

The Honorable Cyndi Taylor Krier

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Aiming to diversify a UT Board of Regents dominated by white males, Gov. Rick Perry appointed three women to the panel Friday, including its first ever African-American woman. For the next six years, former Texas First Lady Rita Clements, Bexar County Judge Cyndi Krier and former Houston City Health Director Judith Craven will join the other six regents to oversee the 15 UT System institutions.

Perry reappointed Clements, 69, who has served on the board since 1996. She had been the only female regent on the nine-member panel. Krier, 50, is a former state senator from San Antonio and has served as president of the UT Ex-Students' Association. Craven, 55, will be the first black woman and only the second black regent to serve on the board. "When I was the only woman, I sometimes laughingly said, 'Here I am one woman representing 53 percent of our student body,'" Clements said. "Now, we have three women representing our student body, and I couldn't be more proud."

With Perry's appointments, the Board of Regents now includes three women, two Hispanics and one African-American. All nine regents were appointed by either Perry or former Gov. George W. Bush. Perry had hoped to improve the geographic diversity of the board, but several key regions in Texas remain unrepresented. Four regents now hail from Houston, while none are from Austin or the Rio Grande Valley, where populations have boomed over the last 10 years and where two system schools are located. UT System Chancellor Dan Burck said the board will face many unique challenges in the coming years, including serving a state where changing demographics have significantly altered the makeup of the UT System and of Texas. The board will also tackle such controversial issues as the development of a system-wide standardized testing plan for students and the adoption of new policies on who can set student tuition rates, currently being decided by the Texas Legislature.

Burck said he knows Clements and Krier "quite well" but has not met Craven. "I'm very pleased by these appointments," Burck said. "I applaud the governor for increasing the board's diversity, and I'm sure that with the incoming regents' backgrounds, UT will continue its path of improvement." Regents serve six-year terms and must gain confirmation from the Senate before taking their place on the board, generally a routine matter. Clements, wife of former Gov. Bill Clements Jr., has been on the board the longest and is a likely candidate to serve as the board's chairwoman. A Dallas resident, she chaired the board's committee on facilities and planning, which oversaw the controversial selection of an architecture firm to design the new Jack Blanton Museum of Art on campus. She said she hopes to focus her attention on securing more funding for medical research and development for the System's six medical institutions. She also wants to continue work on student retention rates and academic quality. "The future of Texas depends on our students now at UT schools," Clements said. "It's all about quality, quality, quality for us on the board."

Krier, the first Republican and first woman ever elected as Bexar County Judge, will take the board position formerly held by fellow San Antonian Tom Loeffler, whose term expired Feb. 1. Krier, who was unavailable for comment, has said she would be willing to forgo the final year of her term as county judge to serve on the board.

Craven, who previously served as a dean at the UT Health Science Center in Houston, will replace former board chairman Don Evans, who resigned in January to serve as U.S. Secretary of Commerce. Craven also serves on the boards of directors of Compaq, Luby's, Variable Annuity Life Insurance Co., Sysco, the Belo Corp. and the Bowling Green State University Foundation. She previously served six years as president of the United Way of the Texas Gulf Coast. Craven was unavailable for comment.