

NIC's Burke plans to leave

He will take post at California college

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Michael L. Burke has resigned as president of North Idaho College and will take over as president of a California community college in March.

Burke, who's been president of NIC since June 1998, said he'll stay at NIC through at least January. He starts at San Jose City College in San Jose on March 1.

"It was one of those opportunities I just couldn't let pass," Burke said on Tuesday. He was nominated for the position and has been nominated for several others in past years. He said his decision to leave has nothing to do with NIC, or with the letter of no confidence business leaders sent him over the summer that expressed concern over NIC's professional-technical programs.

Burke, 55, is NIC's sixth president since the college opened in 1939. The NIC Board of Trustees will make the final decision on the new president after a search committee narrows down the candidates, which could take months. NIC will likely have an interim president during that time.

"I don't think he's going to be an easy person to replace," said Rolly Williams, chairman of the NIC Board of Trustees. "I'm a very strong Michael Burke fan. I thought he was an outstanding president, and I'm sad to see him go."

A new president will mean the college will have three new top administrators since the summer with a new vice president for student services and a new vice president for instruction starting at NIC in July.

Geology instructor Bill Richards, chair of the faculty assembly and a member of the search committee that interviewed Burke almost nine years ago, said Burke's tenure has hurt relations between NIC faculty and the administration.

One of the search committee's goals when interviewing Burke was to find someone with good communication skills who would work to improve the campus climate, Richards said, and Burke didn't do that.

"I think he lacked a lot of effort in that area, and it showed," Richards said. "It's kind of like Burke's handling of the culture and climate never really got started. You can only do first aid so much to fix things."

Ron Nilson, president of Ground Force Manufacturing and one of the leading voices during the business community's spat with the college, said Burke got the message this summer about the concern over the direction of professional-technical education. He said relations between the college and businesses have improved greatly.

"There's no hard feeling between the business leaders and Michael Burke. We wish Michael Burke continued success, because he is more than capable of running a college," Nilson said.

Williams said the letter of no confidence business leaders sent to Burke has been blown out of proportion. It was just a few business people upset, Williams said. "There wasn't a large group of people out there that were dissatisfied with Michael Burke."

Burke is an outstanding college president who was very good at involving many people in the decision-making process, he said.

"I never felt we were out of the loop at all," Williams said.

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Board members showed their approval of Burke this summer when they approved a one-year extension to his \$136,000-a-year contract.

Williams said there are many accomplishments Burke can be proud of, such as the addition of the Meyer Health and Sciences Building. In addition, the college has grown considerably during Burke's presidency. Enrollment in professional-technical programs grew by more than 80 percent from 1994 to 2004, and, despite drops the last two years, overall enrollment at the college has increased by 24 percent since 1996.

"The guy is just a workaholic," Williams said. "I think he's accomplished a lot of things that other people would have difficulty doing."

San Jose City College has about 10,000 students, more than double NIC. Burke said he's staying through January to help with the transition and to make NIC's presentation in Boise to the legislative budget-writing committee.

"There's a lot at stake," Burke said. "I want to be able to tell NIC's story."

He said it's always difficult to leave friends behind but said he's very excited about his new job.

"NIC talks about the NIC family – I've come to understand what that's about. We do treat each other like family" Burke said. "They welcomed me into this family and I'm very thankful for that."