

COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF THE WORKFORCE Member Biographies

Commission Chair

Dr. James L. Applegate

Executive Director

Illinois Board of Higher Education

Dr. James Applegate currently serves as the Executive Director for the Illinois Board of Higher Education. As the state higher education executive officer, Applegate leads efforts to dramatically expand college opportunity in Illinois, especially for low income, first generation, adult and students of color. He also works to increase higher education's contributions to Illinois' economic and civic health as part of advancing Illinois Public Agenda.

Prior to assuming this position, Applegate served as Vice President for the Lumina Foundation, the largest U.S. foundation solely focused on improving higher education. In his role as head of grant making, he led development of new approaches to strategically invest Lumina's more than \$50 million annual grant budget to support increased degree production, fairness, and productivity in the American higher education system. He served as an important external advocate for improving higher education delivering more than 40 keynotes and presentations annually before federal and state policy makers, higher education and business leaders, and philanthropic groups. From 2000-2008, Applegate was the chief academic officer for the state of Kentucky. There he supported reforms that resulted in Kentucky leading the nation in higher education attainment increases from 2000-2009. Applegate was a professor, department head, and university senate chair at the University of Kentucky. He has served as an American Council on Education Fellow and on advisory boards for ACT, ACE, and numerous higher education organizations.

He was a University Fellow and received his Ph.D. from the University of Illinois. Applegate also has worked throughout his career as a consultant and speaker helping education, government, and business organizations improve performance.

Commissioners

Dr. Douglas Baker

President

Northern Illinois University

Dr. Douglas Baker, NIU's 12th chief executive officer, brings a rich background in business, organizational management and higher education leadership to DeKalb. As provost and executive vice president of the University of Idaho from 2005 to 2013, Baker guided the development, implementation and revision of the institution's strategic plan during a period of fiscal challenges.

Born in Hood River, Oregon, and the son of two teachers, Baker earned bachelor's and master's degrees in business-industrial relations and management from Colorado State University. He earned his Ph.D. in business (organizational behavior and theory) in 1983 from the University of Nebraska.

His teaching career began in 1981 at Washington State University-Pullman, where he was an assistant professor of management. He eventually was appointed to lead the Office of Undergraduate Education and vice provost for academic affairs for the Washington State University system before being appointed executive vice president and provost at the University of Idaho.

Kelly Burke

State Representative

Democrat, 36th District

Representative Kelly Burke has represented Illinois' 36th House district since 2011. She currently serves as chair of the House Higher Education committee and is a member of the Higher Education Appropriations committee. She earned a B.A. from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and a J.D. from John Marshall Law School. She also served as legislative aide to state Representative Andrew J. McGann; staff attorney at Saint Xavier University; Evergreen Park Library Board trustee 2003-2011 (President 2005-2011); selected to inaugural class of the 2012 Edgar Fellows Leadership Program; and adjunct faculty, Loyola University Law School. Burke and her husband, Terry, have three children.

Jacqueline Collins

State Senator

Democrat, 16th District

Senator Jacqueline Collins has represented Illinois' 16th Senate district since 2003. A native of Mississippi, she studied journalism at Northwestern University and earned master's degrees from Spertus College, Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government, and Harvard Divinity School. She was also an Emmy Award-nominated news editor (at CBS-TV, Chicago), Minister of Communications for St. Sabina Catholic Church in Chicago, and a Legislative Fellow with United States Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton.

John Comerford

President

Blackburn College

Dr. John Comerford became Blackburn's 16th president on July 1, 2013. Comerford previously served as Vice President and Dean of Student Life at Westminster College, and was active in academic areas, teaching at Westminster and University of Missouri – Columbia. Comerford has held positions at the University of Kansas, Missouri Western State University, and Ball State University. He earned a bachelor's degree with honors from Western Illinois University, a master's degree from the University of Central Missouri, and a Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration from the University of Kansas. His academic research area is legal issues in higher education.

Edgar Curtis

President and Chief Executive Officer

Memorial Health System

As President and CEO of Memorial Health System since 2008, Edgar Curtis provides senior-level administrative leadership for the overall strategic direction of the health system. He is a Fellow of the American College of Healthcare Executives.

Curtis received a bachelor's degree from Southern Illinois University Edwardsville and a MBA from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He began his career as a registered nurse and later served in management and administrative positions at Memorial Medical Center from 1979 to 1993. He served as executive vice president and chief operating officer of Memorial Health System and Memorial Medical Center for 14 years from October 1993 to December 2007.

Curtis serves on the board of the BJC Collaborative, LLC; VHA Mid-America; and the Illinois Hospital Association (IHA). He is a member of the IHA executive committee and was elected treasurer of the 2015 IHA board of trustees. He serves on the board and executive committee of Illinois Performance Excellence. He also serves on the University of Illinois at Chicago College of Nursing External Advisory Board and is a member of several leadership councils for the Greater Springfield Chamber of Commerce.

He has served in leadership roles with several health-related and community organizations, such as the Springfield Urban League, United Way of Central Illinois, and Central Illinois Food Bank.

Bridget Gainer

*Vice President of Global Public Affairs
Aon Risk Solutions Chicago*

*County Commissioner
Cook County 10th District*

For the last decade Gainer has been with Aon, a Chicago based insurance broker, where she has focused on pension and healthcare policy as well as risk management in the public sector and private sector.

Bridget Gainer is the Cook County Commissioner for the County's 10th District, serving since the April 2009. The district includes many of Chicago's north side neighborhoods. She is a member of the Democratic Party. Gainer has led the County Board on issues of vacant/abandoned property, pension reform, and the women and children in the public safety system.

Gainer received a bachelor's degree from the University of Illinois and a MBA from the University of Chicago. She is a Board member of Women Employed, the Center for Economic Progress, and St. Gregory's High School.

Gainer began her political career working as a budget analyst in Chicago's City Hall under Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley. She then went on to work for the Park District as the Director of the Lakefront Parks.

Norine Hammond

*State Representative
Republican, 94th District.*

Representative Norine Hammond has served Illinois' 94th House district since 2010. She was appointed to fill the vacancy of the late Representative Rich Myers, for whom she had served as Legislative Aid since 1999. She attended Western Illinois University and served as Emmet Township Trustee from 2004-06, as Emmet Township Supervisor from 2006-2011, and on the Macomb Planning Commission. Hammond and her husband, Leonard, have one daughter.

Alice Marie Jacobs

*President
Danville Area Community College*

Dr. Alice Marie Jacobs has served as President of Danville Area Community College since September 1999, the second woman to hold the position in the College's 70-year history. Before coming to Danville, Jacobs served as President of Kaskaskia College in Centralia, Illinois; Vice President of Instruction and Student Development at Cape Fear Community College, Wilmington, North Carolina; Dean of Instruction at Rochester Community College, Rochester, Minnesota; and Dean of Occupational Education and faculty member at Kellogg Community College, Battle Creek, Michigan. She began her career in education as Secretary to the President of Kellogg Community College. Jacobs received an associate's degree from Louisburg College, North Carolina, a bachelor's and master's degrees from Western Michigan University, and a Ph.D. from Michigan State University.

Dr. Jacobs is also president of the Danville Rotary. She served as co-chair of Governor Rauner's Transition Education Policy Team and is a current member of the Illinois Board of Higher Education. She is a peer reviewer for the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Region. Dr. Jacobs is a past president of the Illinois Council of Community College Presidents and a past member of the executive committee of the American Association of Community Colleges Board of Directors.

Jason Keller

*Economic Development Director
Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago*

Jason Keller is the Economic Development Director for Illinois in the Community Development and Policy Studies Division at the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago. As Director, he oversees and evaluates economic capacities and sustainable growth opportunities within the Federal Reserve's Seventh District by conducting seminars, workshops, and preparing written materials dealing with the Equal Credit Opportunity Act, the Community Reinvestment Act, and other consumer protection laws and regulations.

Prior to this role, Keller spent thirteen years as an examiner in charge and in a managing role assessing compliance with various regulations in community, regional, and large state member banks and bank holding companies throughout the Federal Reserve's Seventh District.

He currently sits on the Board of Directors of the Leadership Circle of the Executives Club of Chicago and has been an active member since 2006 participating in various leadership development programs and the Club's individual and group Mentorship Programs since their inception. He also serves as a Lead Instructor for the Federal Reserve's Fair Lending Examination Techniques School, a role held by few others across the System.

Keller holds a bachelor's degree from Illinois State University and a master's degree from Northwestern University.

Karen McConnaughay

*State Senator
Republican, 33rd District*

Senator Karen McConnaughay has served Illinois' 33rd Senate district since 2013. She is the Minority Spokesperson for the Senate Transportation Committee and a member of several Senate committees including Commerce and Economic Development, Education, Energy and Public Utilities, Revenue, Financial Institutions, Restorative Justice, Pension Investments, and JCAR. Before her election McConnaughay served as Kane County Board Chairman from 2004-12 and was a Board member from 1992-2004. She was an executive committee member for Metropolis 2020 and chairman of the Northeastern Illinois Regional Water supply Planning Group. She also serves on the National Conference of State Legislatures and volunteers with the PTO, Girl Scouts, Young Mothers Club, Delnor Hospital Auxiliary, and the Fox River Chapter of the Board of the American Red Cross. McConnaughay and her husband, John, have three children and two grandchildren.

John Rico

*Founder and Chief Executive Officer
Rico Enterprises, Inc.*

John Rico is founder, president, and CEO of Rico Computer Enterprises, Inc., one of the oldest minority technology firms in the Midwest. He attended Northern Illinois University and the University of Illinois at Chicago. Mr. Rico has more than 37 years of experience in manufacturing and process management, automated production, systems design, quality control, customization, and installation. Rico Computer Enterprises, Inc., has worked with the Chicago Public Schools, O'Hare and Midway Airports, and the Cook County Recorder of Deeds.

In addition to his work at Rico Computer Enterprises, Inc., Rico co-chairs the Illinois Workforce Investment Board and is an appointed member of the P-20 Council on Education Collaborative. He is a member of the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce and a partner of the Illinois IT Learning Exchange.

John Rico has more than 25 years of experience in the information technology field and is committed to exploring the link between technology and education. In 2008, Rico Enterprises, Inc., partnered with Scholastic Learning to provide support and service for software proven to meet the needs of struggling readers in Chicago Public Schools (CPS). Rico also volunteers as a motivational speaker to CPS and throughout Illinois' educational community.