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Renu Khator is currently the provost and senior vice president at the University of Southern Florida. The UH System Board of Regents unanimously approved her sole finalist as the UH president on Monday.

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## Renu Khator: teacher, poet, community leader

**By: Kim Thai**

**Posted: 10/16/07**

She'll be the first foreign-born president of the UH System and the second woman to have the title. She's also among the few who have been a minority.

Her name is Renu Khator.

And she is full of enthusiasm.

"I'm honored, privileged," she said Monday in a phone interview. "I think UH is so committed to its metropolitan mission in providing access to success to students, its bold vision to be a top-tier institution - all of those are grounds for an excellent university."

Khator (pronounced rah-NEW ka-TOOR), 52, was presented as to the UH System Board of Regents on Monday as the sole finalist for the position and was unanimously approved. Texas law requires the board to give the public 21 days before finalizing the appointment. She is expected to start in her role as president in January 2008, and she will be the third person to be both UH System chancellor and president, following in the footsteps of Arthur K. Smith and Jay Gogue.

She is now the provost and senior vice president at the University of South Florida, which has a similar make-up to UH. USF is ranked as one of the top 63 public research universities and has more than 45,000 students. The USF system has four campuses and is also known as being one of the most "community-engaged" public universities, according to USF's Web site.

"At USF and at UH, there's a lot of similarities," Khator said. "Both are young universities, both are metropolitan, both are focused on students and making sure that the university is accessible to as many people as possible."

Khator did not detail any specific plans for the University but did talk about some potential obstacles UH will have to overcome in the future.

"I can tell you that the biggest challenge of universities located in a big city like Houston is how to provide access to a growing population in a growing city in a growing state," she said.

She said among those challenges is how the university should interact with the community. Khator said she also wants to look at where the University's role is in Houston regarding workforce, intellectual capital and global economy.

Because UH is in such a large metropolitan city, the University has a responsibility to make sure that other academic institutions know what educational expectations are for college, she said. Essentially, the University needs to further involve grades pre-kindergarten through college so everyone is "in sync," Khator said.

Although she has not stated plans at the moment, Khator said she wants to be involved in the University as much as possible.

"I'm looking forward to getting there, to talking to a lot of people, listening and then deciding and charting a course with everybody else," she said. "For any university, I think the biggest priority should be students - that is the most important thing."

Khator said that she would like UH to grow in "research, creativity and innovation," but had no other details at this time.

"It's presumptuous on my part to chart a course here," she said. "But it's a great university with such a phenomenal reputation."

Khator said that she wants to ensure that graduating students have the skills needed for the "global economy" and to put UH at the forefront of "economic growth in the state."

"It's a great university in a great city, and I think universities are there to enlighten minds and open possibilities," she said.

Khator, originally from India, earned her master's and doctoral degrees from Purdue University - specializing in environmental policy.

In addition to being USF's provost, she teaches government and international affairs and is the director of the school's Environmental Science and Policy Department. Khator said her experience from USF will help guide her choices at UH.

"You can never implant a model from one place to another, but experiences are a good starting point," she said. "The situations might be different, the cause might be different, but whatever the issues are we need to tackle them, and we need to fix them so we can provide a top-notch environment for students."

In the end, Khator's philosophy is simple: "When life gives you lemons and everyone else is busy making lemonade, think about making margaritas." She is applying this to her term at the University.

"If things aren't right, then don't be disheartened. Keep your dreams high, keep your hopes up and find a way to get there," she said. "We can make it a place that everybody wants it to be and expects it to be."

Khator also said she has a good reason to look forward to arriving at the University.

"I hear you have good margaritas there," she said.