

## Joy O. Higa

**Cornell degree: AB '89 (A&S)**

*Endorsed by the Committee on Alumni Trustee Nominations*



*Cornell is at an inflection point that requires us to navigate affordability, demographic changes, technological disruption, and cultural dynamics. Selecting our 15th president is a critical board decision that will influence how successfully we lead through these challenges and foster Ezra Cornell's principle of "... any person ... any study."*

### **Describe the reasons you are interested in serving on the board. What strengths and attributes would you bring to this role?**

*When I arrived in Ithaca as a first-generation student from Hawaii, I couldn't have imagined what a launching pad Cornell would be for my life's journey. I would be honored to bring this perspective and knowledge to the board. Whether supporting student mentoring or Reunion and annual fund campaigns, I've learned about how the university works and how it can be better. I'm a proven leader and consensus-builder with experience in the private sector, government, and non-profit worlds. I would use this background to continue enhancing the student experience and support services so everyone can thrive.*

### **In your opinion, what does Carl Becker's concept of "freedom and responsibility" mean for today's Cornell community?**

*"Freedom and responsibility" represent what we learn as Cornellians: to explore and debate diverse ideas with respect, and a commitment to do the greatest good. This means an environment where we can discuss our views and act responsibly by also recognizing the impact on those with other perspectives. I have lived, worked and volunteered in settings where my opinions aligned with few others, or a large majority. My Cornell experience taught me how to navigate these dynamics with curiosity, integrity and respect—values that are essential to our community.*

### **Interim President Michael I. Kotlikoff recently said that this is an important time to "educate citizens to think for themselves, and live together; and to value truth, openness and equality as cornerstones of democracy." In your opinion, what does this mean at Cornell?**

*When people ask what I love about Cornell, I describe the range of personalities and perspectives that were so new to the freshman me. While it was daunting coming from such a different community, I learned how to be comfortable being uncomfortable, how to think critically, how to find and use my voice and—importantly—how to appreciate and live among those differences. Regardless of their path to Cornell, every student has something to learn and something to share. We can cultivate a campus environment that encourages curiosity, respects differences, and promotes a lifelong spirit of Cornell community.*

### **Professional experience:**

- UnitedHealthcare, chief compliance officer and senior vice president, Regulatory Affairs, 2021–present; senior vice president, National Regulatory Affairs, 2018–2021; prior leadership roles in regulatory affairs and government affairs, 2006–2018
- California State Teachers' Retirement System (CalSTRS), board member, 2014–2022; chair, Investment Committee, 2020–2022; chair, Audit Committee, 2018–2020
- Office of the California State Controller, deputy chief of staff, 2004–2006
- Office of the California Governor, chief deputy cabinet secretary, 2003
- California Department of Managed Health Care, deputy director, 2000–2002
- UCLA Center for Health Sciences, director, Government Relations, 1998–2000
- Prior work in health policy and advocacy in California and Washington, D.C.

### **Alumni service:**

- College of Veterinary Medicine Advisory Council, Council liaison, 2024–present
- West Coast Tower Club, committee member, 2024–present, 2005–2007
- Arts and Sciences Career Connections Committee, Healthcare team member, 2023–present
- Cornell University Council, member, 2022–present, 2016–2020, vice chair, 2022–2024; Development Committee, chair, 2020–2022, vice chair, 2018–2020
- President's Council of Cornell Women, sustaining member, 2010–present, member, 2000–2010, vice chair, 2007–2009; Student Life and Mentoring committee, chair, 2004–2006, vice chair, 2002–2004
- Cornell Alumni Admissions Ambassador Network, member, 2003–2023
- Reunion Campaign Committee, member, 2013–2014, 2008–2009, 2003–2004
- Cornell Alumni Association, director at large, 2010–2014
- Cornell Club of Los Angeles, board member, 2004–2013
- Class of 1989, Annual Fund representative, 1999–2009
- Regional Phonathon, member, 1995–2002

### **Community/public service/philanthropic priorities:**

- Venice Family Clinic, board member, 2023–present; co-chair, Public Policy Committee, 2023–present; Venice Family Clinic Foundation, board member 2021–2023; vice chair, Audit Committee 2021–2023
- National Organization of Life and Health Insurance Guaranty Associations, board member, 2020–present; chair, 2024–present; vice chair/treasurer, 2023–2024
- National Charity League, Inc., South Bay Chapter, member, 2014–present; founding president, 2014–2016
- Manhattan Beach Education Foundation, board member, 2019–2023

### **Student involvements/activities:**

- *Cornell Daily Sun*
- Cornell campus tour guide
- Cornell Health Services, student health volunteer
- Kappa Alpha Theta Sorority
- Student Phonathon

### **Additional information:**

Joy has spent her career in healthcare and public policy, with experience in both private industry and appointed roles in California government. She was born and raised in Hawaii and experienced snow for the first time during her inaugural Ithaca winter. A Cornell volunteer for more than 30 years, Joy has held President's Council of Cornell Women (PCCW) and Cornell University Council leadership roles and supported regional, development, mentoring and class programs. She lives with her husband Chris Tuffli in Manhattan Beach, California with their two dogs, with children Ben and Olivia launched on their adult journeys.