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UC weighs raises of 33% for all 10 chancellors

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Published 12:00 am PST Tuesday, November 13, 2007

University of California regents are weighing a proposal to increase their top executives' pay by an average of 33 percent over the next four years, beginning with salary hikes this year of between 13 and 17 percent.

The plan, which will be discussed in a closed committee meeting today, is drawing fire from critics who question the propriety of such increases in a tight budget year for the state.

The full Board of Regents is expected to vote on the proposed raises Thursday at their meeting in Los Angeles.

A brief executive summary released by UC President Robert Dynes says the pay increases are necessary to "address particular recruitment and retention needs." According to Dynes, UC chancellors' pay lags 33 percent behind similar universities.

The proposed salary hikes for chancellors heading the 10 UC campuses would total \$3 million.

For UC Berkeley Chancellor Robert Birgenau, a 33 percent increase would boost his current annual salary of \$416,000 to \$553,280. For UC Davis Chancellor Larry Vanderhoef, the increase would take him from \$300,000 annually to \$399,000.

Paul Schwartz, a spokesman for Dynes, said the pay increases are part of a university-wide initiative established by the regents two years ago.

"The aim is to make sure that we are able to pay competitive wages and benefits to preserve the university's quality," he said. "In September, the regents approved a four-year salary plan for faculty. This follows other actions the regents have taken that have provided raises for our lower-paid workers."

But critics say the timing and tone of the executives' raises is wrong. Lt. Governor John Garamendi, a UC regent, noted that the raises would come the same year the university has raised student fees by 7 percent. Since 2001, he said, fees have nearly doubled for undergraduates.

"The students get to pay more so the chancellors get to have more," Garamendi said Monday. "I am really astounded that the administration would propose a salary increase of this size to the highest-paid executives in the entire system."

He rejected the argument that higher pay is necessary to retain top people. "They already have very good salaries," he said. "This is a public university; if it's about money, they shouldn't be there. My attitude is if you don't want to work here, leave."

State Sen. Leland Yee, a San Francisco Democrat, also criticized the chancellors' proposed pay raises. Yee is the author of SB 190, a law that takes effect Jan. 1 and requires open discussion of executive compensation by UC regents and California State University trustees.

"It is outrageous they would give themselves these raises when the governor has asked every single department to begin to prepare budgets with 10 percent cuts across the board," Yee said. "All departments are supposed to tighten their belts. So who will pay at the University of California? Students and the lowest-paid workers."

The proposed salary hikes for UC chancellors come less than a week after the release of a state audit critical of how much the California State University system awards its executives.

The audit looked at five of the CSU system's 23 campuses, including Sacramento's, and found compensation for top executives had grown 25 percent over the past five years. During that same period, faculty salaries rose 5.6 percent; fees for undergraduate students went from \$2,070 to \$3,521.

State Auditor Elaine Howle singled out Sacramento State President Alexander Gonzalez in her report, noting the relocation costs provided when Gonzalez moved from San Marcos to Sacramento in 2003. The perquisites included \$233,000 in loans, at a 1.697 percent interest rate, to cover escrow costs and mortgage payments. Gonzalez since has paid back the loan.

Gonzalez's salary has increased more than 33 percent over the four years he has been at Sacramento State, according to CSU records. This fall, the CSU administration approved an 11 percent raise that increased his annual pay to \$295,000.

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