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Núñez Challenges Post-Employment Handouts to Top CSU Officials

The Lambda Letters Project applauds Assembly Speaker Fabian Núñez for demanding an audit of the California State University System's post-employment compensation packages for an elite circle of high-ranking administrators. The Speaker says he will ask that the audit begin this coming January, once the auditors complete other audits they are currently working on.

Núñez called for the legislative audit following a San Francisco Chronicle expose detailing Chancellor Charles Reed's \$4 million-plus payout to high-level CSU officials leaving (or having already left) the CSU system for other jobs. The Chronicle also uncovered the Chancellor's practice of keeping certain retired officials on the payroll for up to three years—post-retirement—at annual salaries exceeding \$200,000. According to the Chronicle, these officials were given "special projects" that often had no deliverables attached or written reports required.

These extravagant pay deals—made without public disclosure—have taken place against a backdrop of spiraling tuition costs, declining educational access, and reduced educational funding. As California Faculty Association President John Travis has noted, "Many students are now working two jobs to pay for their tuition, while former administrators are receiving taxpayer dollars in the six-figure range for performing no job." Providing a broader perspective, Travis noted that the \$4 million-plus given to departing CSU officials "could have helped prevent \$2.5 million in budget cuts planned for CSU Dominguez Hills, the campus that serves the most African American students in the system."

In addition to receiving lavish payouts upon leaving top posts at CSU, some executives are promised full tenured professorships—without having taught a day in their lives and without meeting any of the other requirements for tenure. According to revelations made by the San Francisco Chronicle, CSU's top attorney falls into this category. Ironically, one of her responsibilities is to represent the university against faculty claims of unjust tenure denial.

We share concerns voiced by legislative and educational leaders that CSU is losing sight of its original mission to provide eligible California students an affordable college education. We support Speaker Núñez's call for a legislative audit of post-employment compensation packages, and we agree with John Travis' assessment that a broader "investigation is in order to protect taxpayers and the mission of the CSU system."

The increasingly high cost of a CSU education, combined with other factors that narrow access and opportunity (including CSU's "gentrification" of its mission and its underfunding or elimination of programs), is shutting CSU-eligible students out of their local universities. The prospects for California's students of color—an increasing segment of overall college-eligible population—are even bleaker. For instance, at CSU-San Diego State University, Black student enrollment has declined by 21% in the past decade, despite increased student enrollment, in general, and increased CSU-eligible black student applications, in particular. A recent headline in the San Diego Union Tribune documents the other leading access issue: "Latino parents' biggest worry is about how to pay for higher education" (San Diego Union Tribune, A6, Tuesday, August 15, 2006).

The decline or limited growth of students of color is matched by the decline or limited growth of faculty of color within CSU. We urge the legislature and California taxpayers to call for a thorough examination of the policies and procedures that have led not only to the most recently revealed financial excesses, but to other imbalances in the system—including those pertaining to student, staff and faculty diversity.