Entry Form

Title of Entry: Double-digit raise goes to top higher education official (first headline of series on discrepancies in higher-education system)

Name and Address of Organization: The Connecticut Mirror (online-only news site with 60,000 Unique Monthly Visitors)

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Nine stories are submitted for judging as a series; stories in PDF format are named “1ctmirror …” “2ctmirror …” indicating the order in which they should be read. Entry also includes a cover letter by Editor Jenifer Frank and a document called “supplemental info,” which is reporter Jacqueline Rabe Thomas’ account of the story’s development.

This contest entry is submitted by Nancy Gallinger, contest coordinator for The Connecticut Mirror. Email address: njg55@cox.net or ngallinger@ctmirror.org; phone: 860-818-4581
Dear Judges:

It was classic watchdog journalism.

Connecticut Mirror writers Jacqueline Rabe Thomas and Keith Phaneuf learned that the No. 2 official in the state’s newly reorganized higher-education department had received a $49,000 raise. They then learned that raises—many in double-digit percentages—had been improperly granted to 20 other employees of the public college system, even as the salaries of thousands of other state employees were frozen.

For the next few weeks, Rabe Thomas and Phaneuf, with help from reporter Mark Pazniokas, led the state’s media in reporting on blunder after blunder in the leadership of Connecticut higher education, improprieties that were especially outrageous in a struggling economy. One that stood out was the Mirror’s revelation that the new president of higher education had been contractually permitted to take a six-week paid absence for “professional development” at his summer home in Minnesota; during this time he took no courses, did little work, and was finally forced to concede that he’d “worked remotely” during those weeks, though his calendar had very few appointments.

Barely a week after the Mirror stories began to appear, the two highest-ranking higher-education officials resigned.

But stunning revelations continued, painting a picture of a rubber stamp Board of Regents unaware of the actions of the department it was supposed to be leading, and of a governor who ignored and manipulated the statutory process to get his way.

The problems were in part a result of fast-track change in Connecticut’s higher-education system—so fast that leadership roles and responsibilities were not clearly defined, and board and administration operated with unclear lines of authority. So instead of the system’s working toward the intended goal of greater efficiency, a door was left open to potential abuses. It’s a valuable lesson for managers of higher education systems in any state.

As a result of Mirror reporters’ hard work and perseverance, the state was forced to hire an interim higher education president (a former president of the University of Connecticut; UConn is not part of the Regents system), and lawmakers on the higher-education committee vowed to reduce the governor’s control over higher education, including decreasing the number of members the governor can appoint to the Board of Regents.

The clear intent of these changes was to force the Department of Higher Education to be more accountable to the people it serves, the residents of Connecticut.
From October 2 through November 28, the Mirror published about 30 stories and blog items on these problems in the higher-education system. These stories submitted for judging represent the overall scope of the coverage.

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Supplemental information, provided by reporter Jacqueline Rabe Thomas, about development of the Connecticut Board of Regents stories:

The Connecticut Mirror stories that would lead to the resignations of Connecticut’s two top college officials in October 2012 began with a casual conversation with one of my sources.

“I wonder what he is making these days,” my source said to me about the vice president of the state Board of Regents for Higher Education. “I would look if I was you.”

My colleague Keith Phaneuf and I would soon learn that this vice president – who was responsible for shepherding through the legislature a complete reorganization of the state’s university system for Gov. Dannel P. Malloy – received a substantial raise 18 months after settling into his leadership role in the new system. With assistance from another colleague – state Capitol Bureau Chief Mark Pazniokas – we embarked on a series of stories that, over two months’ time, would shine a light of several serious problems within the newly reorganized system.

After getting information about the raise through the state comptroller’s office, Keith Phaneuf and I attempted to go back to the state university system’s president and vice president to seek comment on this nearly $50,000 raise. Our inquiries were met by silence.

In a brief (30 seconds) interview and before all our questions were referred to the central office, the Board of Regents chairman said he did not know how the raise was approved.

Finally, after we appealed to the governor’s office, a prepared statement was provided to the Mirror, saying the “adjustments were merited.”

Keith Phaneuf and I also requested the names of any other employees who had received raises and the amount. This was important because the state university system’s unionized employees were in the middle of a two-year wage freeze, and Malloy’s reorganization of higher education was sold as a way to shed administrative costs.

I was told by a spokeswoman in the office that such a request could take some time to respond to, so we turned to the state comptroller’s office for answers. The comptroller’s office was able to provide us the same day with the paycheck amounts of every employee of the university system at three points in time.

Just as we finished sifting through that data, the spokeswoman called back with an answer – 21 central office employees had received raises totaling nearly $300,000, many of them double-digit percentage raises.

But that still didn’t answer the question: Who authorized these raises?

We pored over board meeting minutes but found no evidence of a vote to approve raises. State law and the board’s bylaws require compensation decisions to be made by the governing board.

The president of the system, during an interview shortly after the 21 raises were disclosed, would take responsibility for unilaterally ordering the raises and said he mistakenly thought he had such authority.
The next day, the governor’s legal counsel and communications staff would meet privately with the system leaders to discuss their next steps.

I would spend the day reading through the president’s contract, the new higher-education merger law, sifting through tips emailed to me, and talking with my sources. One thing became clear: I needed to ask the president how he spent the six weeks provided in his contract for professional development.

Later that day, the president would host a press conference to offer an apology to the public for granting such large raises at central office when everyone else in the system had not received raises for several years.

When asked about his six weeks of professional development, the president explained that he spent it “working remotely” during the summer from his second home in Minnesota. The Mirror’s request for a copy of his daily schedule would soon show that he had few appointments during that time.

During this whole series of events – which took place over five days – other media across the state trailed the Mirror as we disclosed the latest twist in a series of missteps by leadership.

Not only would the leaders of the legislature’s Higher Education Committee personally thank the Mirror for uncovering the problems, they would also call for the president to resign. The top two officials stepped down the next day, saying that they didn’t want to be a distraction for the Board of Regents.

But the story didn’t end there.

My colleague and I decided to step back for a week to give ourselves a chance to synthesize what had just happened. In two follow-up stories, we laid out what the statute for higher-education’s reorganization called for and what steps were actually taken by an aggressive governor and a governing board in its infancy. After that story made clear that the governor was responsible for the contract and benefits that the president was receiving – including the six-weeks’ provision to work remotely – we wrote an article about how that compares with similar institutions.

The board has since done a review of the raises first reported by the Mirror and determined that they were inappropriate.

The articles that brought these issues to light would not have been possible if my colleagues and I did not have a thorough understanding of open-records laws and how to access information.

Jacqueline Rabe Thomas
The Connecticut Mirror
Double-digit raise goes to top higher ed official

October 8, 2012
By Jacqueline Rabe Thomas and Keith M. Phaneuf

A top administrator in Connecticut’s merged public college system received a nearly $49,000 pay increase last week—a move that members of its governing board could not explain Monday, even as most state employees remain under a wage freeze.

And while top administrators for the Board of Regents for Higher Education failed to return multiple phone calls from The Mirror, a brief emailed statement indicated that the 27 percent bump given to Executive Vice President Michael P. Meotti was part of a larger reorganization effort.

The increase, which The Mirror confirmed with State Comptroller Kevin P. Lembo, also sparked an angry response Monday from leaders of the legislature’s Higher Education Committee, who called it inappropriate given the state’s budget woes and recent cutbacks in student aid.

Meotti, whose annual pay was $189,339, would earn $232,244 over the coming 12 months based on the new rate implemented Friday, according to the comptroller’s office.

It was unclear Friday or Monday how the increase for Meotti was approved, or how many others received compensation hikes.

Lewis Robinson Jr., chairman of the Board of Regents, said during a brief interview Monday that he didn’t know how pay raises in the central office are approved and referred all questions either to Meotti or to Robert A. Kennedy, president of the Board of Regents’ system.

Neither Meotti nor Kennedy returned calls left Friday and Monday. Several others on the 15-member board referred all questions to Robinson or Kennedy.

Only after The Mirror appealed to Gov. Daniel P. Malloy’s office Monday for assistance did the Board of Regents’ system office issue a statement by email.

The system’s director of human resources, Steve Weinberger, did not identify how many employees received increases during a recent reorganization, but wrote that “in each instance, the salary increases reflect either new responsibilities or an adjustment that became obvious given the restructuring that occurred at the board. ... Over time, we came to understand that, for internal and external equity considerations, adjustments were merited.”

The General Assembly and Malloy created the Board of Regents system last year by merging the four Connecticut State Universities, the 12 community colleges and Charter Oak State College with the goal of achieving efficiencies and cutting administrative costs.

Meotti, a former commissioner of the Department of Higher Education for three years and previously a state senator, emerged as the Malloy administration’s point man on the higher education consolidation shortly after it announced the plan.

Three weeks ago—before Meotti’s pay increase went into effect—the Board of Regents sent out a news release highlighting 47 new faculty positions it was able to fund through the $5.5 million saved through reorganization efforts that included eliminating 24 administrative posts.

Weinberger also wrote in his statement Monday, “These increases have brought these position salaries on par with similar positions in other university systems. These adjustments do not impact the BOR’s accomplishment of operating with a central office staff smaller than its legacy organizations at salary levels lower than previous incumbents.”

The Board of Regent’s current budget appropriates $29.6 million for its system offices, or 3 percent of the budget.

Strong reactions

Sen. Beth Bye, D-West Hartford, and Rep. Roberta Willis, D-Salisbury, co-chairwomen of the Higher Education Committee, said Monday that, given the sacrifices students, state employees and others have made in recent years, none of the savings from the Board of Regents’ consolidation effort should have been redirected into raises.

“"The whole point of the reorganization was for the dollars to go down to the classroom,” Bye said. “There’s no justifying those increases in these fiscal times. I’m outraged.”

“We cut financial aid this year,” Willis said. "The students took a direct hit. This is the wrong time for this."

The Board of Regents increased tuition by 3.1 percent this year at the community colleges and by 3.8...
percent at the four-year state colleges. That tuition increase is expected to bring an additional $12.8 million in revenue this year.

State government finished the 2011-12 fiscal year with a $143 million general fund deficit, and Lembo certified a $47 million shortfall on Oct. 1 for the current fiscal year, which began July 1. And most state employees are in the second year of a two-year wage freeze ordered by the concessions agreement negotiated by Malloy and state worker union leaders. All but two bargaining units accepted the freeze, thereby exempting them from layoffs through the 2014-15 fiscal year.

Malloy urged all agency heads, including Kennedy, during a Sept. 25 meeting to look for opportunities to trim costs because he anticipates another difficult fiscal year.

"Unfortunately, the economy has not grown as much as we would like it to," the governor said at that time. "... We're making government more efficient, but we've got to keep going. We still have a long, long, long way to go."

When asked Monday whether Meotti's raise was contrary to the governor's instructions, Malloy spokesman Andrew Doba said, "The Board of Regents is an independent body, and as such it was their decision to handle the compensation of management in this manner."

The merged college system also has been in the media spotlight recently following news that the 12 community college presidents are being offered an "expedited" dismissal from their post. Policy requires that college presidents who have been with the system for more than three years be given a 12-month notice, with pay, if they will no longer run the school. Policy also allows for an "accelerated" payment of that 12-months pay, according to a release from the Connecticut State Universities and Colleges Friday night.

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Submitted by CriticalThink on Mon, 10/08/2012 - 5:29pm.

If it smells like RACISM and SEXISM, then its racism and sexism! Nine (9) women and five (5) ethnic minority community college presidents led by two white men (and their Governor) who never worked in a COMMUNITY College and do not grasp or support its unique mission obviously. If it smells like RACISM and SEXISM, then its racism and sexism! Nine (9) women and five (5) ethnic minority community college presidents led by two white men (and their Governor) who never worked in a COMMUNITY College and do not grasp or support its unique mission obviously. Nine (9) women and five (5) ethnic minority community college presidents led by two white men (and their Governor) who never worked in a COMMUNITY College and do not grasp or support its unique mission obviously. Nine (9) women and five (5) ethnic minority community college presidents led by two white men (and their Governor) who never worked in a COMMUNITY College and do not grasp or support its unique mission obviously. Nine (9) women and five (5) ethnic minority community college presidents led by two white men (and their Governor) who never worked in a COMMUNITY College and do not grasp or support its unique mission obviously.

Submitted by Fedup on Mon, 10/08/2012 - 6:26pm.

Seriously folks, somebody has got to start holding the leadership of the Board of Regents accountable for their actions or omissions. According to an October 8 article in the CT Mirror, the Executive Vice President of the seventeen college system just got a $49,000 increase in his annual salary! Who knows how many other honking big wage increases have been implemented since the Board of Regents assumed responsibility. And while we are talking about numbers, maybe someone should look closely at the details behind the $5.5 million dollars in savings which were announced in the June 22, 2012, Board of Regents meeting.

Submitted by 999wakeupct on Mon, 10/08/2012 - 6:02pm.

Submitted by CriticalThink on Mon, 10/08/2012 - 5:29pm.

If it smells like RACISM and SEXISM, then its racism and sexism! Nine (9) women and five (5) ethnic minority community college presidents led by two white men (and their Governor) who never worked in a COMMUNITY College and do not grasp or support its unique mission obviously. If it smells like RACISM and SEXISM, then its racism and sexism! Nine (9) women and five (5) ethnic minority community college presidents led by two white men (and their Governor) who never worked in a COMMUNITY College and do not grasp or support its unique mission obviously. If it smells like RACISM and SEXISM, then its racism and sexism! Nine (9) women and five (5) ethnic minority community college presidents led by two white men (and their Governor) who never worked in a COMMUNITY College and do not grasp or support its unique mission obviously. If it smells like RACISM and SEXISM, then its racism and sexism! Nine (9) women and five (5) ethnic minority community college presidents led by two white men (and their Governor) who never worked in a COMMUNITY College and do not grasp or support its unique mission obviously.


Higher education chief 'mistakenly' ordered 21 executive raises without board approval

Jacqueline Rabe Thomas and Keith M. Phaneuf
October 9, 2012

The state's merged public college system backpedaled Tuesday as its top executive announced that 21 raises he "mistakenly" authorized during the past 10 months would be reassessed by its governing board.

That includes the $49,000 increase granted recently to Michael P. Meotti, the executive vice president of the Board of Regents for Higher Education. Meotti announced earlier Tuesday he would forfeit the increase and return his annual salary to $183,339.

The 21 pay hikes ordered between Dec. 20, 2011, and Sept. 21 by Robert A. Kennedy, president of the regents' system, included nine double-digit percentage increases, in connection with an administrative reorganization.

Kennedy also reduced pay for one central office administrator.

"I approved them mistakenly thinking I had the authority to do so," Kennedy told The Mirror in a late afternoon telephone interview, noting that these raises will stay in place until the board has a chance to review if they are appropriate.

"If they felt they were inappropriate, they can rescind them."
State law and the appointed board's bylaws state that compensation is the board's responsibility.

Robert A. Kennedy (left), president of the Board of Regents, and Lewis Robinson Jr., chairman of the board.

And while Kennedy called his actions a mistake, the regents' central office issued a statement that explained his role in ordering the increases.

"The president employs staff, and the board fixes the compensation of such personnel," read a written statement the system's central office issued late Tuesday afternoon.

"In many cases, those duties are delegated to the chief executive officer. In this case, President Kennedy approved the salary adjustments and the Board of Regents ... will review and determine the appropriateness of all personnel salary adjustments that were made on the basis of additional duties, responsibilities, and roles assigned resulting from the consolidation."

The statement continued, "as the Board of Regents is a new entity, it will establish a formal process to ensure that these and other actions taken are within the context of the existing personnel policies of the former boards."

Kennedy also stood by the increases.

"I would defend the raises," he said. "I do apologize for the process in which they were approved."
Andrew Doba, a spokesman for Gov. Dannel P. Malloy, said in a statement that, "It's clear there is a process in place, and that process was not followed. They are taking steps to address it."

Meotti's pay hike, which represented a 27 percent increase, was one of the largest in the group, which added a net total of $262,206 in total compensation to the individuals involved.

Other large increases included:

- $25,000 for Elaine Clark, from $150,000 to $175,000, who would remain as vice president of facilities;
- $24,000 for director of policy and research Braden Hosch, from $124,999 to $148,999, who also took on the role of director of academic affairs;
- $20,000 for Public Affairs Director Colleen Flanagan Johnson, whose pay would rise from $130,000 to $150,000 as she also assumed the role of system chief of staff.
- $48,000 extra each for Eastern Connecticut State University President Elsa Nunez and Norwalk Community College President David Levinson, who would maintain their current jobs and perform new administrative duties in the central office. Nunez earns $299,460 as the president of Eastern, and Levinson earns $204,188 as Norwalk's president. A spokeswoman for the system said that state law requires the two new positions in the system office, and "Had David and Elsa not accepted double breasted roles at $48,000 each, 2 [vice presidents] would have cost roughly 200,000 each."

The raises, first disclosed Monday by The Mirror, drew strong criticism from the co-chairwomen of the legislature's Higher Education Committee, who said members of the regents' board had indicated they never voted on those pay hikes.

Sen. Beth Bye, D-West Hartford, and Rep. Roberta Willis, D-Salisbury, also charged that the increases were inappropriate given the state's fiscal challenges, as well as sacrifices recently imposed on both college students and state employees.

The co-chairwomen said that all savings from the reorganization should be redirected to support academic programs, and that even those administrators asked to take on new responsibilities shouldn't be receiving pay hikes right now.
"The legislative intent was for those savings to go to the campuses," Bye said, adding she understood this to be Gov. Dannel P. Malloy's intent as well. "That was his stated goal. It was our stated goal. Whoever was responsible for this was not respecting those goals."

Bye added after Tuesday's announcement by the system office, "I expect that President Kennedy -- and especially the Board of Regents -- will review these raises in the same manner that they reviewed Mr. Meotti's salary and that they will take into account the context of these economic times for the state of Connecticut."

Willis said any increased reimbursement these employees have already received should be returned immediately.

"I think they violated the law. They are going to have to return the money," she said. "There's a process. This was handled very shoddily... I just don't know how you could raise salaries like this and not run it by anyone. It's not like [President Kennedy] is new to this."
The Board of Regents increased tuition by 3.1 percent this year at the community colleges and by 3.8 percent at the four-year state colleges. That tuition increase is expected to bring in an additional $12.8 million in revenue this year.

State fiscal challenges

State government finished the 2011-12 fiscal year with a $143 million general fund deficit, and Comptroller Kevin P. Lembo certified a $27 million shortfall on Oct. 1 for the current fiscal year, which began July 1.

Most state employees are in the second year of a two-year wage freeze ordered by the concessions agreement negotiated by Malloy and state worker union leaders.

And Malloy urged all agency heads, including Kennedy, during a Sept. 25 meeting to look for opportunities to trim costs because he expects another difficult fiscal year.

Bye had refused Tuesday to rule out holding a legislative hearing to probe how the raises were ordered after the regents' central office had been silent about the increases Friday, Monday and most of Tuesday.

House Minority Leader Lawrence F. Cafero, R-Norwalk, issued his own call for a legislative inquiry late Tuesday.

"What exactly is going on here?" he wrote in a letter to Bye asking she hold a public hearing this month on the matter. "I do not believe the legislature envisioned these developments when it approved higher education 'reforms' more than a year ago. The apparent breakdown in support of higher education and the lack of transparency in running these systems are perhaps more disturbing."

Malloy told WTIC 1080-AM during an event in Plainville this morning that he was not involved in the raises, and he does not know who approved them.

"The Regents' system needs to run itself, but it needs to run itself well and be accountable to the public. And I think this thing is going to turn out OK," Malloy said. "That is a decision to be made within that system."
On Meotti's decision to forfeit the raise, Malloy said, "I think that that's probably the right thing."

Vice Chairwoman Yvette Melendez said, "These were a mistake, clearly. These are decisions that need to be made by the board.

"There is no question in my mind that this is something that requires immediate review," Melendez said.

Lewis Robinson Jr., board chairman, could not be reached for comment late Tuesday afternoon.

The board is slated to meet at 2:30 p.m. Friday.

Source URL: http://www.ctmirror.org/story/17687/higher-education-chief-mistakenly-ordered-22-executive-raises-without-board-approval
New questions follow an educator's apology

October 10, 2012
By Jacqueline Rabe Thomas and Mark Pazniokas

Hartford -- The head of the state's higher-education system apologized Wednesday for the hefty raises he unilaterally awarded to top staff, but he immediately was confronted with new questions about six weeks he spent working remotely from a second home in Minnesota over the summer.

Robert A. Kennedy, the president of the Board of Regents for Higher Education, said he erred procedurally and politically in awarding 21 raises, including $48,000 for his executive vice president, Michael P. Meotti. All the raises are suspended, and Meotti will be refunding his raise.

Attorney General George Jepsen said he has not been asked for a formal opinion on the propriety of the raises, but he indicated that they probably were inappropriate.

"The statute governing the Board of Regents provides that the 'board shall fix compensation of its professional and technical personnel.' If, in fact, the individuals who received raises are considered professional or technical personnel, only the Board of Regents -- not its president -- could have approved the raises," Jepsen said in an emailed statement.

A contrite and composed Kennedy answered questions for 26 minutes about his failure to seek board approval for raises that he insisted were justified by added duties taken on by the 21 recipients after a sweeping reorganization.

But Kennedy acknowledged he had no explanation for how he and his staff failed to read the political and public reaction to raises at a time when the salaries of most state employees are frozen, taxes have gone up and the economy remains uncertain.

"That's really one of the most fundamental questions," Kennedy said. "The political sensitivity wasn't there. It should have been there."

The press conference took place at the board's central office in Hartford. Kennedy was accompanied by Lewis Robinson Jr., the chairman of the Board of Regents, who was unaware of the raises until they were first reported by The Mirror.

Robinson said the economic and political environment should have been considered.

"How does this really look to John Q. Taxpayer? In that respect we will be factoring in how this plays in a state where we have substantial unemployment," Robinson said.

Meotti did not attend. Asked about his absence, Kennedy replied: "Well, as president, I take responsibility for the decisions and the actions that were taken."

Six-week hiatus

Kennedy, whose base salary is $340,000, also faced questions about a new subject: His absence from the state and central office for six weeks, while he exercised contract rights that gave him six weeks for "professional development." But he took no courses or did any academic research or writing. He also used two weeks of his vacation time over the summer, he said.
used two weeks of his vacation time over the summer, he said.

He said his time in Minnesota, where he and his wife have a home, would be more accurately described as working remotely, not doing professional development.

“That’s the way it’s worded in my contract, so I am sticking with that term. But it really was, probably working remotely would be another apt description of it,” Kennedy said.

Robinson expressed some surprise at the answer, saying he had assumed the professional development meant academic or professional activity other than simply working remotely.

“When I was presented with the contract, and read the paragraph, that I assumed, as I believe someone else here said, that it would be off-site seminars, perhaps teaching or writing a book or something like that. That was it,” Robinson said.

Robinson said Kennedy’s rights under that paragraph would be examined by the board, but not until after it concluded its review of the salary fiasco and established strong guidelines for how raises can be awarded.

Kennedy’s daily schedule during that time away was not immediately available Wednesday.

Asked for reaction on how that time was used, Robinson said, "Well, I wish I had a similar contract... This contract is something that was agreed with President Kennedy and the governor of our state."

Kennedy said it was his understanding during his contract negotiations over the summer of 2011, that he would be allowed to use this time to work remotely.

"That’s the way it was developed when the contract was under discussion and under development with the governor's office," Kennedy said. "I can’t say that everyone knew it that way."

Andrew McDonald, the governor’s general counsel, had no comment on how that provision should be interpreted. He said the contract negotiated by the governor’s office was meant to be an interim agreement until the Board of Regents was formed.

Rep. Roberta Willis, the co-chairwoman of the legislature’s Higher Education Committee, said this news just verifies that more than just compensation needs to be looked at.

"It's not just the salary, but all the other benefits that come with these jobs,” the Democrat from Salisbury said. "With a major reorganization [of the college system], this is probably not the best time to be 2,000 miles away... This is probably not the best way to manage a major merger."

The press conference was a “collective decision” that grew out of a meeting Kennedy and Meotti had earlier in the day with McDonald and Roy Occhiogrosso, the governor's senior adviser, Kennedy said.

Gov. Dannel Malloy was highly critical earlier Wednesday of the raises, but he stopped short of saying he no longer had confidence in Kennedy’s leadership of the newly merged system.

"This was badly mishandled, inappropriately handled. It needs to be addressed. I’m happy there’s been an admission that this was wrong. But there’s going to have to be other steps taken," Malloy said. "This whole thing has to be reviewed. I’m still gathering information. But you can be assured I’m not too happy right now."

 Asked about whether he still enjoys the governor’s confidence, Kennedy replied, “I am hoping that it has not been shaken irrevocably.”

Malloy personally recruited Kennedy, the former president of the University of Maine, to assume leadership of a 100,000-student system merged at Malloy’s insistence. It includes the four campuses of the Connecticut State University system, the dozen community colleges and the online Charter Oak College.

“We gave him a charge. I wanted plans in place to allow students to move from institution to institution and drive up graduation rates,” Malloy said. “That plan is now in place. I wanted $5.5 million in savings by the consolidation. That’s been accomplished, so things have been accomplished, but this is improper.”

Staff writer Keith Phaneuf contributed to this story.
All executive raises in Board of Regents' system suspended

October 10, 2012
By Jacqueline Babe Thomas and Keith M. Phaneuf

The president of the state's merged public college system announced this afternoon that 21 administrative raises he improperly authorized have been suspended immediately pending review by the system's governing board.

The announcement by Robert A. Kennedy, president of the Board of Regents for Higher Education system comes one day after the raises were first disclosed. Kennedy had told The Mirror on Tuesday that the raises were "mistakenly" approved, and he expected the increases to remain in effect at least until the board met Friday to begin its review.

Also Wednesday, board chairman Lewis J. Robinson announced the formation of a special committee on administration to immediately begin developing policies and procedures to govern the board's decision-making process on compensation.

"I expect a full report ... for the Board to review and determine the appropriateness of the salary adjustments, and whether or not any will stand. Clearly how this happened was wrong, and now we need to work on fixing it," Robinson said in a statement.

It is unclear if the regents plan on asking the employees who have received these improper raises, dating back to last December, to pay them back while the board awaits a report.

When one of the largest of the 21 raises, a nearly $49,000 increase granted to Executive Vice President Michael P. Meotti, was first reported Monday in The Mirror, Robinson had said he did not know which parties within the regents' system were responsible for settling executive salary matters. Kennedy said Wednesday that Meotti plans to return the increased compensation he has received.

"The standing committee on administration will allow us to more thoroughly and completely formulate our policies and procedures on a number of issues -- including compensation -- that are currently governed by policies that were adopted by four separate boards and remain in effect today," Robinson said.

Gov. Dannel P. Malloy heavily criticized the raises during an interview today. Two of Malloy's top staffer, senior adviser Roy Occhiogrosso and general counsel Andrew McDonald, met Wednesday morning at the governor's direction with Kennedy, Meotti and Colleen Flanagan Johnson, who is Kennedy's chief of staff.

The full Board of Regents is scheduled to meet at 2:30 p.m., Friday, at Central Connecticut State University in New Britain.

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Comical. The article says it
Submitted by CCCnomore on Wed, 10/10/2012 - 1:55pm.

Comical. The article says it all.
"Kennedy had told The Mirror on Tuesday that he expected the increases would remain in effect at least until the board met Friday to begin its review"
Embattled Board of Regents chief resigns

October 12, 2012
By Jacqueline Rabe Thomas and Keith M. Phaneuf

Robert A. Kennedy, the embattled president of the Board of Regents for Higher Education, announced his resignation Friday morning, effective immediately.

Kennedy, who was recruited last year by Gov. Dannel P. Malloy to lead the new consolidation of the higher education system, bowed to mounting pressure for his resignation after disclosures he unilaterally approved executive pay raises without board approval.

"The issues with which we've dealt over the past few days have become a distraction to that important work, and, as an educator all my life, the most important thing to me is the success and support of our students," Kennedy said. "For that reason, I believe my resignation will allow the critical issues of the Board and its agenda to be addressed in a different light than they might otherwise be."

In resigning a day after bipartisan legislative calls for his departure, Kennedy was showing the political sensitivity be acknowledged lacking when he awarded raises, including $48,000 to his executive vice president, at a time when other state employees face a pay freeze.

His resignation was announced shortly after 10 a.m., five days after the raises were first disclosed by The Mirror.

Kennedy's problems over the raises were compounded by legislative anger over the disclosure that he was absent from the central office for six weeks last summer, using a clause in his contract that he said was for "professional development" to work remotely from a second home in Minnesota.

Another misstep included disclosure that the community college presidents were being offered "expedited" separations, after the central office insisted that the presidents were not being offered a "buyout."

Kennedy, 65, had been hired to head the new merged public college system, which has 100,000 students and includes the four Connecticut State University campuses, 12 community colleges and the online Charter Oak College. Only the University of Connecticut is outside the system.

His contract was up to five years.

"It's a job of a lifetime," Kennedy said on the day Malloy announced he would be the new system's first president. Kennedy was president of the University of Maine at the time.

"Bob is the right person to lead us in a new direction," Malloy said that day in the state Capitol complex. "Bob turned the University of Maine into a job engine... Leadership starts from the top."

In Kennedy's one-sentence resignation letter to Board of Regents Chairman Lewis Robinson Jr., he announced he will be waiving the 120 days of pay his contract requires.

"After taking some time to think about what is in the best interest of our state and this new organization, our colleges and universities, the faculty, staff, presidents and, of course, our students, I have decided to submit my resignation to Board Chairman Lewis J. Robinson this morning," Kennedy wrote in a prepared statement.

"I do so with a heavy heart, understanding that this isn't the way in which I thought my tenure would end."

Board of Regents President Robert A. Kennedy on his resignation: 'I do so with a heavy heart, understanding that this isn't the way in which I thought my tenure would end.'
Malloy, who delivered a pointed message to the Regents' board Thursday urging a close review of Kennedy’s actions, said, "Bob's decision is the right one."

In a prepared statement Friday, the governor said:

"It's unfortunate that the events of the past week have damaged the credibility of the central office, but they have. And that credibility needs to be restored as quickly as possible. As I said yesterday, it is now time for the Board to step in and take whatever actions are necessary to restore confidence and credibility in the central office."

The regents' system president first came under heavy fire late Tuesday when he admitted that he had "mistakenly" authorized 21 executive pay raises without board approval. Those increases, which totaled almost $300,000, also sparked legislative outrage, coming while most state employees are in the second year of a two-year wage freeze.

The most controversial of those increases was a nearly $50,000 bump for the second-highest administrator in the system, Executive Vice President Michael P. Meotti, whose salary rose from $183,339 to $232,244. On Tuesday, one day after The Mirror disclosed the raise, Meotti announced he would relinquish it.

The other raises Kennedy approved have also been suspended.

Other reactions

The top Republican in the state Senate, Minority Leader John McKinney of Fairfield, called Thursday for Meotti's resignation.

And when the four leaders of the legislature's Higher Education Committee issued a bipartisan call Thursday for Kennedy to step down, they also insisted that the Board of Regents investigate Meotti's pay increase.

"Dr. Kennedy's resignation was a necessary first step, but Senator McKinney continues to believe Michael Meotti's ability to lead the higher education system is also compromised and he needs to resign," Senate Republican Caucus spokesman Brett Cody said Friday.

"It is unfortunate that President Kennedy's brief tenure had to end this way, but it is in the best interests of the higher education system and everyone else involved," House Minority Leader Lawrence F. Cafero Jr., R-Norwalk said. "I applaud Mr. Kennedy for recognizing the dire nature of the developments of the last few weeks."

Cafero added that "a full inquiry by the Higher Education Committee is still warranted to answer questions regarding the tenure of the 12 community college presidents. Two college presidents have stated publicly that their future employment was directly linked to the Oct. 31 deadline to respond to offers of an early buyout."

Kennedy, whose base salary was $340,000, also faced several questions this week about his absence from the state and central office for six weeks this past summer, while he exercised contract rights to "professional development."

But he took no courses or did any academic research or writing. He spent his time in Minnesota, where he and his wife have a home, and said it would be more accurate to described that time as working remotely, rather than doing professional development.

Cafero said Thursday that the Board of Regents, and not just Kennedy, weakened its credibility by allowing this arrangement. "For six weeks, did anyone say: 'Where's Bob?'"

Several Republican legislators are calling for legislative hearings on what happened, why the appointed Board of Regents was absent for the decisions surrounding the pay raises and the "expedited[ ]" separation offers made to community college presidents.

"The relationship between the Board of Regents and the central staff and figuring just who is in charge must be settled," Cafero said Friday.

The co-chairwomen of the Higher Education Committee said they have not ruled out having a hearing on these missteps.

Democratic Sen. Beth Bye, co-chairwoman of the committee, said she welcomed the resignation.

"Unfortunately, Dr. Kennedy’s recent missteps have become too much of a distraction to our students and on our campuses," she said.

"We did our due diligence by meeting with the Board of Regents leadership, by talking with professors and students and Regents members, by asking tough questions and demanding strict accountability. We acted in an informed and deliberative manner, and I believe our nonpolitical approach contributed to Dr. Kennedy’s decision to resign."

The panel's other co-chairwoman, Rep. Roberta Willis, D-Salisbury, added, "I think it was the right step for him to take. We wanted this resolved as quickly as possible so we can move on."

Bye added, "I now look forward to the Board of Regents establishing guidelines and procedures to
ensure that Dr. Kennedy’s errors are not repeated, and that our ongoing higher education reorganization for the betterment of students proceeds in a timely and efficient manner.”

The board has a meeting scheduled for 2:30 today at the higher education offices at 61 Woodland St. in Hartford.

While Kennedy absorbed considerable criticism this week, Malloy said the departing president also deserves praise. "There have been many accomplishments at the Board over the last year, and Bob deserves a lot of credit for those accomplishments. He’s a smart, decent, thoughtful individual who has spent many years working to improve education systems. Our state universities, community and technical colleges are better off for Bob having spent the last year here in Connecticut, and I thank him for his service.

Robinson also thanked Kennedy in a prepared statement for his service. "I'm sure this was not an easy decision at which to arrive, but I appreciate his willingness to put our students first. Since meeting him, I have appreciated President Kennedy’s commitment to our change agenda, his willingness to move it forward, and his commitment to the principles of an affordable, accessible higher education experience for the students in our state. I wish him the best," he said.

Read the full statements surrounding the resignation.

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Comments

One down. Many more to go.
Submitted by CCCnomore on Fri, 10/12/2012 - 9:22am.

One down. Many more to go. Meotti has to resign for his part. He has been the architect of the merger, pay raises and the attempted removal of the CCC Presidents.

Jacqueline Rabe Thomas should win a Pulitzer for her reporting. Great Job and keep up the good work!

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One down, one to go. Or, is
Submitted by albertpaul on Fri, 10/12/2012 - 9:25am.

One down, one to go.
Or, is this now a chance for the governor's political crony -- Meotti -- to reappear out of hiding and take over? His dreams will be fulfilled. The public higher education nightmare will only continue to get worse. If that does happen, then it will be a very sad day indeed for our colleges and universities.

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Keep up the good work,
Submitted by Busterhughson on Fri, 10/12/2012 - 9:32am.

Keep up the good work, Jacqueline. This will certainly be a master's thesis for public policy study if not a Pulitzer.

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Meotti is next and Dannel you
Submitted by Speak up on Fri, 10/12/2012 - 9:33am.

Meotti is next and Dannel you are done....never to be elected as Governor again. Occhio start planning your next gig...time is ticking.

CT Mirror, thank you for your excellent coverage. You have outperformed the corporate owned
Michael P. Meotti, executive vice president of the Board of Regents of Higher Education -- and the focus of the pay-raise scandal that slammed the department this week -- became the second top official to resign Friday.

Earlier, Robert A. Kennedy, president of higher education's central office, announced his resignation. The resignations follow confirmation that Kennedy had unilaterally approved pay raises for 21 higher education officials this year in violation of state law. Meotti's 26 percent raise was $48,000 and awarded at a time when most state employees were in the second year of a wage freeze. Meotti was also involved in the system office offering the local college president's "expedited" departures.

Meotti wrote to the board of regent's newly appointed interim president Philip Austin this afternoon.

"I have decided to leave the system office of the Board of Regents for Higher Education because I do not want to be a distraction to the important change agenda across our 17 colleges and universities," Meotti wrote.

"I am happy to assist you in a brief transition period. I look forward to meeting with you soon. Best wishes for another interim presidency for you," he said.

In an emailed statement, Gov. Dannel P. Malloy said this evening, "It's my statement that "change in leadership was necessary." "Did he need to leave? Yeah. This is a step forward… I think people will finally be able to feel like it's a new day. It really would have been impossible for the board to recover from this [scandal] with [Meotti] still around."

Colleen Flanagan Johnson, spokeswoman for the board of regents, said that Meotti will be leaving the college system completely and a date for his departure has not been determined.

"It will be a brief transition period," she said.

Meotti was the Malloy administration's point person for the recent merger creating the 17-college Board of Regents system. Before being named the executive vice president of the system, Meotti had a long history in state politics, including being a state senator and the state's Commissioner of Higher Education.

State Rep. Roberta Willis, D-Salisbury, co-chairwoman of the legislature's Higher Education Committee, said Meotti's decision to step down is an "amazing development."

"Did he need to leave? Yeah. This is a step forward... I think people will finally be able to feel like it's a team again," she said. "It's a new day. It really would have been impossible for the board to recover from this [scandal] with [Meotti] still around."

State Sen. Beth Bye, D-West Hartford, co-chairwoman of the Higher Education Committee, said in a statement that "change in leadership was necessary."

"I respect Mike's decision to step down quickly for the benefit of the entire state college system. The Board of Regents now has an opportunity to study the structure of the central office and recommend improvements. I encourage them to do so, such that our mission of higher education and workforce development can continue unabated," she said.

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