US public university presidents' pay soars

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A recent survey by the *Chronicle of Higher Education* shows presidents of public universities in the US receiving increased salaries and compensation at a time when teachers and other public workers are facing increased attacks. In many cases, university presidents with the highest pay are in states with the largest reported budget deficits.

Ohio State University's E. Gordon Gee, formerly of Vanderbilt University, a private institution, is ranked the highest paid in the country with a total pay package of $1,818, 911. Republican Governor John Kasich recently signed into law a bill banning the right of Ohio's 360,000 public sector workers to strike, raising health insurance costs, and imposing other cuts. (See "Ohio governor signs law attacking public employees")

Following Ohio State's President Gee, the top 10 highest paid presidents include the following:

• Mark A. Emmert, University of Washington: $905,004

• Francisco G. Cigarroa, University of Texas system: $905,004

• John C Hitt, University of Central Florida: $800,703

• Graham B. Spanier, Pennsylvania State University system: $800,592

• Mary Sue Coleman, University of Michigan: $783,103

• Mark G. Yudof, University of California system: $783,103

• Charles W. Steger, Virginia Tech: $744,892

• G. Jay Gogue, Auburn University, Alabama: $734,551

• Michael M. Crow, Arizona State University at Tempe: $728,350

According to the *Chronicle* study, the median pay of presidents at 185 large public universities rose by 1 percent during the 2009-2010 school year, to $444,487. The rise comes as university tuition is skyrocketing, and college students and their families are forced to take on more and more student loan debt.

In an article last November, the *Chronicle* cited nearly 30 presidents at private institutions pulling in more than $1 million total pay for 2008. Among the highest paid in the private sector were R. Gerald Turner, president of Southern Methodist University in Texas, and Nicholas Zeppos of Vanderbilt, who received $2.8 million and $2.4 million respectively.

As states across the country grapple with burgeoning budget deficits, pay for presidents at public universities has been on the incline. These huge payouts are often justified with the argument that, with private university presidents commanding increased salaries, public universities need to boost presidents' pay to continue to attract "quality" candidates. By contrast, teachers and other public-sector workers are being asked to sacrifice their "overly generous" wages and benefits to conform to the laws of the free market.

In the nearly 200 public universities surveyed by the new *Chronicle*, 59 presidents in the years 2009-2010 raked in total compensation of roughly $500,000, up from 58 presidents a year earlier. Many presidents have criticized the survey, saying its publication could prompt attacks on their school budgets. While the attacks on public education are real, this is a cynical attempt on their part to defend their bloated salaries.

Many public presidents have also attempted to ease the scrutiny placed on their pay by foregoing various compensations, taking reductions in pay or, in the case of University of California's Mark Yudof, volunteering to take furlough days to help balance the budget.

While Yudof pulls in his $783,103 in total compensation, however, California Governor Jerry Brown is proposing massive cuts to public education at all levels, from kindergarten through university. (See "Budget cuts to hit public education in California")

In Pennsylvania, where Graham B. Spanier, president

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of the state university system, receives more than $800,000 in annual total compensation, Republican Governor Tom Corbett is proposing to reduce higher-education spending by more than 40 percent.

A number of university presidents have defended their salaries by citing their proportion to that of their schools' total budget. Daniel M. Dooley, vice-president of External Relations at the University of California, speaking in defense of President Mark Yudof's nearly $600,000 in salary alone, said: "We pay Mark $600,000 a year, and the overall budget for the university system is about $20 billion. There are very few organizations with a $20 billion budget where the CEO makes only $600,000."

A document circulated by Ohio Public School's Faculty Welfare Committee reveals the disingenuousness of such an argument. The document dealt with the shrinking pay of the average Ohio public school faculty member compared to that of administrators. From 2000 to 2007, pay for teachers and those in faculty posts had increased an average of only 3 percent. The average pay for presidents was documented as rising nearly 40 percent.

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