

UM spends millions on new president while spurning Michigan Medicine nurses

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The University of Michigan recently announced the selection of Santa Ono as its 15th president, with an initial five-year contract starting October 13. The Board of Regents voted unanimously to select Ono, currently the president of the University of British Columbia.

Ono will receive a base salary of \$975,000 and other perks, including \$350,000 in deferred compensation that starts after the first year, university benefits, supplemental contributions to a retirement plan, an expense allowance and use of a car and a driver.

“Much of what appears in University of Michigan President-elect Santa Ono’s contract is likely to be worth more than \$6 million over its five years,” James Finkelstein, professor emeritus of public policy at George Mason University, told the *Detroit News*. That amount will make Ono one of the top-paid public employees in the state.

“He’s going to be making substantially more than the governor, or any cabinet agency official, any member of the judiciary,” Finkelstein added.

His new home—the President’s House—is being freshly and expensively renovated. In May this year, while searching for a new university president, the regents approved \$15 million for that purpose.

When looking for a new president, the regents had no qualms about making sure all his needs would be met. His contract pays for “safe transport of (Ono’s) cellos and ... storage costs for the period of time during which the presidential house is being renovated.” If his taxes increase, Ono’s contract tells him “you have no associated after-tax costs.” To make sure he travels in style, he will have “travel accommodations commensurate with the position.”

When it comes to the 6,200 nurses at Michigan Medicine, now working without a contract, the Regents have a different attitude. The nurses face understaffing

and forced overtime with 16-hour shifts. They hardly get to spend any time with family and friends. Far from getting a pay increase to keep up with inflation, the university demands they absorb the increased cost of living, now at 9.1 percent. With an average salary of about \$67,000 a year, according to the website Indeed.com, fully licensed nurses face a severe cut in real wages under the 5 percent annual wage increase offered by the university.

The largest source of revenue for the university is Michigan Medicine, also referred to as the University of Michigan Health System. Out of the \$10.031 billion in total operating revenue for the university, the health care system and its related clinical activities bring in \$5.351 billion. The less the university can spend on nurses, the more it can increase the bloated salaries of presidents and other executives.

There are multiple layers of Michigan Medicine executives. The list below shows the salaries of just a small number of them. (Many of these executives wear two or three hats and collect six-figure incomes for each position.)

Salaries for 2021 (per the disclosure form posted by the university):

- Marschall Stevens Runge, CEO of UM Health System, executive vice president of the University of Michigan, and dean of the UM School of Medicine: \$1,433,600
- David Miller, president of UM Health System, executive vice dean for clinical affairs, UM Medical School: \$490,000
- Anthony Denton, senior vice president & chief operating officer, UM Health System: \$713,704
- Eric Duea Barritt, chief development officer, Health, UM Health System: \$470,895
- Amy Ellen Mainville Cohn, chief transformation

officer and chief industrial engineer, UM Health System, UM professor: \$536,640

· Nancy May, chief nurse executive, UM Health System, \$454,480

Runge is also on the board of directors of pharmaceutical giant Lilly, with an annual salary of \$294,000. That is his fourth six-figure “job.”

Instead of calling a strike against UofM Health, the MNA-UMPNC (Michigan Nurses Association-University of Michigan Professional Nurses Council), has organized toothless stunts like petitioning, begging the Regents, and calling an informational picket for Saturday, July 16 to get “support” from what the union calls “allies.” These are Democratic Party politicians, such as Congresswoman Debbie Dingell, willing to pose for a photo with a union member on the union’s Facebook page.

The MNA-UMPNC appeals to the very same Regents—six out of eight are Democrats—who hired Santa Ono and treat him so graciously, while they turn a deaf ear to the nurses, not caring that the conditions they helped create endanger nurse and patient safety.

The union’s reaction to Ono’s hiring was pathetic. The *Detroit News* noted, “Renee Curtis, a registered nurse and president of the Michigan Nurses Association-University of Michigan Professional Council, said the association’s 6,000-plus members welcomed Ono and the new era he would usher in on campus.” Curtis must be hoping Ono will become another “ally.”

Rank-and-file nurses can make the informational picket a call to action by demanding the union call a strike to last until all the nurses’ demands are met. Nurses can turn out to their real allies—fellow workers who are facing the same abominable, unsafe conditions—not the big business politicians, who are on the other side.

The real allies of the UM nurses include hospital and nursing home workers throughout the region; student nurses, many of whom have seen what working conditions are like in the hospital; and auto and other industrial workers who are resisting the decimation of their wages and conditions.

Parts workers at the Ventra Evart plant in central Michigan recently voted by 95 percent to reject a contract backed by the UAW bargaining team. They have formed a rank-and-file committee, which issued this statement:

We know that a strike is serious business and is not something to take lightly. But we will never get what we need and what we deserve without a struggle. The eight-hour day, COLA, company-provided health care, pensions: our grandparents and great-grandparents had to fight for these things tooth and nail. The corporations and the UAW have been taking these gains back, one by one, for decades. Where will it end if we don’t take a stand?

This statement speaks for nurses as well, and they should follow the example of the parts workers and build their own rank-and-file committee.



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