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President's Weekly Perspective, 2008_06_30

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Monday Morning Message - June 30, 2008

Good Morning.

I'd like to use this week's message to discuss an article that appeared last week in The Albuquerque Journal about an employee's allegations that cronyism was involved in decisions to hire, promote and compensate UNM administrative staff.

When we received the complaint, we quickly decided that a thorough review of the facts was called for, if only to ensure the integrity of the University's employment systems and avoid even the appearance of impropriety. Normally, this review would have been conducted by Internal Audit or Human Resources, but because both of those offices were mentioned in the complaint, I asked our lead labor lawyer to conduct a top-to-bottom review of each of the 101 separate job decisions for 21 employees cited. These job actions included individual hiring decisions, promotions, pay raises and so on.

Our review has confirmed the integrity of the Human Resources and personnel process. Counsel could find no evidence of a pattern of policy violation, misconduct nor misappropriation of funds. The Office of Equal Opportunity had approved each of the hiring or promotion decisions within its jurisdiction. In fact, the most serious lapse our Counsel could confirm consisted of five instances where the lack of written documentation to support the respective job action warranted further attention – and even in those cases, the underlying action was found to be amply justified by the facts, even though paperwork was missing from the files.

With respect to the compensation and pay raises for the 21 employees cited, in those instances where comparable market data exists, the UNM employees are actually paid at or below the market rate.

The particular employees mentioned in this complaint represent some of our most dedicated and conscientious workers, and I want to say publicly that we are lucky to have them. Like all 22,000 of our employees, they are an ethnically diverse group whose hiring, promotion and compensation reflects their individual commitment to the mission of this University.

Here at UNM, we have set some ambitious goals for ourselves – student success, academic excellence, improving graduation and retention rates and putting our financial house back in order. To accomplish these objectives, we need to get the right people on board, compensate them accordingly – and hold them accountable for their success.

I believe we have assembled exactly the people we need at the helm if we are to transform this University into the top tier of American Universities, and I hope all of us can move forward to do so.

Our review did, however, uncover a need for certain remedial measures to correct misfiling of employment and compensation decisions, as well as an examination of the need for greater flexibility in the rules pertaining to the hiring of executive staff. I have the utmost confidence in our Human Resources department, and I've asked the Vice President of Human Resources to impress upon the entire University community and all our Departments the obligation to comply with University rules and regulations pertaining to the justification for job actions of this type, not just to the letter but in the spirit as well. While Departments must have latitude to build their own teams, we are a public University, owned by the taxpayers, and must all be vigilant that applicable laws, rules, regulations and policies are complied with.

On a personal note, with Independence Day upon us, I wish each and every one of you a Happy Fourth of July. Janet and I will be taking a few days off, and I hope all of you are able to spend some quality time with your own families and friends. Travel safely!

Have a good week.

David J. Schmidly