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STUDENTS, FACULTY, STAFF UNITE TO REFORM HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNANCE AND END EXECUTIVE PAY SCANDALS

Legislators urge Governor to sign bills to bring transparency and accountability to UC, CSU

SACRAMENTO – Students, faculty, and staff of the University of California and the California State University joined Senator Leland Yee (D-San Francisco/San Mateo) and Assemblyman Anthony Portantino (D-Pasadena) today to urge Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger (R-Los Angeles) to sign two bills aimed at reforming the governing boards of the systems and ending the executive pay hikes that have recently tarnished the institutions.

“The Governor needs to join us in sending a very clear message to the UC and CSU: it is time to end the culture of secrecy and arrogance,” said Yee. “No longer should the students, faculty and staff – the backbone of our public universities – be left to bear the burden, while top execs live high on the hog. As a graduate of both the UC and CSU, I want to make sure our higher education systems succeed by investing in instruction, not creating a get-rich factory for executives. SB 190 will bring much needed sunshine to executive compensation discussions, provide members of the media the democratic access they deserve, and help restore the public’s trust.”

“At a time when many legislators and educators want desperately to increase education funding for our public schools and universities, the California State University Board of Trustees is making that effort much more difficult,” said Portantino. “The openness and accountability that most Californians have come to expect from state government is simply not present at one of the nation’s most prestigious public universities, as evident by their recent vote to increase executive pay by nearly 12 percent across-the-board. AB 1413 is about shining the light on closed-door decision making and holding the CSU to account for how they choose to spend taxpayer dollars.”

Senate Bill (SB) 190, the Higher Education Governance Accountability Act authored by Senator Yee, would require all executive compensation packages to be voted on in an open session of a subcommittee and the full board. The bill would also require full disclosure of the compensation package with accompanying rationale, allow the public to comment on such action items, and close a loophole that allows UC Regents and CSU Trustees on advisory groups to circumvent open meetings law.

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Assembly Bill (AB) 1413, the California State University Governance Reform Act authored by Assemblymember Portantino, would eliminate the practice of “ghost professorships” by requiring all CSU executives who are compensated to teach a class to actually perform the work they are paid to do. Additionally, the bill would allow ex-officio members of the Board (Governor, Lt. Governor, Speaker of the Assembly, Supt. of Public Instruction, and CSU Chancellor) to appoint designees to attend meetings in their absence. This provision is especially important for the state’s constitutional officers who are members of various other important boards and commissions (such as the UC Board of Regents) that meet at the same time in different parts of the state.

SB 190 and AB 1413 come after a series of audits, lawsuits and other revelations found that the UC and the CSU failed to get public approval from the Regents or Trustees for compensation packages and that some top executives were paid more than what was released to the public. Over the past several months, the Regents and Trustees have handed out a number of excessive executive compensation payouts, and also increased student fees.

“SB 190 is a small step in ensuring that the University of California conducts their business in the light of day,” said Gale Price, Executive-Treasurer for AFSCME, Local 3299. “With the many public scandals that have happened at UC over the last two years, it is crucial that the Governor join with the State Legislature in ensuring public oversight of our public universities.”

“CSU students and faculty are outraged by a CSU Administration that continues to make awarding lavish salaries and executive perks its number one priority,” Lillian Taiz, President of the California Faculty Association. “SB 190 and AB 1413 would once and for all stop the waste, fraud, and abuse of taxpayer dollars by the CSU Administration and return the focus back to providing a quality education for students. The Governor prides himself on being a reformer and by signing these two bills he will bring much needed reform to the higher education system in California.”

SB 190 and AB 1413 both passed with overwhelming bipartisan support. The Governor has until October 14 to sign or veto the bills.

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