

The Register-Guard

<http://www.registerguard.com/>

EDITORIAL: 'Shared sacrifice' is vital

<http://www.registerguard.com/csp/cms/sites/web/opinion/25425950-47/president-state-university-employees-governor.csp> |

UO president made a good-hearted error

Posted to Web: **Wednesday, Oct 20, 2010 05:56PM**

Appeared in print: **Wednesday, Oct 20, 2010, page A8**

When University of Oregon President Richard Lariviere approved a plan to help low-paid campus workers make up furlough losses by working more overtime, his heart was in the right place.

His head wasn't.

When the governor got wind of the plan, he let Lariviere know that he disapproved. He did so through an Oct. 1 e-mail from his chief of staff, Tim Nesbitt, as first reported by Willamette Week.

The president's plan was to give overtime to unionized workers who were required to take pay cuts through furloughs (time off without pay).

Lariviere said he was not trying to evade the university's assigned spending cuts to help the state achieve overall budget reductions. "We just did it through operational efficiencies rather than the mandated mechanism," he told The Register-Guard Monday. "The concern was to protect our most vulnerable colleagues in all of this."

So what's wrong with that?

Tim Nesbitt, Governor Kulongoski's chief of staff, answered that question in his e-mail: "The governor recognizes that the public's support for government can be eroded in times like these when the private sector is shedding jobs, households are cutting back and tax burdens can feel heavier to bear. That is why the principle of self-sacrifice has an importance beyond its contribution to any agency's budget saving and why, in times like these, policies that appear to evade our commitment to shared sacrifice for any group of employees can be damaging to all of us."

Ironically, Nesbitt is a former head of the Oregon AFL-CIO and has long been affiliated with unions representing public employees.

But he was right in this case to chastise Lariviere for being too generous with some UO employees. Many Oregon workers affected by pay cuts in one form or another would love to have an opportunity to make up their paycheck erosion through overtime. They will not understand why their counterparts who work for one small unit of state

government should receive that privilege.

A second irony involves the fact that shortly after he assumed his post last summer, the UO's new president proposed revising the system of governance so that universities would enjoy more independence from state government.

The idea may not go anywhere; similar past proposals haven't. But in the meantime, as The Oregonian noted pointedly, "the UO is no more independent than the Department of Corrections..."

True enough, legally. But there is a big fiscal difference: The university now receives only 8 percent of its operating funds from the state, compared with more than 30 percent not so long ago. This does not, of course, entitle the university president to abide by only 8 percent of the state's edicts.

These facts are well known on the campus and in the governor's office. They don't change the current fact that in the way he tried to be nice to about 1,000 employees the university's president made a mistake.

We can only hope this will cause the school no harm in the next session of the Legislature. Our optimistic guess is that legislators will be distracted by much larger problems.