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— PAUL KELLY, PRESIDENT OF THE STATE BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Rules change for Lariviere

The UO president faces new conditions in his contract that bar him from bypassing the state higher ed board

BY GREG BOLY
The Register-Guard

The state Board of Higher Education is tightening the reins on University of Oregon President Richard Lariviere following his decision to pursue sweeping changes at the UO in spite of board objections.

Several new conditions are being added to Lariviere's contract that, among other things, bar him from doing what he did during his previous term of the university directly to legislatives without the board's approval. Instead, he can only pursue such changes "through the board's processes."

The new language appears to be the price Lariviere will pay for essentially bypassing the board with his New Partnership plan, which would make big changes in how the UO is funded and managed. He still is free to pursue the plan, but only by first bringing it to the board and winning its approval.

Members of the higher education board approved the new conditions during a phone meeting Tuesday. They are part of a one-year extension of Lariviere's contract, which is expected to be finalied next month. Yet to be hammered out is Lariviere's compensation; he was hired in March 2009 at an annual salary of $460,000, which included a state-funded salary of $246,700 a year plus supplements from the UO Foundation and in deferred compensation.

Through a spokesman, Lariviere said Wednesday he didn't have anything further to add to the board's discussion. He continues to support the board's reform plans and an education reform measure pushed by Gov. John Kitzhaber. Lariviere with-

Lariviere: Board's, governor's reform plans are in committee

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Paul Kelly, president of the state Board of Higher Education that over sees the Oregon University System, acknowledged that board members were not happy with Lariviere's ends run with the New Partnership.

The state board is pushing a different reform plan for higher education, and it saw Lariviere's plan as a distraction or worse.

"We did not approve that," Kelly said Wednesday. "In fact, we objected to the University of Oregon's pursuit of it. It's a matter of the board's proposal. We were not pleased that the University of Oregon went down that path for much of the legislative session." We were not pleased that the University of Oregon went down that path for much of the legislative session. We were not pleased that the University of Oregon went down that path for much of the legislative session. We were not pleased that the University of Oregon went down that path for much of the legislative session. We were not pleased that the University of Oregon went down that path for much of the legislative session.

The board's reform plan currently is in the Judicial Ways and Means Committee, but Kelly said he's optimistic it will emerge in time for the House and Senate to vote on it and believes it will be approved. Kitzhaber's bill also is in Ways and Means but may have a tougher time getting a vote.

"Work within the tent" Kelly stressed the board isn't trying to muzzle Lariviere and he has no intention to oppose the New Partnership. He said the contract language is meant only to ensure that Lar iviere follows board procedures for proposing changes.

"It's about having everybody within the tent instead of wandering outside the tent," he said. In fact, Kelly praised Lariviere's overall performance.

"President Lariviere is an extremely capable, talented guy who has already done some terrific things at the University of Oregon and, more importantly, has great leadership potential, not just for the UO but the entire state public higher education system," he said. "We envision a long-term relationship with Richard and hope he wants to be at the UO of O for a long period of time."

However, it's clear the board isn't prepared to commit to that long-term relationship yet. Lariviere will get only a one-year contract, even though another president who started at the same time as Lariviere, Rob Davies at Eastern Oregon University, was given a two-year contract.

Another addition to Lariviere's contract is a clause allowing the board to terminate him without cause with 30 days' notice. Other language requires Lariviere to attend board meetings and meetings of the university presidents and to actively participate in discussions over university management and financing.

Kelly said Lariviere has not been attending OSU meetings "as fully and frequently as we would like.

The one-year contract, he said, is meant to imply a lack of confidence. He said it reflects the potential for big changes in the state's higher education system that reform efforts could bring, which are likely to have a bigger effect on the UO than smaller schools such as OSU. Lariviere's contract gives both the board and Lariviere more flexibility to deal with any changes, Kelly said.

"Frankly, we could all be looking at a very different landscape a year from now," he said. "We felt that the time frame was appropriate given that potential."

Not an unusual move

The new contract conditions make it clear the board wants to see some changes in Lariviere's approach to certain issues. But that doesn't necessarily mean his position is in jeopardy, and it's not a particularly unusual move for the state board, one former board member said.

Tony Van Vliet, who not only served on the board in the 1990s but also was a state legislator and forestry professor at Oregon State University, said it's not uncommon for the board to address specific issues with university presidents through contract language. But Van Vliet still believes Lariviere got off easy.

"If this had been 1989, he would have been gone," he said, referring to the ouster of then-UO President Paul Olum following a similar incident. Olum had been around the board to seek more funding for the UO from the Legislature, drawing the ire of Chancellor Eloy Oak, who sacked him.

"I am surprised that he even got this far doing the things that he did at the Legislature," Van Vliet said of the UO president.

Van Vliet said Lariviere's tactics seem to reflect what he and others have long seen as an attitude problem at the UO, which he said is sometimes seen as putting its own interests ahead of the rest of the higher education system.

"During my tenure on the board, the University of Oregon has not been a team player," he said.

"There's a lot of hard feelings about how business is done there."