POEM ABOUT YOUR UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT’S COMPLETELY REASONABLE FOUR MILLION-DOLLAR COMPENSATION PACKAGE

by SUSAN HARLAN

“Most of the money earned by America’s top-paid private-college presidents in 2015 came from sources outside their regular paycheck....The top earner in 2015 was Nathan O. Hatch, president of Wake Forest University, who made just over $4 million, according to The Chronicle’s analysis.” — The Chronicle of Higher Ed, 12/10/17
Dear University Community,

It has come to our attention
Up here in our very tall turret
That a scurrilous rag known as
The Chronicle of Higher Education
Has published its annual database
Of executive compensation packages
Of college presidents in the U.S.

Their analysis shows that in 2015,
Our glorious and anointed-with-holy-oil
President received just over $4 million
And ranked first in total compensation
In the whole entire and complete country,
From sea to shining sea.
Because university trustees are known
To be thoughtful and generous people,
We would like to offer some
Additional context
To everyone in our campus community,
Particularly those professors
Who might make less money
Than the president.

We assure you that every dime
Of this $4,004,617
Can be accounted for,
Justified,
And rationalized
As you might rationalize
Sending a longing-filled text to an ex
When you are drunk at 3 a.m.

It is extremely important to note that
That the president’s actual base pay
Was a meager $839,944,
While $92,000 was bonus pay,
And $3,009,376 was what we like to call
“Other pay,” or “Not real money pay,”
Which includes fast cars,
Swanky pads, jet-setting, opera tickets,
And club dues for the clubs where
Upper-level university administrators
Unwind after a long day of
Trying to figure out how to get professors
To give away their labor.
Also worth mentioning is the president’s
Reasonable champagne budget,
Which we double only around the holidays.
We understand that this breakdown
Might be confusing to those of you
Who do not have a champagne budget,
So we provide this information
By way of clarification.

Also by way of clarification,
We would like to note that the vesting
Of the president’s deferred compensation
Prompted a one-year bump among peers
Because IRS reporting rules require
That the entire vested benefit,
Which includes accruals reported
In the tax filings from 2006-2014,
Plus the final accrual and any investment
Net earnings, be reported
In the year of vesting.
So gross inequality in the
Corporate American university
Is not a thing.
As you no doubt now see,
Numbers are not numbers,
But things that can be interpreted
And reinterpreted,
But not like you interpret things
In English departments
Because that shit is useless.

We would also remind you that
The president has done
A lot of Really Leader-y Things
All by himself,
And these Really Leader-y Things
Cost $4,004,617.
Indeed, not unlike his crown
Bejeweled with the Heart of the Ocean
From *Titanic*, his compensation
Over the course of his tenure
Reflects his exceptional leadership.
Even when he has found this crown
Rather heavy
(Needless to say, he keeps it
In constant rotation
With St Edward’s Crown),
He has seen the university through
A transformational period
That includes achieving the largest
Fundraising effort in our history.
He has also set the standard for personal
And career development,
Built a boatload of brick buildings,
Swerved to avoid a (very cute) badger once,
And ensured an academic and residential environment
That educates the whole person
And not just part of them
Like their torso
Or foot.

These innovative accomplishments
Are absolutely worth $4 million,
In the same way that what you do in those
Classroom places – and he remembered to
Talk you professors up
For the fundraising campaign! –
Is worth somewhere between $5 and $75,000
With occasional presents of fish and game,
And so forth,
Whenever they are in season.
We would also remind you
That you are #luckytohaveajob
And request that you please
Consult the contract you signed
With your congealing blood,
Which stipulates that so long as you
Are comfortable,
You are to remain a docile
And non-critical member
Of this community,
Which is really very much
Like a family
If you are in a Harold Pinter play.

This is not the first communication
We trustees have made
On the subject of the president’s compensation,
And we would be #grateful
If you would accept what we are saying
And get on with your small
And ordinary lives.
We are on a team-building African safari
And would like to get back to shooting zebras.
Thank you, and bless our beloved university!

Sincerely,
The Board of Trustees

TAGS: Higher Ed, Universities, Money, Poems

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