



Our Opinion: U of I board should rethink Ringeisen deal

GateHouse News Service

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IT'S A SWEET DEAL, no doubt, for a university president signing off from a lengthy career in higher education.

University of Illinois Springfield Chancellor Richard Ringeisen gets \$273,000 after he retires to serve as an adviser to the president of the University of Illinois. He won't have to live in Illinois to do the job, and he'll even get reimbursed for flying back and forth between his new home in the Carolinas and the Land of Lincoln.

What's wrong with this picture?

THE DISCLOSURE comes the same week that University of Illinois President Stanley Ikenberry appeared before a legislative panel decrying how the state's refusal to pay what it owes to the universities is creating a fiscal crisis.

In a meeting Wednesday with The State Journal-Register's editorial board, Ikenberry outlined areas he was looking at to trim the budget. One area of concern, ironically, was the number of administrators that the U of I system has on the payroll.

To put this in perspective, Ringeisen's deal could pay the tuition for more than 25 needy Illinois students.

We mean no disrespect to Ringeisen, who has done a commendable job building and leading UIS for a decade, but the idea of taking this amount of money while the system he works for faces financial implosion seems questionable at best.

To be fair, former university leaders often provide valuable service in the twilight of their careers. A key attribute for any leader in higher education is an ability to raise money. Ringeisen has done that well over the years. He knows the state's players and has been an effective ambassador between UIS and the community it serves. He might be able to assist in ongoing capital campaigns, albeit from afar.

But even given that expertise, it seems out of balance to create another administrative salary when some staff members are being asked to take furlough days.

THE PROBLEM here is one of both perception and reality.

These next few critical months are a time when the university system desperately needs to assure the public that the lifelong opportunity extended by getting a college degree will not fall hopelessly out of reach.

The perception is that U of I's leadership is convinced the status quo should prevail in the face of extraordinary challenge.

The reality is that the state may not be able to afford this deal, given that Illinois lawmakers seem unable to commit any substantive act of governance so far this year. Ikenberry talked of many options that might play out if the state doesn't pay its bills, including shutting down campuses.

The U of I board of trustees will get a chance to sanction Ringeisen's deal when it meets March 10. We strongly suggest the board rethink the offer and make sure any deal offered is more in line with budget reality.

Comments (6)

College Student

7 hours ago

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Trustee Hasara: please hear us in Springfield. ENOUGH of this.

ash

3 hours ago

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The problem isn't that the deal was added at the end, but included in his initial contract. How does the sj-r editorial board propose to deal with that minor detail? I'm not saying it is right, and it clearly comes at the worst possible time, but it was a part of his contract from day one. If he sued to get it, he would certainly win and the system would be out both the money and the legal fees.

Fullhouse
2 hours ago

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I like the guy, but before long, these college boards are going to start treating University Presidents like CEO's. They will say we cannot get anybody to run our school if we dont pay them 20 million dollars.

Board, take a step back to reality, I am SURE you can find someone to do that job that doesn't need an AIG contract.

tbarcroft
2 hours ago

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I am afraid that 'ash' is right. There is no legal standing to dispute the original contract. We can only look to Dr. Ringeisen's good conscience to remedy the matter.

IllinoisCitizen
2 hours ago

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I'm sorry, but if the university can negate union-negotiated contracts, surely it can negate negotiated contracts as well. There are ways to end-run contracts -- they find them all the time. This would be an appropriate time.

TelegramSam
1 hour ago

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I suppose this explains U of I calling three times in one day to solicit donations from alumni. Login or register to post a comment:

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