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Pension fund faces shortfall

Police, firefighters seek more money from city

By Evan Mohl
EL PASO TIMES

More than five years after receiving a $210 million bailout from the city, the El Paso Firemen and Policemen's Pension Fund has asked for more public money to solve a $270 million funding shortfall.

The move surprised some city officials and generated concerns about the fund's sustainability, setting the stage for a debate and negotiations over the viability of police and firefighter pensions and who's responsible for paying for them.

The El Paso Firemen and Policemen's Pension Fund has already asked the city to contribute about $4 million to the fund annually while its members would increase contributions by $3 million annually. The fund's leadership says its members are making sacrifices, too, just like in 2009 when they gave up $186 million in benefits in exchange for city money.

Some City Council members and the city manager's office are hesitant to dip deeper into an already stretched budget. The city has ordered an audit of the fund, looking for ways to solve the shortfall other than using taxpayer money.

Mayor John Cook says he wants to avoid adversarial negotiations and promises to fix the shortfall in his last 100 days in office. He will leave office in June.

"We must make this fund sustainable," Cook said. "Every mayor can't face this problem every five years. I cannot leave the system broken; we have to take care of our policemen and firemen in a fiscally responsible way."

El Paso Firemen and Policemen's Pension Fund Board Chairman Police Lt. Tyler Grossman acknowledges that the fund is giving out more in benefits than it is taking in from investments and payments, partly due to a retiree membership of 1,400 and just about 1,800 current contributors. The fund has dropped below its ability to pay out benefits to retirees over the next 40 years and also is less than 80 percent funded.

The average pay in retirement is about $44,000.

Please see **Shortfall** 9A

Education

Ysleta tosses plan to study outsourcing certain jobs

By Marty Schladen
EL PASO TIMES

Ysleta school district administrators last week abandoned plans to spend $100,000 to study whether to outsource four supervisory jobs.

District spokeswoman Patricia Ayala said administrators conceived the plan in an effort to be as "efficient as possible."

But school board Trustee Shane Haggerty questioned the expense of the study, while Arlinda Valencia, president of the Ysleta Teachers Association, said it would have been more money wasted by Superintendent Michael Zolkoski, who has already spent hundreds of thousands on noneducational items such as employee parties, a Christmas program and his district-owned house.

"He needs to start cutting those instead of cutting jobs," Valencia said.

On Jan. 25, school administrators posted a solicitation for a "feasibility study on outsourcing operation administration" that said bids would be opened on Feb. 8.

Ayala didn't respond Friday to a phone call and an email asking whether school administrators planned, as Haggerty said, to pay a firm $100,000 to study whether to outsource the four jobs. She also didn't respond to a request for the names of the firms that had submitted bids.

Nor did Ayala respond directly Thursday when asked why administrators abandoned the outsourcing study Monday.

"Standard operating procedure is that we can close solicitations at the district's discretion, without making an award," she said in an email.

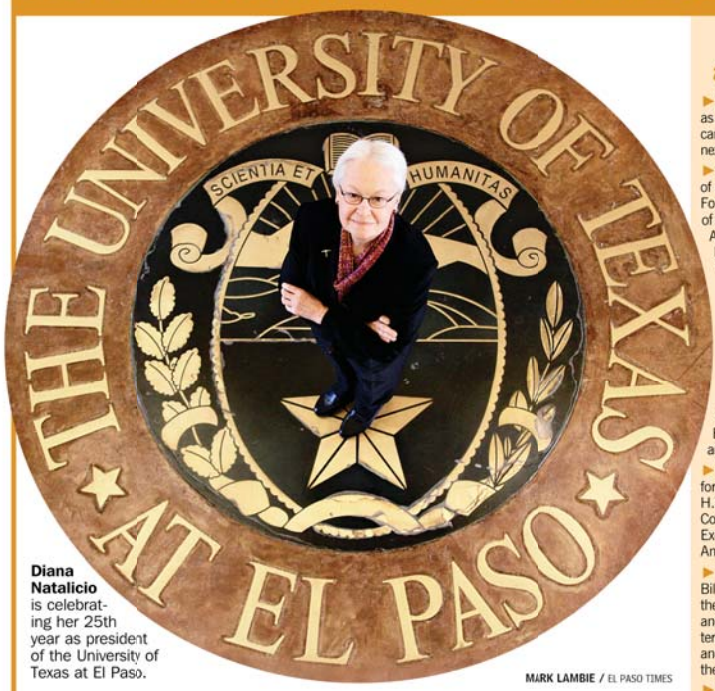
The one-page scope of work in the bid packet does not list the number of employees who might eventually be outsourced, and it does not address the potential cost of the study.

Haggerty said part of the reason administrators abandoned the study was that he raised objections when he learned about it.

"I would love to take credit for it,"

Please see **Ysleta** 9A

CELEBRATION OF LEADERSHIP



Diana Natalicio is celebrating her 25th year as president of the University of Texas at El Paso.

MARK LAMBIE / EL PASO TIMES

Natalicio promotes, nurtures UTEP over 25-year career

By Adriana M. Chávez
EL PASO TIMES

In the nearly 100-year history of the University of Texas at El Paso, Diana Natalicio has been its president for a quarter of that time.

Natalicio, 73, said that while growing up in St. Louis, she always saw herself as a teacher, but never imagined being the person overseeing the progress of a growing public university that seeks to become one of the top research institutions in the nation.

On Feb. 11, Natalicio celebrated her 25th year at the university as its 14th president, a real rarity.

According to the American Council on Education's 2012 American College President study, the typical American college or university president is a married 61-year-old white man who holds a doctoral degree in education and has worked in his current position for seven years, a profile that has not varied over the past 25 years or since Natalicio became president.

Natalicio, who has a doctoral degree in linguistics, said during an interview with the El Paso Times on Friday she doesn't see herself slowing down soon.

"I've always said that I will do this for as long as I get up every

Please see **Natalicio** 9A

Natalicio's accomplishments

- **Natalicio** will be sworn in as chairwoman of the American Council on Education next month.
- **She** serves on the board of trustees of the Rockefeller Foundation and on the board of directors of the Association of Public and Land Grant Universities.
- **She** has served on the board of governors of the U.S.-Mexico Foundation for Science and of the NASA Advisory Committee, and on the boards of Trinity Industries, National Action Council for Minorities in Engineering, Sandia Corp. and Internt2.
- **She** was appointed by former President George H.W. Bush to the Advisory Commission on Education Excellence for Hispanic Americans.
- **In 1994,** former President Bill Clinton appointed her to the National Science Board, and she served two six-year terms as a board member and three two-year terms as the board's vice chairwoman.
- **In 1997,** she was given the Harold W. McGraw Jr. Prize in Education. Two years later, Natalicio was inducted into the Texas Women's Hall of Fame. In 2006, she was given the University of Texas at Austin's Distinguished Alumnus Award.
- **In 2011,** she was recognized by Mexican President Felipe Calderón with the Orden Mexicana del Aguila Azteca, or the Order of the Aztec Eagle, that country's highest honor given to foreign nationals.
- **She** has received honorary doctoral degrees from Georgetown University, Smith College and the Universidad Autonoma de Nuevo Leon.

Natalicio

Continued from **1A**

day excited and feeling good about the work that I'm doing and the impact that UTEP is having," Natalicio said. "I think, for me, it's all about the outcomes of the work, and as long as I feel we are achieving the outcomes that we have worked toward, I'll be energized and want to continue."

Natalicio is the current longest-serving president of a four-year Texas public university and UTEP's first woman president. She's also the first former faculty member at UTEP to be named the university's president.

When Natalicio started at UTEP in 1988, her annual base salary was $95,000. Her current base salary is $391,755, slightly above the $383,000 median national base pay average at public research institutions, according to the Chronicle of Higher Education.

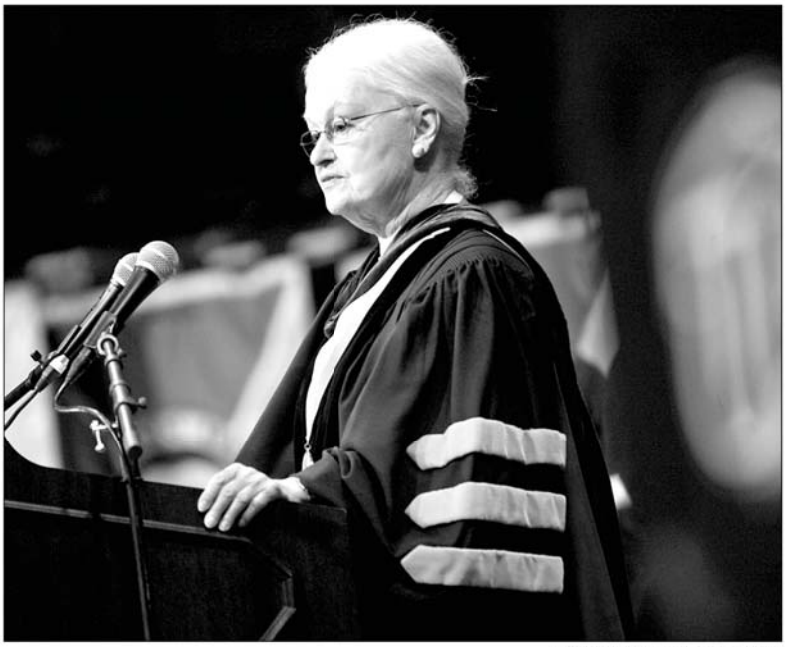
In 2010, Natalicio rejected a 2 percent pay raise, stating at the time, "In tough economic times, my salary is quite adequate."

Natalicio grew up in a modest family in St. Louis. Her parents didn't attend college but encouraged her and her brother to get degrees.

After working for a short time as a switchboard operator at a large manufacturing company, a job Natalicio found boring and unrewarding, she turned to her childhood dream of teaching and enrolled at St. Louis University.

Her background is similar to the backgrounds of many UTEP students who are the first ones in their families attending college and some who juggle their studies with working and raising families.

"I can resonate to a lot of what our students are feeling, especially in their first semester," Natalicio said. "I was so scared when I went to St. Louis University that I was going to fail. I just didn't know what to expect. I was so underprepared, and I was competing with people who had gone to the prep schools. When I got there, they scared me. In the end, I outran them, but in the beginning they just seemed so knowledgeable, but of course they were bluffing."



MARK LAMBIE / TIMES FILE PHOTO

UTEP President Diana Natalicio presides over an annual commencement ceremony at the Don Haskins Center at the University of Texas at El Paso.

Natalicio's background

▶ **Received** a bachelor's degree in Spanish from St. Louis University in 1961.

▶ **Received** a master's degree in Portuguese and Brazilian-area studies from the University of Texas at Austin in 1964.

▶ **She received** a doctorate in linguistics from the University of Texas at Austin in 1969.

▶ **She worked** as a professor or instructor at Our Lady of the Lake College, St. Mary's University and the University of Texas at Austin before arriving at UTEP

Although Natalicio initially viewed being a university president as "mostly ceremonial," she worked her way up from a temporary position at UTEP to a full-time professor, and then she became vice president for academic affairs, dean of liberal arts and chairwoman of the modern languages department.

During Natalicio's tenure as president, enrollment at UTEP has increased from 14,971 to more than 22,700 students, 90 percent of whom reflect the demographics of the region. UTEP's budget has also increased, from $65 million in 1988 to more than $400 million.

Currently, the university is in the middle of planning next year's centennial celebrations and juggling several campus projects to improve its infrastructure.

In the past 10 years, the university has spent nearly $400 million in building and renovating facilities for the science, engineering and health sciences departments, along with other student quality-of-life-related projects such as parking garages and a new university bookstore building.

In the next 10 years or so, visitors to UTEP can expect to see a campus mostly closed off to vehicles where pedestrians can walk under shaded pagodas with walkways connecting to a plaza in the campus's center.

Natalicio said that when she arrived at UTEP in 1971, the school did not have the confidence it has now in competing

"Back then, I think we were too quick to blame others for not giving us whatever it was that we needed or wanted, and didn't have enough confidence in ourselves to be aggressive about competing for whatever it was that we needed or wanted," she said. "I think the big difference in UTEP today is our attitude. It's just so much more competitive, we're so much more eager to take on challenges, and we have a lot of confidence that we'll succeed."

University of Texas System Chancellor Francisco Cigarroa, who calls Natalicio a "mentor," said Natalicio has helped shape UTEP into a university able to take on those challenges.

"She is a dream come true," Cigarroa said. "You can walk onto UTEP on any given day and feel the excitement. People still look up to her for her leadership and you can feel it. I salute her, and I'm so proud of her."

Many others who have worked closely with Natalicio attribute to her work UTEP's increased confidence and ability to take on challenges, such as becoming a nationally recognized research university, known as Tier One, by 2018.

"Dr. Natalicio has been a proactive forward-looking advocate for UTEP's students, faculty and staff. She has not only aggressively guided UTEP through an extensive period of change, but has been the driving force for that change. She has been a mentor for a large group of young administrators. She's truly an El Paso treasure," said Dr. Jose Manuel de la Rosa, vice president for health affairs at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center at El Paso and the founding dean of the Paul L. Foster School of Medicine.

Woody Hunt, the chairman and CEO of Hunt Companies who was on the UT System Board of Regents from 1999 to 2005, called Natalicio a "change agent" who has helped UTEP become a research-competitive institution. "She has been strategically laying out an approach for UTEP for many levels, with a focus on research competitiveness. UTEP is able to be a research-competitive institution even though it has not been historically," Hunt said.

He added, "She is an advocate in Austin for UTEP to be allowed to compete against the other universities to be a Tier 1 university. Being an advocate whether in the political sense or fundraising sense, I think it's had a pretty remarkable impact on the institution, which today looks significantly different than it would have looked without her leadership."

Natalicio said the university is on schedule in attaining Tier 1 status.

"The latest data are very encouraging," Natalicio said. "In federal funding, we rank second among all the eight emerging research universities that are competing for this Tier 1 federal research dollars. Only the University of Houston is ahead of us ... which is quite an accomplishment. We know how to do this, and we're building more and more momentum. I think that very soon, we will get to the goal line."

According to statistics provided by UTEP officials, degree completions have grown dramatically at UTEP, pointing out that there has been an 85 percent increase in undergraduate degrees awarded in the past decade, more than 80 percent of them to Hispanics, and UTEP consistently ranks among the top three universities nationally in the number of Hispanic graduates per year in nearly every disciplinary area.

UTEP offers 19 doctoral degrees, and had a total of 727 doctoral students enrolled by the end of last year. Among the criteria to access the state money that would help UTEP achieve Tier 1 status is a requirement that universities confer 200 doctoral degrees annually.

In 2011-12, UTEP awarded 79 doctoral degrees, an increase from 59 in 2008-09. Generally, universities that earn a Tier 1 designation spend about $100 million annually on research and are known for having high-caliber faculty and degree programs. UTEP also has an annual research-spending portfolio of nearly $80 million and is growing each year, keeping in line with their 2018 goal.

El Paso Mayor John Cook, who received a bachelor's degree in business from UTEP in 1977, said Natalicio's leadership has brought a "dynamic transition to the university."

"When I graduated in 1977, there was only one doctoral program available; now there are 19 programs," Cook said. "UTEP has evolved from a simple hometown college to a nationally recognized university that our community can truly be proud of and we must attribute this success to the leadership of Dr. Diana Natalicio."

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