

RETROACTIVE PAY FOR NORTHERN EMPLOYEEE



Back in September of 2011, there were two Northern New Mexico College employees who had received raises. Not only did they receive raises, they received back-pay which totaled up to about two months' worth of pay even though the state constitution clearly states that these kinds of raises for public employees are strictly prohibited. Back on the 13th of September in 2011, the former chief of staff, Susan Meredith, received an e-mail from the former human resources assistance, Karen Dvorak. The e-mail provided information on an approval of a pay increase for the two separate employees, both of which were working in the financial department. The two employees were Henrietta Trujillo and Tessie Lopez. When contacted, Meredith responded shortly after, stating that she did agree with the pay increases for both employees and that the raises should be made effective as soon as possible. On the following day, both Meredith and Dvorak received an e-mail from Connie Romero, who holds the position of the director of budget and finance. In the email, she stated that Rusty Barceló had promised the two employees that they would receive and increase and that the increase would be retroactive, which is why she was instructed to process the pay increases in that way. She also stated that it was necessary to speak to both Domingo Sanchez and Rusty Barceló again. After receiving the e-mail message, Meredith wrote back and stated that from what she understands, retroactive pay raises are not legal. Romero wrote back to Meredith, stating that such acts are not against the law and pointed out that the raise she has received was also retroactive. Meredith continued to persist but Romero told her that she had already check with the state personnel director, Jeff Varela, and he told her there was nothing listed in the constitution that would prohibit such acts. She also told Meredith that retroactive raises were very common. Even though both Meredith and Dvorak protested the retroactive pay increases, the college chose to approve the raises for those two employees. Meredith claims that Sanchez was the one who pushed for the approval of these raises. The entire time, Meredith felt as though the actions were illegal, sticking to her original thoughts. Sanchez has said, "The issue was, these were individuals who on I think it was four different occasions were told that they were getting these increases because of additional duties, and because they kept just being dropped off to the side, we said that they were effective 'til July 1."

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