

PSU's attempt at openness Penn State says it has paid \$3.2 million for legal fees, consultants and public relations firms related to the Jerry Sandusky scandal.

Editorial – Lancaster New Era, February 20, 2012

The amount is eye-popping, and there are good reasons for alumni and taxpayers who support the state-related university to be outraged at the expense.

But consider that there was a time not too long ago when having Penn State make such information public was more difficult than prying open a box that was nailed shut.

In terms of openness, then, Penn State is making progress.

The expenditures come to light as the university launches a website -- openness.psu.edu -- to demonstrate its newly found commitment to public disclosure in the aftermath of the scandal.

The new site does not reveal all the costs the university faces from the Sandusky matter.

For example, it doesn't give terms of the contract settlements with former President Graham Spanier and the late Coach Joe Paterno -- two high-profile casualties of the scandal -- citing confidentially language.

But the site does provide information the university was reluctant to make public in the past, such as the employment contract of the new head football coach, Bill O'Brien, whose base salary is \$950,000.

Recall that it took a ruling by the state Supreme Court in 2007 to force Penn State to reveal Paterno's salary. Back then, JoePa was paid roughly \$500,000 a year.

Penn State's new appreciation for openness is, well, appreciated. But if the university really wants to strike a blow for openness, it would embrace the state's Right-to-Know law.

As it stands now, Penn State is exempt from the open-records law. So are Pitt, Temple and Lincoln, the other state-related universities. It's an exemption that the 14 universities in the State System of Higher Education don't have.

Bills to change that are pending in the Legislature, but Penn State and the other state-related universities need not wait to be prodded by lawmakers to do the right thing.

So long as Penn State and the others accept taxpayer funds, they should make public what publicly funded institutions make public -- nothing more, nothing less.

There was a time when having Penn State make such information public was more difficult than prying open a box that was nailed shut.