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UH's Khator knows how to get down to business

Houston Business Journal - by Barrett Goldsmith

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Uncomfortable though I am when I realize that the person next to me is texting one of his or her friends about me, I found it oddly satisfying this week when I was the subject of an in-progress Tweet launched by one of Houston's top movers and shakers.

At the time of the Tweet, I was speaking with **University of Houston** president and system chancellor **Renu Khator** about, among other things, UH's elevation by the Carnegie Foundation to Tier One research status. You can read the full interview in the Jan. 28 print edition of the **Houston Business Journal**.

Time for full disclosure: I am a proud graduate of UH, a vocal Cougar fan and a former employee, meaning that not only do I revoke all claims to objectivity, but I also have to contend with the idea that Khator was once my boss's boss's boss's ... (you get the idea).

Suffice it to say it was difficult to suppress a **Tiger Woods**-style arm pump when I found out about the Tier One stuff — though no such physical effort was made when UH quarterback and former Heisman Trophy hopeful Case Keenum was granted a sixth year of eligibility by the NCAA.

Khator, who made achieving overall Tier One status her primary goal upon arriving three years ago from the University of South Florida, deserves much of the credit. She has pushed researchers to new heights — grant proposals and awards are way up — and supersized the school's fundraising haul.

But both the money and the impetus for the research has to come from somewhere, and for that the Houston business community must take a bow. It has supported UH both financially and strategically, and it will have to do so even more if the cuts in state funding for higher education now on the table are realized.

The budget bugbear is not the only beast the university must battle. Its graduation rate is 10 percent lower than the state average, its student services are improving — but still sub-par — and many parts of the campus, including its football and basketball stadiums, are far from elite.

The biggest problem, however, continues to be the school's reputation, which is getting better but is still not commensurate with the quality of its faculty, programs, students and alumni. Getting full Tier One status might go a long way toward bridging that divide.