

Public Statement - Lori Nixon

Today's decision to plead 'no contest' was not an easy one to make. Although I do not believe this non-violent protest warrants the extreme sanctions being proposed by the University and the DA, the District attorney's insistence on taking my liberty away for 18 months encouraged me not to exercise my constitutional right to defend myself through trial. As my fellow community members, friends, co-workers, classmates, former students, former campers, and especially my mom, can all attest to - locking me up for 18 months would be a detriment to our community, rather than a positive solution to our social ills.

Since our arrests for non-violent civil disobedience, many community members have leveled insults at our character, issued calls for violence against us, and had the audacity to suggest they have nothing to do with tuition hikes or police brutality. First and foremost, tuition hikes will negatively affect every person in the greater Santa Cruz area. The UC Regents will continue their plans to expand campus, redirect important natural resources (such as WATER), place even further strain on Santa Cruz's housing market, and the transportation issues faced on the day of my arrest will pale in comparison to the 10s of thousands more students and their families descending on our town. Additionally, police misconduct is a reality in our community, and connecting with local organizations such as Barrios Unidos or Sin Barras can provide you with much more in depth information.

Despite what many internet commentators will have you believe, I am not spoiled or entitled or selfish. Like many of you, I am a working-class individual who has struggled significantly throughout my life to make ends meet, and this struggle has only increased in the past few years. From 2007 to 2011 I worked hands-on with 6th graders from all over the SDUSD, only for my program to be cut. I was then laid-off, my house foreclosed on, and my health care cancelled. Somehow, over the past 40 years the state of CA has reduced its funding for education from 13.4% to 5.9%, and increased spending on prisons from 4% to 9.7%. We are living in a time where our lawmakers have continually driven us out of our homes, driven more people into prisons, and are depriving us all of the benefits that stem from a well-educated society.

The attention focused on the HWY 6 has rarely mentioned the greater context of UCSC's student activism and has been disrespectful to the thousands of students across the state who participated in the multiple protests during the first week of March. For many years, students, faculty, and campus workers have expressed their discontent by writing letters, writing petitions, lobbying in DC & Sacramento. They have staged strikes and rallies, walked out of classes, taken over administrative spaces, and attempted to create dialogue at Regents meetings (despite all the Regents' attempts to suppress student attendance at these meetings). Just this year alone, my fellow students have organized countless vigils for victims of police violence, multiple vigils and events related to the 43 missing students of Ayotzinapa, a successful Blackout/shutdown of Quarry Plaza, campaigns for divestment from fossil fuels and the military-industrial complex, advocated for safer spaces for queer and trans students,

and are fighting back against sexual assault, which has resulted in a federal investigation into the University's mishandling of Title IX complaints. Students are doing significant work to bring attention to serious issues, yet are largely ignored by the administration and left unknown to the greater community.

It is crucial the media attention and community focus shift from this one action of civil disobedience and onto the more important matters at hand. Public education is failing all across the state, police have killed almost 400 people in 2015 alone, our tax dollars are very blatantly being spent to incarcerate instead of educate.

It is absolutely vital that you ask yourself how many more students need to be homeless, without food, and locked into a lifetime of debt before you are outraged? How many more people need to die at the hands of police or are unjustly incarcerated before we say enough is enough? What will it take for the blindfold to be lifted? We cannot continue to pretend that everything will be ok, and I call on you to pressure your lawmakers to fund education, question the money being spent on incarceration, and call for a university ran by students, faculty, workers, and community members. We may just be individuals, but collectively our voices are strong. If there is anything I have learned from my years working with the youth of our state, it's that even small streams move mountains. Thank you.