

## **Stephen Zunes: Liberal UCSC alumni may pay price for donations**

Alumni of the UC Santa Cruz who have been active politically in support of liberal causes should be cautious about making in-kind donations to their alma mater. It seems that UCSC now reserves the right to bring in ultra-conservative speakers as a condition of accepting such gifts from those with left-of-center views.

**The late Santa Cruz mayor Scott Kennedy, a UCSC alum**, posthumously donated through his widow Kris Kennedy hundreds of volumes from his large collection of books on peace and justice issues to the Page Smith Library at UCSC's Cowell College. The books reflected his decades of activism in support for the farmworkers and other union struggles; his commitment to racial and economic justice; his advocacy for Israeli-Palestinian peace; his strong personal commitment to nonviolence and nonviolent action; and, his opposition to the Vietnam War, the nuclear arms race, military intervention in Central America, and South African apartheid.

At the dedication of the library's "Scott Kennedy Peace Corner," however, the then-Provost Faye Crosby shocked those in attendance by announcing that the ceremony dedicating the memorial space for the collection would not be a standalone event, but that **it would be paired with a later talk by J.J. Surbeck, a right-wing Republican polemicist** from Southern California without any connection with UCSC. Apparently, the provost had concluded that, as a result of Kennedy's progressive political views and peace activism, the acceptance of his gift and the dedication of the space had to be "balanced" for ideological reasons.

Out of 123 other peace memorials at colleges and universities in the United States, **this was the first time ever** that an administration had insisted on bringing in a pro-war speaker in response to a peace memorial dedication.

**Surbeck, who regularly speaks before Tea Party gatherings and other far-right venues, has rarely been given a podium at colleges and universities due to his racist and Islamophobic tirades.** For example, he has accused American Muslims of trying to impose sharia law, insists that all Muslims are "our enemies," subscribes to various conspiracy theories regarding the supposed "Islamization" of America, and claims that "the Arab world" inherently hates the United States. In addition, he has repeatedly attacked the United Nations, human rights organizations, and international legal institutions; he was an outspoken supporter of the U.S. invasion of Iraq and has repeatedly called for war on Iran; and, he has even defended ethnic cleansing, the killing of civilians, and the annexation of territory seized by military force as legitimate acts of warfare.

UCSC spokesman Scott Hernandez recently defended Provost Crosby's decision, saying that accepting books with peace and justice themes and dedicating space to a pacifist and liberal Democrat like Kennedy "was met with some controversy," so the university "felt it important to provide a platform" for a right-wing Republican militarist like Surbeck. When asked if this meant a donation by an advocate for migrant farmworkers could result in UCSC bringing in a speaker supporting the growers or a donation by a civil rights activist resulting in the university bringing in a white supremacist, Hernandez replied, "Every gift to UC Santa Cruz is special and handled on a case-by-case basis."

In the case of the Kennedy donation, some of the former mayor's Democratic Party colleagues, friends, and family members eventually succeeded in pressuring UCSC to formally disassociate Surbeck's appearance with the Peace Corner dedication. (The Cowell provost still insisted on bringing him to campus anyway, however, by making his talk part of a speaker series of Middle Eastern Studies scholars, even though Surbeck has no academic standing in that or any other field. Ironically, his was the only lecture in the series to which the Santa Cruz Sentinel sent a reporter!)

Other liberal alumni donors faced with the university's insistence that their gifts be "balanced" by bringing in a right-wing speaker may not have the strong support in the Santa Cruz community as did Kennedy to successfully challenge the decision. As a result, those who share the late mayor's support for peace and justice should think twice before making any major donation to their alma mater.