

TO: Academic Senate

FROM: Paul J. Zingg, President

RE: No Confidence Resolution

DATE: December 9, 2015

Since I will not be attending the Academic Senate meeting on Thursday, December 10, because of a long-standing, annual commitment to host a student leadership reception, which is taking place at the same time, I wish to share with the members of the Academic Senate some observations relative to the proposed “No Confidence” resolution that you will be discussing.

My response focuses on two main points.

First, it is sad and deeply troubling to me personally that individuals have reached a point of frustration, anxiety and/or anger that compels such a resolution. Although this resolution largely contains very broad, sweeping, and unsubstantiated and vague generalities, it is clear that the authors of the resolution have concerns that need to be respected and addressed. Many, in fact, already have been, such as the presentation on the Academic Affairs budget, which interim provost Susan Elrod made before the Academic Senate and other bodies last week. Many of you may recall how appreciatively that presentation was received. It addressed such matters as the timing of the budget, the focus of the budget on student success and workforce protection, budget management responsibility and accountability throughout the division, and the allocation of substantial funds from the division’s reserves to support faculty professional development and to ensure that classes are available in the spring to meet student demand, and, of course, to provide instructional opportunities for part-time faculty, in particular.

This commitment to the entire workforce of the division, in fact, is something that my administration has been faithful in keeping even through the darkest days of the so-called Great Recession, when this campus lost \$40 million in state support. Not one staff member or tenure/tenure track faculty member or lecturer with contract entitlements suffered a lay-off over these years. Not one. And the dedication of reserve funds in the spring is a further reflection of this commitment.

It is particularly troubling if anyone has been told that there will be draconian cuts of classes and instructional opportunities in the spring. The bearers of such false news acted irresponsibly. For false information, in whole or in part, serves no one, or the University. This is the case no matter what the source and no matter what its expressions, as, for example, and specifically, this resolution.

In fact, on workforce security and recovery, the story is just the opposite of a downward spiral of neglect and “loss of jobs” that the resolution portrays. Our campus recovery from the Great Recession includes the highest number of overall instructional faculty and lecturers in fall, 2015, since 2008; and the highest number of tenure/tenure track faculty since 2011. The tenure density of

our faculty – one of the highest priorities of the Academic Senate – is now back over 60%, a level it has not attained in many years.

And, of course, our campus equity plan, as recognized by our campus CFA leadership, is among the most comprehensive plans – if not, in fact, *the* most comprehensive plan – in the entire CSU. This plan has been recognized by our CFA leadership as “a good start.” And since it is a plan that, even in its initial phases, reaches a higher percentage of our faculty workforce with more campus-based funding than any other campus in the system, that seems a fair and accurate assessment. It is also a record of commitment to faculty support and renewal that belies such statements and implications to the contrary in the resolution.

Second, I have always believed that a university is governed by certain “right rules of conduct,” indeed, the very definition of a moral code. These particularly include reason and respect, civility and community. That begins with truth-telling. For, if anything, if a university is not a community where truth-telling is paramount, it loses its soul and forfeits its purpose.

Let’s be certain what the fundamental purpose of this University is. It is clearly stated in our Mission Statement:

“California State University, Chico, is a comprehensive university principally serving Northern California, our state and nation through excellence in instruction, research, creative activity, and public service. The University is committed to assist students in their search for knowledge and understanding and to prepare them with the attitudes, skills and habits of lifelong learning in order to assume responsibility in a democratic community and to be mindful of a global society.”

In other words, as stated consistently and clearly throughout our *Strategic Plan*, our focus is on student learning and success, wherever it occurs and whatever are its dimensions. Our focus is not just student intellectual development.

The phrase “the primacy of Academic Affairs” as stated in this resolution is particularly offensive to the three other divisions of the University, whose members do not consider themselves to be second or third-class citizens of the campus, in a caste system subservient to those who work in Academic Affairs. It is also an inaccurate representation of what is “primary” at the University. And that also is clearly stated in the First Priority of the University’s *Strategic Plan*: “Believing in the *primacy of learning*, we will continue to develop high-quality learning environments both inside and outside the classroom.”

This is an all-University responsibility and the contributions of all divisions and individuals to this effort should be acknowledged and respected, not marginalized and insulted.

Yes, without a doubt, the heart of a university’s *academic* reputation is its academic quality. And that finds expression in two key ways: the quality of its faculty; and the quality of its academic programs (that is, the formal curriculum of majors, minors and General Education).

But, an institution's *general* reputation is both academic *and otherwise*. It is the kind of *perceived* reputation that draws the attention of the governor, the legislature, the press, high school counselors, parents, donors, *et al.* and depends mightily on the success of its graduates. That is, the consequences of their time with us "both inside and outside the classroom." And our students make it very clear in surveys that they take about "the Chico experience" (such as the National Survey of Student Engagement) that they are more likely than their counterparts in the CSU and nationally to find at Chico State an environment focused on their overall well-being, a campus culture geared to student success, and a place that fosters meaningful and supportive relationships with staff throughout the University.

If we value respect and common purpose, that is, elements of the "right rules of conduct" noted above, and which are asserted to be the case in the resolution, we need to stop exalting one division and, at least, implicitly, diminishing three others. And since a key "whereas" clause of this resolution is predicated on the alleged "primacy of Academic Affairs," any support for this resolution accepts the validity of that assertion and its dismissive regard for the University's three other divisions. Is this the message that the Academic Senate wants to send? Is this the climate of divisiveness and disrespect that it wishes to foster?

There are many other aspects of this resolution that, I believe, fail the test of clarity and responsibility through innuendo and anecdote, unsubstantiation and vagueness. What, for example, does "the lack of focused leadership" mean? What personnel policies and processes have not been developed and implemented "effectively"? What is the definition of "effectively"? How have budget matters lacked transparency and good-faith information sharing? This is a question that seems particularly relevant given the positive response to Susan Elrod's presentation on the Academic Affairs budget and the commitments within to strengthen opportunities for input and guidance.

Each "whereas" clause of this resolution raises questions about the lack of clarity, accuracy, specificity and evidence as these few examples indicate. And this lack of clarity and accuracy challenges the Academic Senate to consider the messages and consequences of supporting a resolution with so many short-comings. And, again, I draw a clear distinction between acknowledging concerns and presenting them accurately and fairly.

Finally, I ask the Academic Senate to consider the very real and negative consequences of supporting a resolution like this for the presidential search. For supporting a resolution that lacks clarity, specificity and accuracy would have a chilling effect on the strength of the pool and the interest of candidates to come to a place where the very fabric of the academy, as noted in the above "right rules of conduct," and as supposedly championed by the Academic Senate, is contradicted in it.

The same is true with the two current dean searches, both of which are in the negotiation phase. It is a challenging enough environment with a presidential search to conclude successful dean searches, but this resolution, if passed, will make the task considerably harder. Please think about the consequences for the long-term well-being of the University.

For candidates for these positions, and others, would prefer to find evidence that the Academic Senate embraces the values and behaviors that it insists the administration practice. And that a true partnership of purpose and trust characterizes the institution. That we can demonstrate to anyone – both on the campus and beyond – that we are a place which rejects *ad hominem* attacks and unexamined assertions; a place where all parties wish to be part of the effort, wish to be part of the solution, to help address the underlying reasons for the concerns that are expressed in the campus climate survey. This would be a place worth joining – a place meriting the commitment and the confidence of its members.

Thank you for your consideration of my views. They are offered with respect and a deep commitment to the notion that we are “one University” that requires the positive engagement of our entire community in the creation of a learning and working environment where high morale and high quality are synonymous.

That goal will always be a work in progress. And we have to embrace not just the reasons to be such a place, but the means. This resolution is not such a means.

But it raises issues and concerns which, as I have acknowledged at the outset of this message, must be respected and addressed. And I, and my entire cabinet, are committed to doing so, as should be evident from, among other recent demonstrations, the report that cabinet provided the University community on October 2 regarding the many steps that we have taken, and are taking, to address the issues raised in the campus climate survey; Susan’s presentation on the Academic Affairs budget, which was one of those steps; and my decision not to appoint the interim provost to a permanent position upon listening to the University faculty and others on this matter.