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Nov. 4, 2008 FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Cal Poly President Issues Second Letter to Campus Supporting Diversity, Announcing University Meetings

To the Members of the Cal Poly Campus Community:

Over my nearly thirty years as president of Cal Poly, I cannot think of another incident that has outraged and saddened me as much as the hateful and intolerant displays reported last week at the Crops House. They included a confederate flag and noose, together symbols of the nation's shameful and violent repression of African Americans through centuries of slavery and segregation and today reflective of the racism that still exists in our nation.

It has also been reported that there was a sign at the house that featured reprehensible homophobic slurs as well as racist epithets. All of these expressions of bigotry and intolerance are totally unacceptable. Upon hearing about this situation, the campus community spontaneously rose up and condemned it, and made it clear that such expressions of racism, homophobia and bigotry have no place at this university.

I have been proud to see Cal Poly faculty, staff and students speak out so powerfully against hate and intolerance, as reported in a recent editorial in the Mustang Daily:

(http://media.www.mustangdaily.net/media/storage/paper860/news/2008/11/03/Columns /Protest.Proves.Cal.Polys.Passion-3520584.shtml).

With my email to faculty, staff and students on Thursday of last week, I expressed my condemnation of the Crops House incidents. I would like to add to that my sincere regret and sorrow for the fear, distress and hurt that has resulted from these acts. I know that African American and GLBT members of the community targeted by these expressions of hate especially have been harmed by them.

I will do everything in my power to see that such an incident does not happen again at Cal Poly and to ensure that all members of the University feel safe and free from harassment. With this note, I would also like to share an update on developments and actions since last week.

- \cdot The Head of the Horticulture and Crops Science Department and the faculty have continued to work forcefully and effectively with the Crops House residents. On Friday, the Department Head strongly recommended to the house residents that they voluntarily vacate the house and discontinue their duties along with the benefits associated with living in the residence. The residents complied with this and moved off campus on Saturday morning. The house has been boarded up and will no longer be used in the CAFES agricultural housing system.
- · The Crops House residents submitted to the Tribune a second, more extensive written apology, published in the paper on Friday (http://www.sanluisobispo.com/news/local/story/513994.html).
- The Crops House students have also asked the Department Head to help them in reaching out to those Cal

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Poly students who have been frightened and harmed by seeing or reading about the hateful displays. Vice President Cornel Morton and his colleagues in the Counseling Center are working actively to hold discussions with the students and to arrange meetings that will achieve this.

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· On Nov. 12, with the assistance of Associated Students Inc., Cornel Morton and I will convene a community meeting to invite open dialogue about the climate on our campus and how we can ensure that all community members feel welcome, valued and supported. Dean Wehner is convening a separate meeting for CAFES students on Thursday of this week. Information about the time and location of these forums will be communicated shortly.

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• The University and the College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences are initiating a review of the agriculture housing system supervision and oversight policies and procedures.

We understand the anger and outrage that these incidents have prompted, and the desire for the students involved to be punished. In particular, there have been questions about whether the actions of these students constitute a hate crime. We have received a legal opinion, confirmed by federal and local law enforcement authorities, that under state and federal law they do not.

Moreover, however reprehensible, the hateful displays at the Crops House represent expression protected under the U.S. and California constitutions. This does not make them acceptable or tolerable. While the symbols and alleged signage displayed at the Crops House were not criminal, they were nonetheless hateful, and unquestionably racist and homophobic. This requires significant proactive diligence by the entire University community to avoid any further acts of this kind. The University community does have recourse in situations where its core values of openness and respect are assaulted and challenged.

The most powerful defense against the kind of hate displayed at the Crops House is the full throated rejection of it by the community as a whole. We have seen this over the past several days and I applaud it.

The University, College and Department have taken additional steps outlined above to ensure that there is no threat to campus safety, that the hateful incidents at the Crops House are exposed to public attention and condemnation, that the Crops House residents are confronted with the harm that their actions have caused, that we make clear that such expressions of hate and intolerance are not compatible with Cal Poly's institutional mission and values, and that agriculture housing management policies and procedures are strengthened.

We only hope that this very shameful episode may result in the kind of open dialogue and soul searching that permits communities to grow and change. We must all continue working to make our campus an inclusive and supportive learning environment.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone who has written to me with observations, criticisms, advice and offers of assistance. I am proud of the passion, pride and determination with which the Cal Poly community has rejected this terrible incident.

Sincerely.

Warren J. Baker

President

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