

Local politicians and activists weigh in on Obama's visit to UCI

With Obama's speech for UCI just days away, local political people offer different thoughts on the meaning of his O.C. visit.



Tustin resident Dan Jacobson is chairman of the Democratic Foundation of Orange County.

ROSE PALMISANO, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

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As President Barack Obama's Saturday commencement speech at Angel Stadium for UC Irvine graduates approaches, the excitement builds for many. But beneath the surface, thoughts about the commander in chief's visit are more complex.

A Democratic activist is happy the president is coming, but points out her displeasure with some key policies. A Republican leader says the county should be proud to be visited by the president, but takes the opportunity to jab Obama for border security issues and for squeezing in a Laguna Beach fundraiser while he's here. And a conservative Catholic activist makes no effort to mask his disgust at the idea of this president journeying to his community.

In short, the visit is arousing mixed emotions.

Q: How does it feel to have the Democratic president holding a massive event in a county where Democrats have long been such a minority?

Felicity Figueroa, Irvine, Democratic activist:

"While I may disagree with a number of President Obama's policies, such as his disinclination to halt deportations and his wanton use of drones in the Middle East, I am pleased – and not at all surprised – that he will come to Orange County as the 2014 UCI commencement speaker.

"Orange County, once the bastion of conservative white guys, has seen dramatic changes in the last few decades with the influx of ethnic and religious minorities that tend to hold a more liberal view of the world. As the national GOP leans farther and farther to the right, those of us on the progressive side of things see Orange County moving steadily – if slowly – in the opposite direction. UCI's pursuit of Obama as this year's keynote speaker reflects that transition and it's about time that the outside world takes notice."

Q: Will this visit help your efforts to build momentum for the Democratic party and its candidates in this predominantly GOP county?

Dan Jacobson, Tustin, chairman of the Democratic Foundation of Orange County:

"Yes. As Orange County grows more and more Democratic, the address of our smart and inspirational Democratic president will associate Orange County Democrats with UCI, a thoughtful institution; the beautiful city of Irvine, which is less than 1,000 voters away from becoming Democratic; and the job-generating city of Anaheim (where the speech will be delivered), which is already Democratic.

"People will want to be associating with these things. People will want to be an Orange County Democrat."

Q: What do you think of the acrimonious partisanship that can manifest itself even for a supposedly apolitical event?

James Vaughn, Laguna Hills, a former Republican consultant who voted for Obama and now identifies with no political party:

“I didn’t appreciate the way President Bush was treated and think it is equally disrespectful to treat President Obama the way the Tea Party faction does. It is sad that so many Americans seem to outsource their thinking to political parties and automatically reject the other side without considering the idea on its own.

“Obamacare is a GOP idea that became anathema when adopted by the Democrats. As a Republican, telling people to use the private sector for a service rather than the government used to be called self-responsibility. Political parties are an anachronism and totally unnecessary in the information age.”

Q: Is there part of you that sets aside the partisanship and makes you proud to have the president coming to your county?

Scott Baugh, Huntington Beach, chairman of the county GOP and former state Assembly Republican leader:

“As the chairman of the Republican Party in Orange County, there is a natural impulse to view everything the president does through the test of limited government, and this president fails that test by his own admission. The fact that there is lawlessness going on at our southern border while he is raising money on this trip is equally disturbing.

“However, the office of the presidency transcends politics, and the office represents the greatest exercise of a republic the world has ever known. In fact, if you have ever seen a presidential motorcade, Marine One or Air Force One, you cannot help but be proud of what the office represents, regardless of the occupant. All of Orange County, and the students of UC Irvine, should be proud to have the occupant pay a visit to us.”

Q: How will it feel to have the president getting all this attention for coming to your backyard?

Kenneth M. Fisher, Anaheim, founder of Concerned Roman Catholics of America and former member of the county GOP’s governing Central Committee:

“I cannot believe any thinking American would be happy to have this would-be dictator as a guest in their community. I would say that even if he happened to be a Republican. I might remind you that Nixon was forced to resign because Republicans were willing to stand against him. Where are the Democrats who should be willing to stand against the dictatorship of Obama?”

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