

Jackie Speier convenes college leaders, deputy SF attorney

Congresswoman Jackie Speier's forum on "City College One Year Later" revealed a rising tide of discontent with the illegal, destructive actions of the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC).

The audience applauded heartily when Deputy City Attorney Sarah Eisenberg was introduced as a litigator in SF Attorney Dennis Herrera's suit against the ACCJC. After closing arguments on Dec. 9th, Judge Curtis Karnow will issue a judgment early in 2015 on whether the commission had indeed violated laws and their own policies, requiring a fresh start to accrediting City College.

One of the defining moments in court involved a question from Karnow as to what the college – not a party to this lawsuit – would actually want with regard to a judicial remedy. Eisenberg responded by quoting Special Trustee Robert Agrella, who stated in his deposition that a new accreditation process would be preferable to the restoration policy the ACCJC had concocted to avoid giving City College a regular extension. This policy is another ACCJC scheme allowing the college no recourse at the end of two years if it doesn't hit 100% compliance with standards, which is required of no other colleges.

AFT 2121 president Tim Killikelly said, "Just treat us fairly. We don't need special rules made up for us that are unfair."

Killikelly emphasized that City College continues to be a respected institution providing quality education to its students. This is validated by student success data from the State Chancellor's office. Lillian Marrujo-Duck, president of CCSF's Academic Senate, commended the college for the array of student support programs serving a diverse group of underrepresented students.

Ron Galatolo, Chancellor of San Mateo Community College District, was emphatic in his respect for City College. He spoke numerous times about the ACCJC's inconsistent and shady behaviors in applying the standards. Diverging from the other regional accreditors, as well as its own history under different leadership, the commission has been punitive to more than two-thirds of community colleges in California. And the ACCJC chose not to sanction some colleges for the very issues that it claims are grounds for shuttering City College, such as the percent of budget spent on employee salaries and benefits.

City College Trustee John Rizzo said they are urging Agrella to consider restoring the function of the Board of Trustees sooner. "This week we are meeting as a board for the first time in 18 months," he said, referring to the Dec. 17th training.

"Through a flawed process, a democratically elected board was removed," said Marrujo-Duck. She affirmed that "we are doing our job" despite dealing with crises imposed from within and outside the college.

As a Congressional member, Speier understood the magnitude of complaints against the ACCJC. "Whenever you have institutions that are self regulated, you have the potential for arbitrariness, conflicts of interest, bad actors."

Speier showed her commitment to supporting City College and a fair accreditation process, promising to follow up on several issues, including the monitoring of the U.S. Department of Education's re-

recognition of ACCJC. "I will try to spend time educating the DOE and the Secretary," said Speier, "even if I have to sit outside his door."