



The mission of the Southwestern College Sun is to serve its campuses and their communities by providing information, insights and stimulating discussions of news, activities and topics relevant to our readers. The staff strives to produce a newspaper that is timely, accurate, fair, interesting, visual and accessible to readers. Though The Sun is a student publication, staff members ascribe to the ethical and moral guidelines of professional journalists.

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AWARDS/HONORS

National College Newspaper Hall of Fame
Inducted 2018

Student Press Law Center National College Press Freedom Award
2011, 2018

National Newspaper Association National College Newspaper of the Year
2004-2021

Associated Collegiate Press Pacemaker Awards
2003-06, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2012-2017, 2019, 2020
General Excellence
2001-20
Best of Show
2003-20

Columbia University Scholastic Press Association Gold Medal for Journalism Excellence
2001-20

College Media Association National College Newspaper of the Year
2020

California College Media Association Outstanding Community College Newspaper

San Diego County Multicultural Heritage Award

California Newspaper Publishers Association California College Newspaper of the Year
2013, 2016, 2020, 2021
Student Newspaper General Excellence
2002-21

Society of Professional Journalists National Mark of Excellence
2001-21
First Amendment Award
2002, 2005

San Diego Press Club Excellence in Journalism
1999-2021
Directors Award for Defense of Free Speech
2012

Journalism Association of Community Colleges Pacesetter Award
2001-18
Newspaper General Excellence
2000-2020

American Scholastic Press Association Community College Newspaper of the Year

Racists Co-opt First Amendment

This newspaper has a history of ferociously defending the First Amendment and this staff is committed to carrying on that legacy. The newspapers laid out in our newsroom’s archive paint a remarkable story of Southwestern College students battling authoritarian administrators, board members and their henchmen (and henchwomen) going back into the 1990s. In each and every case, the offender was trying to cover up an illegal act that later came to light.

Like a schizophrenic roller coaster, SC has enjoyed periods of enlightened leadership by men and women who respected free speech, and endured wanna-be tyrants who attempted to shut it down, most recently a 2019 attack on this publication by a former vice president. We pledge to continue to be vigilant.

America’s First Amendment is broad and expansive for a reason. Our Founding Fathers wanted citizens to have the ability to engage their elected officials and share their thoughts. Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton did not like each other, but they agreed that robust discussion of issues was the best and most democratic way to find solutions and make policy. It had the secondary benefit of empowering citizens and encouraging Americans to feel ownership in their democracy.

Unfortunately, a wave of extremist scoundrels have hijacked the First Amendment to use as a screen to spew racism, hatred and violence. They have crossed a line and entered a netherworld the First Amendment was not designed to protect.

Anti-vaxxers and other political extremists have made a sport out of hijacking public meetings and turning them into orgies of insults, racism and attacks on public officials. Worse, they are threatening elected officials, health care professionals, educators and journalists at their homes and jobs under the guise of exercising their First Amendment rights.

Just as you cannot scream “fire” in a crowded theater, you cannot stand at the microphone at the San Diego County Board of Supervisors and call the County’s leading health official – an esteemed Black woman medical doctor – an “Aunt Jemima.”

County Supervisor Nora Vargas and her colleagues on the board sat quietly as they were called savage names by right-wing anti-vax, anti-government whack jobs. One man told former Marine Nathan Fletcher to shoot himself in the head and urged another supervisor to hang herself. He told Vargas he hoped she died quickly of clogged arteries.

A sludge of vile poured forth from the unhinged man as he attacked the supervisors, but Vargas leapt to the defense of San Diego County Public Health Officer Dr. Wilma Wooten when he called her the N-word and other racist epithets.

“You can’t call her that!” Vargas told the man. “You can call me fat all you want, but you can’t call her that!”

The Issue: San Diego County Supervisor Nora Vargas stopped a racist speaker from denigrating a Black County employee.

Our position: The First Amendment protects our right to redress the government, not hate speech or calls to violence.



Ji Ho Kim / Staff

Vargas, in the heat of the moment, nailed the essence of the First Amendment.

People of good will can disagree about policy, but too many of the “post-truth, alternate facts” fringe are abusing the First Amendment to threaten public employees.

America’s veneer of civility has been scrubbed away with course sandpaper by Donald Trump, Steve Bannon, Steven Miller and their fellow travelers. They begot the Marjorie Taylor Green, Paul Gosar, Lauren Boebert crazies at the national level as well as the San Diego man who would reduce the lifetime achievements and public service of a well-respected Black woman to an illustration on a bottle of pancake syrup.

Their ilk will likely continue with the toxic excreta for the foreseeable future, but they do not get to hide behind the First Amendment.

Vargas and the supervisors have a tough tightrope to walk: How to curtail racist hate rants at public meetings without diminishing legitimate free speech. All five supervisors from both parties have said they are adamant about protecting free speech and the right of San Diego County residents to share their opinions at board meetings. Vargas, Fletcher and Supervisor Terra Lawson-Remer also believe they need to protect County employees.

Gone are the days when we can just shrug off nut jobs who rant at public meetings. Our ironically named “social media” has allowed local whackadoodles a national platform. We should have learned after former Republican vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin used social media to

put a bull’s eye target on Arizona Congress Member Gabrielle Giffords. Responding to Palin’s post, a man shot Giffords in the head.

Recent developments are deeply troubling. Racist and hateful messaging by national figures like Boebert have become Jim Crow-style code for “harass, injure or kill this person.” Boebert’s once easy-to-ignore Islamophobic comment about Congress Member Ilhan Omar has put Omar’s life in danger. Same for Congress Member Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez after she was murdered in a video by GOP wingnut Gosar. Both women have been bombarded with death threats.

This scenario is playing out across the nation for governors, state legislators and local board members. School boards in Poway, Santee and nearby Lemon Grove are under siege from extremists staking out their homes and threatening their families over masking policies and the right-wing’s latest obsession, critical race theory. (That is a topic for another day.)

The Editorial Board of The Sun supports Supervisors Vargas, Fletcher and Lawson-Remer as they work to protect County employees from hate speech and violence, while honoring the spirit of the First Amendment. Public servants like Dr. Wooten have the right and the expectation of a safe workplace. The nut case who insulted her has the right to express his disagreement with public policy, but not to target County staff.

The First Amendment is too precious to allow it to be abused. It is worth fighting for. We are glad Supervisor Vargas agrees.

