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University of California Graduation Speakers to Cancel Statewide Unless 20,000 UC Workers are Guaranteed a Fair Contract

Including former President Bill Clinton, Robert Kennedy Jr., Speaker Emeritus of the California Assembly Fabian Núñez, Assemblywoman Fiona Ma and Angela Davis

California – Across the state, prominent speakers are ready to cancel at UC commencement ceremonies unless 20,000 UC workers receive a fair contract. President Bill Clinton and Speaker Emeritus of the California Assembly Fabian Núñez have been joined by Robert Kennedy Jr., Assemblywoman Fiona Ma, and Angela Davis in pledging not to speak at UC graduations unless the contract is settled. Distinguished Professor Jack Miles, Professor Wally Goldfrank, Associate Professor Paul Ortiz, and Lecturer Maria Echaveste are also ready to cancel. Together, this represents speakers at nearly all of the UC campuses where graduations are scheduled, most of which are next week.

Former President Clinton said, "While I'm honored to be invited and really looking forward to speaking at UCLA's commencement ceremonies, I can't cross the picket line. I hope it can be resolved quickly."

The 20,000 patient care and service workers do everything from assisting in surgeries to cleaning dorm rooms in the University of California's ten campus/five hospital system. They have been negotiating for a fair contract since August, 2007. All of the commencement speakers, students, and workers remain hopeful that an agreement will be reached so that the cancellations of scheduled appearances are not needed.

On Wednesday, UCLA students delivered more than 1,000 signatures to Chancellor Gene Block in support of Bill Clinton's decision to support workers. Additionally, roughly twenty students and workers are currently engaged in a three-day fast outside of the Chancellor's office supporting equal pay for equal work and a fair contract for the workers.

"It is important to me that former President Clinton has decided not to speak at UCLA's graduation if he has to cross a picket line. The commencement ceremony is important to me; but not at the expense of ignoring the plight of thousands of workers on campus," said Maricruz Cecena, a UCLA graduating senior.

At issue are UC wages which are dramatically behind other hospitals and CA's community colleges where workers are paid an average of 25% higher for the same work. Patient care workers are concerned this is contributing to high-turnover, staffing shortages, and over-reliance on temps which can affect patient care as extra time is needed to train the constant flow of new staff.

For service workers, wages are as low as \$10 an hour, and 96% of UC service workers are income eligible for at least one of the following public assistance programs: food stamps, WIC, public housing subsidies, and reduced lunch. Many work 2-3 jobs to meet their families' basic needs.

"We understand graduation is a special time at UC and we are proud that Bill Clinton, the other speakers and thousands of students have chosen to stand with us in our fight for equal pay for equal work. UC should do the right thing by settling our contract now, so graduations will not be affected," said Lakesha Harrison, Licensed Vocational Nurse & President of AFSCME 3299.

State funds comprise only 8.6% of the funding for the 20,000 workers. The vast majority of funding comes from the UC hospitals which posted profits of \$371 million last year. CA State-appointed neutral Factfinder Carol Vendrillo, who independently evaluated the labor dispute, said, *"It is not the lack of state funding but the University's priorities... It is time for UC to take a broader view of its priorities by honoring the important contribution that service workers make to the U.C. community and compensating them with wages that are in line with the competitive market rate."*

The American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 3299, AFL-CIO represents 20,000 patient care and service workers at UC including licensed vocational nurses, medical techs and assistants, respiratory therapists, custodians, cafeteria workers, and security officers. 2201 Broadway Ave, Suite 315 Oakland, CA 94612, (510) 844-1160, media@afscme3299.org

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