RFK Jr. Wakes Up Northridge Students At First Convocation

Written by MARIANNE LOVE  
Thursday, 13 September 2007

Robert F. Kennedy Jr. was the keynote speaker at California State University at Northridge on Sept. 6 during the college's first freshman convocation. The convocation was created to give students a greater understanding of the valuable opportunities available on campus.

It doesn't take much to attract a bunch of new college students if you promise to feed them and show a movie.

But officials at California State University at Northridge took it one step further last week and held its first freshman convocation and invited, Robert F.

Kennedy Jr., an environmental champion, the nephew of President John F. Kennedy and son of U.S. Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy. Kennedy Jr. spent 30 minutes bashing the White House administration and their cronies for the destruction of the environment and the media for not reporting the news.

He used the convocation as a bully pulpit to attack the White House's "radical" administration.

Kennedy is the chief prosecuting attorney for Riverkeeper, which has brought hundreds of polluters to justice and forced them to spend hundreds of millions of dollars remediating the Hudson River in New York. He also serves as senior attorney for the Natural Resources Defense Council and president of the Waterkeeper Alliance, which is a champion of clean water.
"Nature is the infrastructure of our community. We are not saving it for the fishes and the birds, but for the air we breathe, the water we drink," Kennedy said. "We cannot talk about the environment without criticizing this President and this White House. This is the worst environmental administration."

While some would think that the recent triple-digit temperatures in the Valley are related to global warming, weather experts said it was about the way the weather pattern was set up with a strong high pressure and sinking air that compresses and heat things up. Global warming is about the average temperatures of the entire Earth changing a few degrees and mostly getting hotter.

The ozone layer and poor air quality – commonly attributed to lung cancer and asthma – has become a serious concern and not one that went unnoticed by Kennedy.

Kennedy said Bush has placed corporate friends and polluters in charge of the nation's environmental agencies, and he named them one by one and the agencies they managed and the environmental laws they broke.

He said today, news is more about entertainment – the Anna Nicole Smiths, Lindsay Lohans and Brad Pitts of the world – rather than serious issues, and that the media no longer serves the public interest.

Kennedy raised awareness about air pollution and its effect on human beings especially in terms of asthma and spoke about polluted fish from mercury contamination caused by the 400 coal-burning mines allowed to operate because President George W. Bush "messed" with the law and environmental requirements to benefit the industry without regard to the effects on Americans.

"There's nothing radical about protecting the environment for our children," said Kennedy, who promotes free market capitalism and democracy versus corporate cronyism.
He also accused Bush of taking money from the oil and coal industries and consequently managing to have lawsuits dropped against his financial supporters.

Kennedy said one out of six childbearing women suffer from mercury poisoning and give birth to children with autism and other debilitating diseases.

He said 18,000 people died every year from air pollution and that the Appalachian Mountains in Virginia were being illegally mined and destroyed, impoverishing the local community.

Kennedy was paid for his speech. Tom Piernik, director of student development and international program at CSUN, said the amount of money he was paid was not public information. Piernik said he wasn't sure if taxpayers money was used, or if Kennedy was paid with private donations.

The convocation, which drew about 2,200 students, faculty and staff, ended with a reception and the screening of "An Inconvenient Truth," an Academy Award-winning documentary about climate change, especially global warming presented by former Vice President Al Gore.

Shauna Stewart, an 18-year-old freshman originally from Waco, Texas said she felt the evening was skewed by not presenting the other side.

"Brain washing may be too strong of a term, but that's how it felt," said Stewart, a
self-proclaimed community environmentalist and foreign language and culture major.

Dylan McCabe, 18, said he liked Kennedy's speech and felt he learned from it.

"It made me more aware of some things," McCabe said.

Marowa Chowdhury, 17, said she didn't realize the media doesn't address important issues as Kennedy suggested.

"He presented facts backed up with statistics about mercury, asthma and their effects," Chowdhury, a freshman civil engineer major said.

Ashley McCullough, 18, of the San Francisco bay area said, she was going to take Kennedy up on his suggestion that everyone get their mercury levels tested.

"I'm also going to watch what I eat," McCullough said.

Kiara Moore, an 18-year-old health science major, called Kennedy's message a wake up call.

Staff Reporter Marianne Love can be reached at (818) 365-3111, Ext. 152. Or, by e-mailing mlove@sanfernandosun.com

Last Updated ( Thursday, 13 September 2007 )