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From the campus: Lessons learned from Moore flap at UVSC

By David R. Keller
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Immediately upon the announcement by student leaders of Michael Moore's speaking engagement, phones at Utah Valley State College began ringing. I have benefited from long talks with many callers and, despite the often charged nature of these conversations, have gleaned several important lessons from the controversy. Many callers expressed shock at the apparent lack of oversight of Associated Students of Utah Valley State College. For them, the administration should have prevented ASUVSC leadership from extending the invitation in the first place, and now should cancel the event. Yet by definition student government is the exercise of self-governance by students for educational purposes. ASUVSC ought not be a puppet regime of the executive office, and the administration should refrain from meddling unless there is some overriding legal or public safety concern. Moore's visit clearly does not rise to this standard. Others have complained that inviting Moore is tacit endorsement of liberal agendas by UVSC as a whole. However, this accusation ignores the long list of recent speakers who can hardly be described as leftist. For example, Gordon B. Hinckley, Robert Bennett, Orrin Hatch, Chris Cannon, Stephen Covey, Gayle Ruzicka, Alan Keyes and Barbara Bush, the last two invited by ASUVSC. In reality, contrary to the image that Moore's invitation has painted, UVSC tends to host conservative speakers. Hence, bringing to campus Sean Hannity, who has already spoken locally twice in one year, hardly achieves "balance." Some parents and faculty have expressed worry that impressionable young minds will be perverted by Moore's "propaganda." My students are offended by this notion, stating they are mature enough to sort through complex political issues and draw their own conclusions. My experience confirms their claim. One overlooked outcome of Moore's visit is that the usually apathetic student population is more likely to vote in the upcoming election - to Republican advantage. Then there are the threats of retribution. Donors have symbolically rescinded pledges, while rumors circulate that some legislators seek to punish UVSC financially. This would be extremely unfortunate because withholding funds would only make it more difficult for UVSC to serve the community in ways critics of Moore support. Retaliation by the pocketbook results in the reverse of the intended outcome. Some callers have contended that the choice of Moore is inappropriate because he is an affront to "community values." While this assertion is undoubtedly true, it is patently anti-democratic. Democracy functions best by a panoply of perspectives, a variety of voices. It is arrogant and contradictory to state "I support the democratic process the caveat "I know I'm right and the misguided must be excluded from the dialogue." Numerous callers simply said Moore should be barred from campus because he is a "liar." Since, notably, the same epithet has plausibly been used to describe the very targets of Moore's barbs, the worst thing we could possibly do is snuff out discussion of current domestic and foreign policy on the eve of a presidential election. Unilateralism and the doctrine of pre-emptive war profoundly affect our future and deserve discussion. Personally, I have enjoyed the imbroglio sparked by Moore's impending visit and think it has been largely constructive - the rational debates, the demonstrations, the petition drives, even the irrational tirades. The issue cuts to the core of a public institution of higher education's responsibility to democracy, and thus UVSC's role in Utah County. UVSC serves Utah by serving democracy. As such, antagonists and admirers of Moore alike should come together and agree that dialogue on controversial public policy issues is healthy for our community. Anything else is antithetical to the political foundations of this nation.

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