

UC President Janet Napolitano takes budget fight to Valley leaders

By Hannah Furfaro



UC President Janet Napolitano, center, approaches the lectern after being introduced by UC Board of Regents vice chair Fred Ruiz. At left is Fresno Rotary Club president Shirley Bruegman.

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University of California President Janet Napolitano is hoping to light a fire under Fresno leaders and business people. Her cause is simple: Let's get lawmakers to pour more dollars into the UC system.

Fresno doesn't often hear much noise about high education funding, she told a group of nearly 200 Fresno Rotary Club members and their guests on Monday.

"I'd like you all to make some. And now would be a really good time," she said.

Napolitano brought the plea during the Rotary Club's weekly meeting in downtown. The visit was part of a larger effort Napolitano is making to drum up public support for boosting state funding for the 10 UC campuses and avoiding proposed tuition hikes as high as 5% next school year.



The tuition proposal would help fill deep budget gaps, Napolitano has said.

In a showdown with Gov. Jerry Brown, Napolitano is seeking an additional \$110 million for the schools this year on top of \$120 million in new funding promised to the UCs in Brown's initial budget proposal. The pair have had two one-on-one meetings to try to iron out a deal.

On Monday, Napolitano was quick to the punch line. UC campuses are still struggling from blistering budget cuts of the past and simply can't afford to keep chugging along as usual without either an infusion of new money or by raising tuition.

Moving her arms to show how students' share of the UC System's budget has now surpassed what the state chips in, Napolitano painted a stark reality of recession-era slashing. About 30% of the system's budget was carved out in two years, she said. Meanwhile, she said, UC schools have increased enrollment and students have shouldered higher tuition bills.

"Sacramento right now is knee-deep in the state budget process and our university is in a big fight," she said, before stopping short and changing tone. "We're in a big, big important discussion," she continued. "We are asking for additional funding so we can continue to increase our enrollment, so we can recruit and retain top faculty."

The work of the UCs extends far beyond campus borders, she said, from research in the peach orchards in Del Rey to the young entrepreneurs, doctors and other successful scholars who come from the Valley and graduate from UC schools. About 2,300 of current UC undergraduates come from Fresno County, she said. About 238,000 students enroll in UC graduate and undergraduate programs each year.

"Our university is your university," she said. "What do we want to make of it and how do we want to pay for it?"

Those are the hundred-million dollars questions.

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