

Lawmakers laud teaching in speeches at VVC

Cook, Obernolte address college board Tuesday night



Zoom

Rep. Paul Cook, R-Apple Valley, speaks about teaching and education at the Victor Valley College Board of Trustees meeting Tuesday night. (Shea Johnson, Staff Writer)

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VICTORVILLE — Rep. Paul Cook and Assemblyman Jay Obernolte had nothing but praise for Victor Valley College, delivering short but impassioned speeches on the significance of education to the college board Tuesday night.

Board of Trustees President Joseph W. Brady suggested that Cook, R-Apple Valley, and Obernolte, R-Hesperia, address the board every year, a notion that Cook said would be high on his priority list.

Cook has direct connections to VVC Superintendent/President Roger Wagner, who formerly headed Copper Mountain College in Joshua Tree, where Cook taught history and political science. Cook has also been a professor at University of California, Riverside, and Cal State San Bernardino.

"I've got to tell you, I've been at all three levels and, personally, my heart is right here," Cook said.

Speaking of the regular gridlock in Washington D.C., Cook said that education, however, was "one area where we might make progress," particularly because he said the subject enjoys supporters from both sides of the aisle.

He also provided a glimpse into his educational policy platform, saying that he was a proponent for local control.

"I would rather you make decisions affecting this college right here, then way back in Washington," he told the board. "You know this area better than I will ever know."

Additionally, he reflected on his time teaching, calling it the best experience of his life.

"If you do it right, it's the greatest feeling in the world where after teaching, you made a difference in somebody's life, and that's what it's all about," he said. "And community colleges, students come in here, they don't know what they're doing. Some of them just got out of high school, some of them had problems in high school, some of them just came out of the military, some of them are retired, and they're there for a variety of reasons.

"But the common denominator is they want to make their life a little bit better."

Obernolte, meanwhile, said he originally wanted to be a teacher, but other callings in video game development, and eventually politics, took center stage.

"If this doesn't work out for me in politics, and something happens to my business, I'm going to spend the rest of my life teaching because it's where my heart is, it's what I love to do," he said.

Obernolte earned an engineering degree from Caltech and master's degree in artificial intelligence from UCLA.

"Now artificial intelligence, for those who don't know, is a division of computer science, although it's been suggested to me that knowledge of artificial intelligence might be a very useful thing to have in Sacramento," he quipped.

Referencing a faster-paced, more competitive modern work environment, he also provided a piece of advice for this generation's workforce.

"Our children are going to have to have a life-long dedication to continuing education, that's the only way they're going to make it," he said. "The days that you could acquire an education and then go on and spend a career using that education are behind us."

It's for that reason, he called community college, UC and CSU systems in California the "genesis of how that happens" and community colleges, specifically, "the backbone of our kids' education in the 21st century."

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