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“Alternative Spring Break”: Four Los Angeles Community College Students Spend Week Marching for the Future, not Partying

LeGrand, CA – Four Los Angeles community college students today departed for an “Alternative Spring Break,” marching up the Central Valley to protest cuts to public education, safety, health and other critical services. The students are foregoing Spring Break revelry, and instead will spend the week with educators and public service advocates making a 365-mile Bakersfield to Sacramento trek. Following in Cesar Chavez’s footsteps, Fiona Pulskamp, Clay and Andy Gallardo, and Ramon Andrade are joining the march during the celebration of Cesar Chavez Day. The students are making an extraordinary personal commitment and sacrifice to protest cuts to public education, public health and public safety, and to draw attention to the need to reclaim California’s promise.

Fiona Pulskamp, 22, a student at Los Angeles Valley College and Pierce College, was raised by her single mother after her father was killed at an early age. Her mom entered the middle class by going to college, taking young Fiona to the campus childcare and sometimes to class with her. Her mother is now an instructor at Sacramento City College. “Education is the most important thing in life. I’d rather be supporting the cause and be with like-minded people instead of partying in Cancun,” said Fiona. “I think I am the person I am today because of the educational route I’ve taken. It has shaped who I am today. It is really depressing that people will not have the same opportunities as me.”

Fiona is worried that budget cuts will make college unaffordable to the working class. She said students aren’t apathetic about the crisis facing them, but they are without hope. “There is this huge idea that they as an individual

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cannot change things. They don't feel like they have any power," said Fiona. Fiona is studying anthropology and hopes to transfer to UC Davis or Berkeley.

Fiona joins the "March for California's Future" along with Ramon Andrade, 20, a student at Los Angeles Valley College; Andy Gallardo, 20, a student at Los Angeles Mission College and Los Angeles Valley College; and, Clay Gallardo, 21, a student at Los Angeles Valley College and LA Mission College.

As Ramon Andrade sees it, the future of California's economy is at stake. Elected leaders cannot expect the state to stay competitive in a 21st century, global economy if they continue raising tuitions and cutting higher education budgets. "We need educated people. Without that, California is not going to do so well," said Andrade. "I just wanted to do something productive, something for a good cause. Something I believe in." Ramon is studying political science and hopes to transfer to UC San Diego or UC Santa Barbara.

Because of budget cuts, Clay Gallardo has had problems getting the classes he needs to graduate on time. He has struggled to schedule a full-time school load and couldn't take summer school last year when classes were cut. He has to commute to two campuses. Because many classes have prerequisites, Clay estimates that his graduation date has been pushed back a year or two, due to budget cuts. Clay is one of the lucky students who qualify for financial aid. Those who are not so lucky have been hard hit by tuition increases, he says.

"A lot of people who are my close friends have had to drop out," said Clay. "I think it is really important that people actively participate in democracy. As a student, I want to show support for workers and unions." Clay is studying social work and hopes to transfer to Berkeley. He is Andy Gallardo's older brother.

Andy Gallardo is in just his first year of college, but already has had a hard time getting into the classes he needs. Even though he primarily attends Mission College, he had to attend Valley College this winter so he wouldn't miss a vital class. "Nothing good is going to come out of budget cuts," said Andy. "It is going to have a negative affect on all of us."

Andy is marching because he believes quality public education and quality public services are vital to California's Future. Andy is studying art and is Clay Gallardo's younger brother. He hopes to transfer to UC Santa Barbara.

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