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Conservative author at Poly urges students to start deciding

Mason Weaver tells them to fight against attacks on personal freedom

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Mason Weaver

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By Cynthia Lambert | clambert@thetribunenews.com

The conservative author and entrepreneur whose visit nearly 10 years ago to Cal Poly sparked a free speech lawsuit does not describe himself as a controversial figure.

Loving? Yes. Dedicated to his wife and family? Check.

"I am not, despite what everyone may say, controversial," Mason Weaver told a crowd of nearly 100 people gathered on campus Tuesday evening. "But the nicest person here will rise up in anger if someone attacks what you love."

And attacks on personal freedoms are one thing Weaver clearly does not tolerate.

In an hourlong speech hosted by the Cal Poly College Republicans, Weaver — a self-described "close-minded Christian conservative with an attitude" — told students to stop debating and evaluating, and start deciding.

"No one celebrates submission, no one celebrates compromise," he said. "You are American students. You stand on the shoulders of people ... who have sacrificed everything they have, including their lives, so you could have the opportunity to disagree with someone."

Weaver has visited Cal Poly at least three times, including a visit in 2002 that spurred a lawsuit by former student Steve Hinkle, a member of the College Republicans.

Hinkle claimed the university violated his First Amendment rights by punishing him for trying to post a flier promoting Weaver's

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visit, which contained the title of his book, "It's OK to Leave the Plantation."

The flier offended several black students who were holding a club meeting nearby. Cal Poly officials said Hinkle was punished for disrupting the meeting, not for the content of the flier.

Hinkle sued, arguing that his free speech rights were violated, and Cal Poly agreed to pay him a \$40,000 settlement, covering his legal bills. Cal Poly denied doing anything wrong or breaking the law.

Weaver's return visit this week should "serve as a wake-up call" and inspire campus administration to take another look at its free speech policies, Cal Poly College Republicans President Brendan Pringle wrote in an opinion piece in Mustang Daily, the campus newspaper.

Pringle pointed to a rating given to Cal Poly by the nonpartisan, Philadelphia-based Foundation for Individual Rights in Education.

The "yellow light" rating indicates that the foundation believes Cal Poly has some policies that could ban or excessively regulate protected speech. Pringle elaborated Tuesday that, for the most part, Cal Poly's policies are compliant. But, he added, some areas are vague and could be used by the school to infringe on students' free speech rights on campus.

Cal Poly reviewed its policies about a year ago to make sure that the university protects and supports free speech, said Chip Visci, associate vice president of communications.

The foundation had asked the university to review its policies, he said. "We looked at all that and felt we had a very good policy in place that supports free speech, encourages free speech and most importantly, protects free speech."

Weaver's talk on Tuesday is part of the College Republicans' Freedom Week, which includes a symbolic tearing down of a fake Berlin Wall today and a barbecue Thursday to support American troops.

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