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**School presidents stand united against neo-Nazi hatred**

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Over this Fourth of July holiday, at a time when we all will be celebrating this great experiment in democracy and diversity we call America, at a time when communities all over America will come together to celebrate freedom as communities - Nazis will walk the streets of Olympia.

Disguised as youthfulness and strength and draped in bygone symbols of destruction and bigotry, they will climb the steps of our state's Capitol, the symbol of our civility, and tell us to hate our neighbors.

As the presidents of the three higher-education institutions in this community, we speak in a single voice to express our support and agreement with groups such as Unity in the Community, the city councils of Lacey, Olympia and Tumwater, the Chambers of Commerce, local businesses and hundreds of individuals who say to these unwelcome visitors, "Not in our community."

The Evergreen State College, St. Martin's University and South Puget Sound Community College take great pride in our welcoming community and in the roles our institutions have played in making this one of the most vibrant, diverse, creative and respected communities in Washington state. These qualities are a beacon that attracts the best and brightest people and businesses to our area.

Ironically, it is these very qualities that have attracted the neo-Nazis to us. Their presence, however, offends our community by threatening our freedom and our ideals as democratic people.

Each of our higher-education institutions cultivates welcoming environments for the diverse student populations who turn to us. Students learn in our institutions to embrace and enjoy the ethnic, cultural and philosophical diversity around them. Even more, the racial, ethnic and intellectual diversity that our students bring increases the vitality of our institutions and enhances learning.

When students leave our colleges, many make this community their home. They take jobs, open businesses and fuel the economy. Their exposure to and appreciation of diversity make them better employees, better employers, better leaders and better citizens.

The message and philosophy the neo-Nazis are trying to bring into our midst is diametrically opposed to everything we do in education. We cannot allow it to take root here.

Hate does not build community; it tears communities apart. Hate does not add to our

community conversation; it sows violence and destruction. Hate does not make a good neighbor, a fine friend or a worthwhile leader.

While our democracy allows the neo-Nazi the freedom to spew their abhorrent rhetoric into the public marketplace of ideas, we, as a community, have a responsibility to vigorously and loudly counter them with our own positive, community-affirming message. As the Nazis' message will tell us who they are, our message must tell them who we are: Arts Walk on a warm evening. The farmers market on a Saturday morning. The Tumwater Fourth of July Parade. Lakefair. The Lacey Fun Fair. All those times and places where we come together in good company as a community.

Against those forces that would tear us apart and diminish our neighbors, The Evergreen State College, St. Martin's University and South Puget Sound Community College stand together to reaffirm our commitment to building a future that openly embraces the ideals of freedom we celebrate on the Fourth of July. The neo-Nazi message of hate is antithetical to that commitment to a free society, and we stand with you, the community, in opposition to it.

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