

## **Former SDSU President Sally Roush's Full Statement**

May 17, 2018

*Report to the University Senate  
Former President Sally Roush*

Good afternoon. I am here to report to you my decisions regarding the Senate resolution that addresses the Aztec moniker and the Aztec Warrior.

I want to begin by thanking the University Senate for your leadership. You fulfill the important role of reminding us as a university when matters or issues of concern need to be formally or effectively addressed. This important role continues across time and is inclusive of raising issues previously addressed that need re-evaluation in light of contemporary conditions. I am grateful to you for embracing that responsibility regarding the Aztec moniker and the Aztec Warrior.

Students, whether through their governing organization of Associated Students or through individually expressed opinions and actions, also provide leadership by asking questions. They ask about everything from long-existing practices to matters of institutional identity. My thanks to our students for carrying out their important part in bringing forward the matters of the Aztec moniker and Aztec Warrior.

Students become alumni. As such, their relationship with the university does not end at Commencement; rather the nature of their relationship simply, but importantly, changes. Our alumni's life-long affiliation with the university is invaluable. It underscores the critical importance of a quality education that produces leaders whose SDSU education is the foundation for continued growth and contributions to the greater good. I thank the many alumni who have provided input and comments regarding these significant topics.

Our faculty and staff are the keepers and deliverers of our good and important work. Many also have a life-long relationship with the university – as current students or alumni themselves – and strive for continual improvement in what we do and how we do it. Thank you for expressing your opinions on this matter of importance to yourselves as well as to the university.

The residents of our city and county choose to connect with us – if they are not already students, alumni or employees. They connect as friends, patrons of our arts programs,

fans, donors, business partners or simply as those who value our contributions to the public good. Your voices were also sought and heard. Thanks to you as well.

Together we are One SDSU Community with many voices. I value each and every one. Over 200,000 of you were asked your opinions about the Aztec moniker and Aztec Warrior. Close to 13,000 responded to a survey. Over 6,100 chose to provide commentary. The comments cover the full spectrum of opinions from complete elimination of the moniker and Aztec Warrior to making not one single change to either. One consistent, overarching message, however, was conveyed in a loud and clear voice: **Respect**, genuinely intended and executed, must be the foundation of our actions going forward.

The 2018 Aztec Identity Task Force was established in February 2018 in response to the Nov. 7, 2017, “Senate Resolution to Eliminate the Mascot and Form a Task Force to Investigate the Aztec Identity.” The 2018 task force received information and input from the many voices in each of the groups I have mentioned. It considered both quantitative data and qualitative information gathered through surveys and interviews. Additionally, I considered comments from emails, letters and phone calls to the university, as well as from feedback gathered directly from community members. The 2018 task force conclusions and recommendations benefited from study of the 2001 Aztec Identity Task Force report, as well as from a current-state analysis. It will be a surprise to no one that the information gathered represents a wide variety of opinion about what is right and necessary, and that between diametrically opposed points of view there is much common ground.

Each of the 17 volunteer members of the 2018 task force worked diligently, with integrity and devotion. Their own opinions mirrored the range of opinion and emotion reflected in the information they collected – from feeling great pride in the Aztec Warrior to experiences of marginalization and pain over cultural appropriation that are captured in the warrior figure. Each member, in her or his own way, contributed to produce a report that is thoughtful, insightful and compelling. It is a report that shines a light on a path forward. Each member of the 2018 task force took to heart the singular call for respect as a foundational requirement for all of their deliberations that led to their conclusions and recommendations.

I am grateful beyond words to the 2018 task force members.

I gave the utmost consideration to their work. I note with deep respect and much empathy their divided opinions on the issue of the Aztec Warrior. With thanks and great respect for the 2018 task force members and all voices expressed in any manner, I have made the following decisions:

**The use of the Aztec moniker will continue.** It is a source of pride for the collective majority of those who responded to the surveys or volunteered their views. Its **use will be unfailingly informed and guided by the wisdom of the 2018 task**

**force** expressed in this quote: We will “effectively embrace and teach positive elements of what is known about the Aztec Empire and its people.” In so doing, we will rely explicitly on the Aztec civilization’s three pillars of Knowledge, Strength and Prowess, and Giving Back to Community.

Further, as a federally designated Hispanic Serving Institution on the U.S.-Mexico border, SDSU will exert its unique capabilities to responsibly “honor the many indigenous people of the region.” We will formalize a strong “educational program that situates indigenous contributions – ancient, historic, and contemporary – into the education of all students through the retention of the moniker.”

“Aztec” will continue to be the name we associate with our university. We will, however, make changes to honor the Aztec culture, relying on our considerable capacity to create and deliver appropriate programmatic and educational material. Most importantly, we will focus on and correct the longstanding “lack of engagement with other indigenous groups locally and with the history of the Aztec Empire.”

**The Aztec Warrior**, similarly a source of pride for the collective majority, **will be retained, but as Spirit Leader, not mascot. There will be** immediate and visible **changes** in demeanor **to achieve a respectful portrayal** of a powerful figure from Aztec culture. We will undertake an effort to **assess whether to add other meaningful symbols**, marks or representations, including historically accurate animal symbols that capture the intellectual sophistication, power and bravery of the Aztec civilization.

In this regard, the issue of the spear was raised in the Senate resolution. The 2018 task force members concurred that the spear is an image of the warrior culture and that they understood that the offense relative to its use in our Athletics logo is its correlation to war. The task force said:

“Symbols are inherently ambiguous and rest not on consensus of their meaning but rather on a shared range of meanings that are recognized by members of a culture group. The (task force) does not find the spear an inherently negative image and recognizes it as an important symbol of the Aztec Empire along with the atlatl, shield, obsidian knives, and other such paraphernalia of warrior culture. If the university chooses to retain it, the (task force) recommends that this be done alongside the appropriate and respectful use of other utilitarian symbols that define the Aztec emphasis on education and commitment to the community as a whole.”

The status of the Aztec Warrior is, without doubt, the most challenging and difficult decision to have made. The majority voices have not prevented any of us from hearing the voices of those who are deeply offended and hurt by this outcome. I acknowledge that those who are offended and hurt have legitimate reasons. We must recognize that historical acts and current-day thoughtless disregard constitute a hard reality. It is incumbent upon us all to act with respect as we move forward.

The task force's thoughtful deliberations resulted in recommendations covering six key areas and are hereby accepted. The areas are:

- Education.
- *Governing body to ensure ethical, moral and fiduciary responsibility of carrying the Aztec name.*
- *Meaningful engagement with Native American and indigenous communities of the U.S. and Mexico.*
- *Appropriate signage and symbolic representation of the Aztec Empire and contemporary Nahua people across the campus.*
- *Respectful and correct use of the Nahuatl language, especially in the invocation of such in awards and other forms of recognition, and*
- *Stricter guidelines for mascot – now Spirit Leader – representation, monitoring and enforcement of said guidelines.*
- *The breadth and depth of these 2018 task force recommendations will serve as the basis for change. They have the potential to lessen the dissonance that exists on these issues. I urge thorough and careful consideration of them as we evolve in our linkage to the Aztec culture.*

There are two essential recommendations that I am implementing immediately.

In maintaining the Aztec moniker and embracing the Aztec Warrior as our Spirit Leader, our greatest challenge ahead is to acknowledge and be ever vigilant regarding the consequences of unintentional disrespect. We will ensure that appropriate recognition of and reverence for the greatness of the Aztec civilization is infused into the daily life of the university. This will be accomplished through the creation of a governing authority, chaired by the president of the university and staffed by a dedicated coordinator. The governing authority is hereby established as a first order of business. It will provide the focus, continuity and resources that have hampered past university efforts in these areas.

This president-led governing authority will include the duly elected chair of the Aztec Culture Education Committee, the chair of the University Senate, the president of Associated Students, the president of the Alumni Association, and the Director of Intercollegiate Athletics. The governing authority will oversee a budget of ongoing and one-time university funds to cover the cost of the coordinator, courses offered in an approved curriculum, co-curricular activities, and honorific or educational projects, among other things. Funds established for similar measures and managed by Associated Students can also further the governing authority's purpose.

The university will formally institutionalize the Aztec Culture Education Committee, which will report directly to the governing authority chaired by the university president. Membership on the committee will continue to include representation from faculty and staff through the University Senate, each division of the university, Athletics, and

Associated Students, and it will be broadened to include representatives of local Native American tribes. Membership may be modified by the president as she deems necessary and appropriate.

The education committee's duties will include articulating and recommending ways to meaningfully include local Native American tribes in our significant functions and annual ceremonial events, such as All-University Convocation and Commencement. We are committed to building bridges.

There is one other immediate change that is warranted and overdue. Use of the nicknames "Monty" or "Zuma" in any context is inappropriate, but particularly so for university awards and recognitions. The prestigious awards that have borne these names have great institutional significance; the accomplishments of those so honored will not be diminished by a change in name. Use of a nickname is disrespectful, however unintended. We will immediately rename our annual awards for outstanding faculty, staff and alumni, in coordination with the appropriate university committees, to eliminate the use of the nicknames.

I have spoken to incoming President de la Torre, who is aware of the decision-making process that was followed and has read the task force report and its appendices. She asked me to convey that she respects the process. She accepts the decisions I have made. She is committed to ensuring the Aztec name and representations are treated with the care and the respect they deserve.

The members of the 2018 Aztec Identity Task Force closed their report with this sentiment, which I have partially excerpted: "(We) would like to express our appreciation for the opportunity to have served the SDSU community. Our assignment was not easy and weighed heavily on each of us. We agreed to serve because the issue was important to us and to our fellow colleagues and community members and because we each believed we could undertake the task with the intention of offering a long-term resolution that could be respected, if not necessarily agreed upon, by most stakeholders. We hope we have ... provided a framework. ..."

The task force members did indeed provide a solid framework. They also provided an example of respectful discourse and civility regarding a deeply divisive matter. It is a powerful example for our entire community to emulate as we embrace respect as the foundation for our actions now and in the future.

Thank you.