



Photos by Erik Jepsen/UC San Diego Publications

Campus Welcomes Newly Elected Speaker of the Assembly Toni Atkins

The UC San Diego community held a special celebration for Toni Atkins Friday in recognition of her recent unanimous election as the 69th Speaker of the California State Assembly.

The event was hosted by the Chancellor's Community Advisory Board (CCAB) at the Faculty Club. CCAB advocates for UC San Diego and advises the chancellor, with special emphasis on the university's role in the community. Chancellor Pradeep K. Khosla, members of CCAB and UC San Diego faculty, staff and students attended the reception and had an opportunity to meet and speak with Atkins.

Atkins' election was historic, as she is the first San Diegan and the first lesbian to serve as speaker of the California State Assembly.

"Toni's election as speaker demonstrates the respect and admiration that her peers have for her and it recognizes the outstanding work she's done in Sacramento," said Khosla.



Atkins represents the 78th district, which includes coastal San Diego, from Imperial Beach, along the Mexican border, north to Solana Beach, central San Diego and all of UC San Diego's campus in La Jolla.

"Toni has been a supporter of legislation that has helped UC San Diego, our students and our community," Khosla said. "She is a fierce advocate for all students, including those in our most vulnerable communities. Her work has raised awareness of LGBT issues, and she's championed anti-bullying policies that raise awareness about this painful issue."

Atkins has served in the California State Assembly since 2010 and her work to better the lives Californians has ranged from focusing on affordable housing, to encouraging economic development, and improving the state's educational standards as well as protecting public safety.



"My election is important to UC San Diego in two ways," Atkins said. "Higher education is one of the most important issues for me and the people of California. Also, my role will give UC San Diego more visibility—I will be able to share UC San Diego's successes to a broader audience."

She added, "As Speaker, we can highlight all that is great about San Diego—the region's strengths in research and development in high-tech, bio-tech and life sciences as well as our higher education institutions...We have a great success story with UC San Diego—we call it an incubator and innovator. Now, we can give the university more of a spotlight to all of California."

Education has long been an issue Atkins has been passionate about. The Appalachian-born daughter of a coal miner father and seamstress mother attended public schools in Roanoke, Va., and college at Emory & Henry College in Emory, Va. After she graduated, Atkins moved to the West Coast where she worked as an administrator at women's health clinics in Los Angeles and San Diego. She later served eight years on the San Diego City Council.

Atkins said that education is a high priority for state lawmakers as Gov. Jerry Brown's budget talks enter the final week.

"We're hoping to give back to students after so many years of budget cuts to education," Atkins said. "It's critical to California's success to invest in education."

Avril Prakash, director of UC San Diego's Student Organized Voter Access Committee (SOVAC), a non-partisan student organization that aims to increase voting among the campus's students, said she's thrilled Atkins is now Speaker of the Assembly.

"She's been a huge advocate and champion for students," Prakash said. "I think her role can help the campus have a more active political presence among our students, which would benefit us all."

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