

Outgoing homeland security secretary to head University of California

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Janet Napolitano, the Obama administration's outgoing chief of Homeland Security, is slated to take over leadership next month of the Board of Regents of the University of California.

The former Arizona attorney general and governor will replace Mark Yudof as board president on August 13. Napolitano has no background in the administration of higher education. As governor of Arizona, Napolitano cut \$100 million from the Arizona State Universities and another \$40 million from the state's community colleges. She is expected to preside over similar cuts, as well as tuition increases, in her new post.

The University of California (UC) is among California's largest employers, with almost 20,000 faculty members and an additional 190,000 staff serving a student body of 234,464. The 26-member Board of Regents, whose members are appointed by the governor for a 12-year term, oversees the University of California's ten campuses and five medical centers. Almost entirely from the most affluent layers of society, the regents usually have little to no background in higher education and are widely despised by students and faculty.

Over the past decades, the Board of Regents has relentlessly increased fees while cutting classes and closing libraries. Meanwhile, the university system's huge budget and large endowments have been used to pay astronomical administrative salaries, fund construction projects, and speculate in financial investments.

During Yudof's five years heading the Board of Regents, annual fees increased from \$7,517 to \$12,192, not including room and board, books, and other ancillary charges.

In an effort to give a progressive gloss to the

reactionary agenda that she will be pursuing, Napolitano is being lauded as the first woman to preside over the UC Board of Regents. What is far more significant than her gender, however, is Napolitano's background building up the repressive apparatus of the federal government during the first term of the Obama administration.

As chief of Homeland Security, Napolitano participated in unprecedented attacks on democratic rights. She enlisted the aid of Amtrak, Wal-Mart, hotel chains, major sports leagues and public transportation agencies for her "See Something, Say Something" campaign, promoting a climate of fear by encouraging people to spy on one another, reporting "suspicious activity" and "terror tips." In speeches, Napolitano has invoked Cold-War era witch-hunting of so-called communists and sympathizers as the model for her campaign.

Napolitano's Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting Initiative, or SAR, has led to the creation of profiles on tens of thousands of people held in a top-secret vault on the fourth floor of the J. Edgar Hoover FBI Building in Washington.

Napolitano is responsible for the deportation of hundreds of thousands of immigrant workers and the deaths of thousands of others who have perished trying to enter the United States along an increasingly militarized Mexican border. Napolitano asked Congress to authorize drones to monitor the US-Mexico divide. According to the *Huffington Post*, \$200 million has been spent on a "small fleet" of 10 Predator drones for domestic use.

As an Obama appointee, Napolitano oversaw the expansion of the "Secure Communities" program, which allows police officers to act as immigration officials and cross-reference the fingerprints of detained

individuals with the Immigration and Customs Enforcement database. Under her direction, Homeland Security initiated “287(g) partnerships” to coordinate local police with federal immigration authorities, leading to mass deportations under the guise of an anti-crime campaign. The majority of those removed from the country had either no criminal record or were guilty of only minor offenses.

Napolitano’s appointment to oversee the public university system in a state with a vast immigrant community, in particular a large Mexican-American population, reflects particular disdain for ordinary people and popular sentiment.

The state’s decision to turn to a person with a background such as Napolitano’s to head what was once one of the greatest public systems of higher education in the world is revealing. Her close ties to the military and intelligence agencies will facilitate their already considerable influence on research throughout the UC system, where increasingly labs and other research facilities are placed at the service of the military and private industry. For instance, some of the largest grants funding UC’s Scripps Institution of Oceanography are issued by the Office of Naval Research and private companies such as Shell Oil.

Even more importantly, Napolitano’s background in US intelligence and law enforcement will play a critical role in the state’s looming confrontation with students, faculty, and staff in the UC system. For the last three years, the Board of Regents has been unable to host a meeting that has not been curtailed by demonstrations of those opposed to tuition hikes, the gutting of services, and the axing of wages and benefits for employees. In the figure of Napolitano, the ruling elite in California has found a representative who they are sure can be relied upon to meet with force a growing upsurge of students and working people in one of the nation’s most important public university systems.



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