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Policy summit set for Aptos on Saturday draws progressive backlash

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A Colorado think tank concerned with national and international political policy will host its annual winter conference at the Seascape Beach Resort on Saturday.

The event, by nonprofit Steamboat Institute, has raised some eyebrows in the local Santa Cruz County community, with several political activist groups gearing up to protest the day-long summit by an organization espousing conservative principles. Citizen group Santa Cruz for Bernie has planned to meet conference attendees as they arrive in town on Friday and Santa Cruz Indivisible, promoting progressive values, is aiming to organize at the resort Saturday morning.

“The Path Forward: America in 2017 and Beyond” will focus on eliciting input on foreign and domestic policy priorities in the era of the Trump Administration, including environment and energy, health care, big government and global security. One featured speaker, Rep. Devin Nunes, R-Tulare, was in the news last week after the resignation of national security adviser Gen. Michael Flynn on Feb. 13. Nunes, the chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, questioned U.S. intelligence oversight of Flynn’s dealings with a Russian ambassador and the information’s subsequent leak to the media, according to the Associated Press.

Flynn was initially invited to Saturday’s summit, in addition to Rep. Ryan Zinke, a Montana Republican, nominee for Secretary of Interior. Neither were expected to attend the event, as of Thursday.

The Aptos resort was chosen for Saturday’s event at the recommendation of a Steamboat Institute board member, who has a vacation home there, said Steamboat Chairwoman and CEO Jennifer Schubert-Akin on Thursday. Schubert-Akin said she was aware that protesters were fomenting dissent with the conference. Those with differing opinions are welcome to their views and to attend as a celebration of the protections of the First Amendment, she said.

Schubert-Akin, however, said she disagreed with a designation she has heard that the event is a “pro-Trump” conference. The group is nonpartisan in that it invites attendees of all political persuasions, though its principles earn it the “conservative” label, she said.

Steamboat Institute's "five principles" include: limited government, low taxes and fiscal responsibility, free market capitalism, strong national defense and individual rights and responsibilities.

"If you knew some of the views of the people who are speaking on Saturday, they are not Trump supporters," Schubert-Akin said.

Additional conference speakers include Peter Brookes from the Heritage Foundation, Daniel Mitchell from the Cato Institute and Trump transition team members David Bernhardt and Amy Oliver Cooke. Fellow speakers include Victor Davis Hanson of the Hoover Institution, U.S. Sen. Steve Daines, of Montana and Charlie McNeil of NexGen Resources.

Tickets for Saturday's largely sold-out conference began at \$250 a head. The event coincides with UC Santa Cruz's annual Climate Science and Policy Conference.