

UC would lose \$9 billion for research, healthcare, education if Trump cut federal funds



Elizabeth Wheeler, a chemical engineer at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, is developing a machine that can identify viruses and bacteria in as little as three minutes. The University of California receives some U.S. funding for the federal lab. (Jim Stevens / MCT)

By **Teresa Watanabe and Amina Khan**

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New treatments for genetic diseases. Advances in solar-based sustainable energy. Financial aid for needy students and medical assistance for the elderly.

All of that — and much more — is supported by the \$9 billion in federal funds given annually to the [University of California](#) for research, education and healthcare. Those funds drew widespread public attention Thursday, when [President Trump](#) tweeted that UC Berkeley's federal funds might be at risk after campus officials cancelled an appearance by conservative firebrand Milo Yiannopoulos to safeguard the public from violent protesters.

“If U.C. Berkeley does not allow free speech and practices violence on innocent people with a different point of view — NO FEDERAL FUNDS?” Trump tweeted.

Legal experts say presidents have no authority to cut off federal funds for alleged violations of the 1st Amendment. Even if they did, pulling funding from UC — the nation’s premier public research university system — would cripple myriad projects that richly benefit the nation, said Stuart Russell, a computer scientist at UC Berkeley and founding director of the Center for Human-Compatible AI.

“For Trump to threaten federal funding, which by the way benefits the country in terms of the scientific research the campus does that helps our defense and helps our industries ... seems like the act of a dictator,” he said.

According to UC data, the \$9 billion in annual federal funding includes:

- \$3 billion in research grants. Nearly four-fifths of the funds are awarded by the National Institutes of Health and the National Science Foundation. UC is the nation’s largest recipient of federal funding for research and related projects, with UC San Francisco, UC San Diego and UCLA receiving the largest grants.
- \$3.5 billion to UC medical centers for Medicare and Medicaid patients.
- \$1.6 billion in financial aid to UC students for federal Pell Grants, work-study awards, graduate fellowships and other grants and scholarships.
- \$800 million to operate the federal Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory.

Even if Trump could not legally cut federal funding, Russell said, federal agencies “might think twice before allocating funding to Berkeley” because of presidential annoyance.

But Erwin Chemerinsky, a 1st Amendment expert and the dean of UC Irvine School of Law, said the 10th Amendment bars the federal government from using benefits such as funding to coerce state and local governments into desired action.

“The government can’t condition money to a campus on the condition that campus administrators not speak critically,” he said. “It would be unconstitutional.”

UC Regent Norman Pattiz, who heads the regents’ committee on national laboratories, said Trump’s tweet surprised him. He said UC researchers supported by federal funding have made enormous contributions — helping the missions to Mars, modernizing nuclear security, advancing alternative energy and discovering new medical treatments.

“They really are tremendous resources to California, the nation and the world,” Pattiz said.

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