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Federal judge sides with UC employees in free speech lawsuit against Trump administration

Madeleine Kashkooli | Staff

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President Donald Trump's administration followed its research funding freeze with a list of demands to UCLA in exchange for the return of its federal funding.

Hayes Gaboury | File



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A federal judge has ordered the federal government to end their coercive tactics against the UC in the latest installment of a coalition of UC employees and students' lawsuit against President Donald Trump's administration.

In her ruling, U.S. District Judge Rita F. Lin ordered the federal government to cease threats of withholding federal funding, as well as to “address Plaintiffs’ irreparable harm and to restore the status quo.”

The decision comes after a Nov. 6 hearing in which Lin said she found the plaintiffs had submitted “overwhelming evidence” that the federal government had “publicly launched a campaign to purge woke and left viewpoints” from the university by freezing nearly \$600 million in federal research grants from UCLA over alleged antisemitism, among other issues.

The administration followed the freeze with a list of demands to UCLA in exchange for the return of its federal funding. These demands include placing restrictions on student protests, discouraging admission of “anti-Western” international students, ending “unlawful DEI goals” in admissions, banning gender-affirming care for minors and banning transgender women from women’s sports.

“This looks to me like a classic First Amendment injury, and it is exactly what the administration has said that it’s trying to achieve,” Lin said.

The plaintiffs launched the lawsuit against the Trump administration in September, alleging that the administration’s demands constitute political censorship and retaliation against the university. The lawsuit claims the federal government has violated the First, Fifth and Tenth amendments, Title VI and Title IX, and the Administrative Procedures Act.

On Oct. 9, more than 60 staff members of the American Association of University Professors, or AAUP — one of the plaintiffs in the lawsuit — submitted sworn declarations to the federal court in which the staff members describe specific incidents including self-censorship and concerns about potential political retaliation.

On Oct. 10, the coalition filed a motion for preliminary injunction that called for the court to “stop the Trump-Vance administration’s unlawful policy while the case continues,” according to a press release.

During the Nov. 6 hearing, U.S. Department of Justice lawyer Abhishek Kambli said, “It’s questionable whether the third party censorship doctrine is even viable because the easiest path to complete relief for the plaintiff would be to sue the university directly.”

However, Lin pushed back against this argument. “How does that respond to the present harms that are already occurring, the self censorship that is already occurring?” she asked.

Connie Chan, a lawyer for AAUP, said the defendants had presented “zero evidence” that the university was taking actions independent of the pressure from the federal government to “extinguish” leftist ideology on campus.

“It is the fact that the University of California is allowing faculty and students to engage in this type of protected First Amendment speech that has made University of California the target of the federal government’s coercion campaign,” Chan said.

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