

*As delivered*

**President Michael V. Drake – Opening Remarks  
UC Board of Regents Meeting  
Luskin Conference Center  
Wednesday, March 19, 2025  
8:30 AM**

Thank you very much, Chair Reilly.

As you shared, we have both things to celebrate and difficult issues to consider during this week's meeting. I will start with some good news: Last month, UC Merced assumed its place among the nation's top research universities by earning R1 status from the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. Category R1 denotes a "very strong commitment to research, evidenced by significant research spending and the awarding of a large number of doctoral degrees." It is the highest level of research activity in the Carnegie Classification system. The campus achieved this less than 20 years after opening its doors.

Earning this distinction affirms what we've all known: That UC Merced has a stellar research enterprise and exemplifies what the University of California is all about – cutting-edge research that benefits the local community, the state, and the nation. Achieving this level of research activity at a new university while simultaneously being recognized as one of the — if not THE leading institution — in the nation for social mobility is a first-of-its-kind achievement for our youngest campus. Congratulations to Chancellor Muñoz and the entire Merced team for this great accomplishment!

This achievement comes at a time when the value of research universities – and of all higher education– is being debated and threatened. I know many of you are closely watching the news coming out of Washington, DC. I have heard from many members of our community that they are feeling worried and frightened.

Although these developments have been alarming, they were not entirely unforeseen. Many of the administration's plans were made clear during the presidential campaign. And my office, as well as our campuses, our health enterprise, and our labs began mapping out potential impacts and contingency plans long before the election.

That effort continues now. For the past two months, this has been our daily work. Shortly after the election, I established a strike team and directed them to track, analyze, and respond to the flood of information and actions coming out of Washington. That's included multiple teams across every part of the University – from government relations and legal staff, to academic and research leaders, to communications and HR, and more.

Last week, I also traveled to Washington, D.C., to meet with legislators from both sides of the aisle, with our partners from higher education associations, and with UC alumni and students at the Washington Center. All of these conversations had a similar undercurrent, which is to say there is a great deal of uncertainty about the future.

Of course, we are also planning for a proposed state budget for 2025-26 that would cut the University's ongoing budget by nearly 8%, or \$396.6 million. We recognize the state is in a challenging financial position, and that the Governor and Legislature are considering many difficult decisions. But a reduction of this magnitude would be alarming under any circumstances -- even more so when considered along with new federal policy proposals and other actions that could have devastating effects on the University. These cuts threaten our ability to deliver on our core missions: education, research, patient care, student support services, and our work to expand educational access for all Californians.

Today, I want to address some of the greatest risks to the University, how we are preparing and responding, and how we — as a University community — can move forward together.

In assessing the federal administration's actions, we identified three primary risks to the University.

First is the impact to our research enterprise, specifically the potential freezing or decreasing of federal contracts and grants. As the world's leading public research institution — and one that has partnered closely with the NIH and the federal government for these past 80 years — the reduction or elimination of research funding would have a particularly profound impact on our University. Hindering academic research will lead to job loss, limit the creation of new knowledge, slow the development of new cures and solutions to society's most vexing problems, and reduce the

pipeline of well-trained, innovative leaders of tomorrow. It's a lose-lose, lose-lose proposition for our country.

Federal research funding is an area where we have taken a particularly assertive stance, supporting legal actions, leading advocacy campaigns, and organizing a letter from researchers that now has thousands of signatures from across the country. We are using every tool in our toolbox because this threat is existential.

Second, the potential cuts to Medicare and Medicaid are a grave threat. These would have significant impacts on the UC Health enterprise, and on the patients we serve. We are tracking this carefully and preparing for any impacts to these programs.

The third area of concern falls under the umbrella of the University's values – the fundamentals of who we are, the people we serve, and how we support them. I'll talk more about this in a moment.

So, what are we doing to prepare for, respond to, and mitigate these emerging risks to the University's mission and values?

Our legal team has been working actively to protect the University through the courts. UC leaders, including myself, are advocating daily with state and federal elected officials for the University's policy and funding priorities. Our Federal and State Governmental Relations teams support these efforts through policy analysis, coordination with campuses and OP leaders, and their relationships and direct advocacy in Washington, D.C., and Sacramento.

Given the serious potential funding impacts facing the University at both the state and federal levels, we are also preparing for significant financial challenges. Some of our next steps are clear and need to be taken immediately.

For example, I will be directing every UC location, including the Office of the President, to prepare financial strategies and workforce management plans, and to implement cost-saving measures. Because every UC location is different, these plans will vary accordingly. In addition, we will soon

implement a systemwide hiring freeze to help the University manage its costs and conserve funds.

Some federal actions may conflict with the University's values, and require us to assess more carefully and decide on the best path forward. There are areas in which we remain steadfast, and there are areas in which we need to be open to self-reflection and change.

One of these areas became clear after the terrorist attacks of October 7, and the campus protests that followed. Since then, we have reviewed our policies and approaches carefully, partly in response to requests from our State legislators. We looked at response protocols related to expressive activities, such as protests, and made comprehensive changes to ensure a consistent systemwide response. I am pleased to report that last week, the state released \$25 million they previously held back to ensure that we effectively addressed campus climate issues. This funding does not solve our overall budget challenges, but it does recognize the progress we've made in addressing antisemitism on our campuses — which is work that continues to this day.

As I have contemplated our next steps, I have also reflected back on the past 80 years of partnership with the federal government. Our scientific discoveries have fundamentally changed the world, improving countless lives in our state, nation, and around the globe.

In my field of medicine, scientific discoveries have led to lifesaving treatments and cures. When I was starting out as a medical student at UCSF, I remember many diseases that had no cure or even effective treatment.

My first paid job at the University was counseling patients with incurable diseases. I could offer little beyond sympathy and advice on how to manage their pain.

In those days, childhood leukemia was, in most cases, a terminal diagnosis. Today, 90% or more of childhood leukemia cases can be treated effectively.

Years ago, doctors were puzzled by young men becoming ill and perishing from opportunistic infections. Then we learned to diagnose, treat, and in many cases prevent HIV/AIDS.

There have been countless other groundbreaking advancements in medicine over the years, and more are on the horizon. That's in large part due to research and discoveries made at universities, including the University of California. This kind of progress wouldn't be possible without the longstanding partnership we've had with the federal government and the NIH.

This work, and so much more of what we do and what we stand for, is at risk today. I recognize this is frightening for many people in our UC community. These feelings can make it hard to study, teach, or work.

Still, I can state unequivocally that the University of California will be here at the end of the day. The rules of engagement may have changed, but our foundational values have not. For more than 150 years, we have focused on teaching, research, and public service for the greater good. That means all of us, working together, for everyone.

As a child I learned to sing a song of the hope and grandeur that reflected the America of my seven-year-old imagination: "...amber waves of grain, purple mountains majesty, above the fruited plain ..."

As a middle schooler, I lived in fear of Russian bombs, but also of hateful people right here in the United States.

I remember being inspired by a speech given by President Lyndon Johnson to a joint session of Congress on March 15<sup>th</sup>, 1965 — 60 years ago to the day last weekend. The subject of that speech was voting rights, and it followed the violence on the Pettis bridge in Selma.

The speech was meaningful to me for a number of reasons. I had the privilege 10 years or so ago to visit the National Archives in Washington, D.C. I was with a small group and we were allowed to examine some original documents not generally on public display. One was a copy of President Johnson's speech from 1965. When I saw the document, I noticed two things. First, it was type-written, and then edited by pencil in his

own hand. And I noticed in the last sentence, one word was underlined for emphasis. Seeing this, I could imagine him reading and practicing the speech, and then adjusting it, by hand, to make sure he drove home his point. I marveled at how much our imperfect union is imagined and made manifest by our own hand, by the interactions of people, just like you and me, doing our best to improve our communities, our states, our nation.

The second thing I noticed was which word Johnson underlined. That was the word “shall,” as in, “we shall overcome.” Coming from a white southerner during an era in which Jim Crow laws still lived on the books, this was powerful language, indeed. Powerful as well was the reaction of the crowd, which greeted several of his comments with sustained, and in some cases universal, applause. I found it hopeful and inspiring then, and it feels hopeful, inspiring, and courageous six decades later.

Indian poet, philosopher, and Nobel Laureate Tagore once wrote that he dreamed of a land “where the mind is free and the head is held high,” where “words come out from the depths of truth,” where “tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection.”

This was the land of my dreams as I contemplated the “Amber waves of grain...” in my youth. This was the place where I — and since then millions of others — have enjoyed the opportunity and blessing of a world-class education, and in which I have had the privilege of serving so many others. And this is the place that we defend and protect, to preserve opportunity for outstanding students, from all walks of life, to come to learn and grow into the leaders of tomorrow.

Like President Johnson, we create and manifest our University by our own hand. What we do and how we do it creates the substance that defines our University. We must stay true to the mission of making ourselves better, every day, to be more inclusive, to build a more perfect institution.

For more than 150 years, we have focused on teaching, research, and public service for the greater good. Throughout our history as an institution and as a nation, we have weathered other struggles and found new ways to show up for the people that we serve.

I have tremendous confidence in the strength of the University of California. Working together, we have the determination, the perspective, and the ability to tackle what's ahead. We have a deep commitment to protecting this institution – along with each of you. We will address these challenges, however difficult, together. Fiat Lux.

Thank you, Chair Reilly.