

Liz Ortega
Assemblymember-Elect, 20th District
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13 November 2022

Michael Drake, President
University of California
Office of the President
1111 Franklin Street
Oakland, CA 94607

RE: Act Now to Avert the Potential Strikes of 48,000 UAW-represented Academic Workers at UC

Dear President Drake,

As the newly-elected Assemblymember for District 20, I urge you to avert the potential Unfair Labor Practice strikes of 48,000 UAW-represented Academic Workers at the University of California.

Last week, over 35,000 Academic Workers constituting three-fourths of the total UAW-represented workforce at all 10 UC campuses and Lawrence Berkeley National Lab voted to call for a strike if circumstances justify. To avert the strike and the massive disruption that this will cause for the University and for the surrounding communities, I urge you to immediately cease unfair labor practices and bargain in good faith with UAW Academic Workers in all four bargaining units.

The 48,000 UAW-represented Academic Workers — Academic Researchers, Postdoctoral Scholars, Academic Student Employees and Student Researchers — perform the bulk of the teaching and research at UC. Their talent, innovation, and labor contributes greatly to the University's mission and its ability to secure funding. In FY 2021-22, UC received \$5.1 billion from the state in instructional and research funding.

The University of California is one of the top public university systems and research institutions in the world, in no small part because of its ability to attract the most talented scholars from a wide array of backgrounds. But the University cannot live up to its stated mission of offering opportunity to all and delivering world-class education and research if it disrespects its employees by frequently and repeatedly violating California public sector labor law.

Since UAW began negotiating with UC last year, the union has filed 27 Unfair Labor Practices against the University, with many of these resulting in Complaints issued by the Public Employment Relations Board (PERB). I am deeply concerned to hear about UC's actions to bypass the bargaining process, implement unilateral changes to contractual topics, and refuse to disclose requisite information to UAW.

It is my understanding that UC's unlawful tactics are preventing the UAW from reaching agreements on core issues that address improving equity in academia, including compensation that reflects the value of workers' contributions, transit benefits that help fight climate change, paid family leave, and job security. These priorities will help the University recruit and retain a diverse workforce that reflects the population of California and includes first-generation academics, immigrants, and other historically-excluded groups, in line with my goals as an elected leader in California.

As one of California's largest employers, UC has not only the opportunity but the obligation to be a leader in setting industry standards for academia and leading the way for other public employers. I urge UC to come to the table with the UAW's four bargaining units in good faith to improve the working conditions of all Academic Workers and implement benefits and compensation commensurate with the immense value they provide the University. By failing to do so, UC is risking mass disruption and losing the talent that has earned UC its prestigious reputation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Liz Ortega", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Liz Ortega,
Assemblymember-Elect, District 20