



## Remarks to the UC Board of Regents

Steven W. Cheung, Chair of the Academic Senate

November 13, 2024

Good morning, Regents, President Drake, faculty, students, staff, and other members of the University of California community. Last Wednesday at this time, I arrived at the Office of the President in Oakland and was surprised to find the building perimeter completely boarded up and secured at the ground level. I initially thought it was some sort of vanity construction project to an already attractive building, but quickly realized that it was intentional defensive action to keep our people safe from any despondent actors bent on violent response to the decisive national election results from the night before.

At this moment of incipient federal government change, our community of learners, scholars, and service providers are perhaps feeling unease about what harm to ourselves, and our University may be lurking around the corner. Would federal student financial aid get slashed and saddle some learners with career-altering debt? Would fragile gains in closing racial, gender, and other equity gaps come undone? Would promising clean energy and fetal stem cell research never see the light of day? Would vulnerable populations lose all access to healthcare?

Those somber scenarios triggered memories of gripping uncertainty that permeated my formative years as an immigrant teenager in the mid-seventies, living in lower Manhattan. New York City was in deep trouble. Years of profligate spending brought the municipality to the brink of bankruptcy. The American economy was damaged by a crushing oil embargo to punish President Richard Nixon for airlifting supplies to an ally during the Yom Kippur war. President Gerry Ford declined federal assistance to the City. The financial crisis meant school budgets shrank, bellies gurgled, crimes soared, and aspirations dimmed. With the engine of social mobility — that is, institutions of learning — under duress, it was state and local governments, and community actions that made the difference. Governor Hugh Carey, financier Felix Rohatyn, and teachers' union leader Albert Shanker worked in tandem to illuminate a path away from the fiscal abyss that

threatened hopes and dreams. New York City recovered with stronger fiscal discipline, Egypt made peace with Israel, American prosperity rebounded, cars became smaller, lighter, and more fuel-efficient, and I subsequently relocated to California.

This meandering digression recounts an event from half a century ago in a city across the continent. I share this vignette because it is cornerstone to my deep belief that responsive governments, compassionate institutions, and human innovations can be mobilized to navigate potential harm to societal engines of social mobility. The unease I now feel about our near-term future is far from the pervasive anxieties that, at times, overwhelmed me as an immigrant teenager. Through the years, I have witnessed resiliency and resourcefulness play out in a myriad of ways to solve challenging problems.

I am optimistic California will mount broad and vigorous support for the University's continued dedication to our mission areas of teaching, research, and service, should such intervention be needed. Governor Gavin Newsom recently announced a special session of the State Legislature to safeguard California values on climate change, reproductive rights, immigration, and other important commitments. The University has been steadfast in ensuring student access to a world-class education, regardless of immigration status. UC Health will continue to combat structural inequities that are barriers to healthcare access. The Academic Senate, in the exercise of shared governance, will partner with University administrators to advance mission area interests in the face of anticipated strong headwinds blowing from Washington.

I assure you this Steven Cheung, in contrast to a politician by the same name, will be staying in California beyond January 20<sup>th</sup> to do the good work of the University. This is reflected in the Academic Senate priorities set for the current academic year:

- Continue creating clear transfer pathways to welcome more diverse cohorts of California community college students to the UC campuses;
- Endeavor to find balance between supporting the right to free speech and protest, and protecting the right to unfettered access to education;
- Explore the feasibility of a common payroll calendar where salary adjustments would be effective on July 1<sup>st</sup> for all employees;
- Examine applications of artificial intelligence in instruction delivery and student support;

- Re-imagine how academic doctorate programs may be configured to meet labor market and funding support realities;
- Study benefits redesign options to stabilize health plan premiums for active and retired employees;
- Collaborate with UC Health to expand healthcare access, particularly for the central valley and inland empire; and
- Advocate for full decarbonization of the UC campuses sooner rather than later.

The essential partner for the work of the Academic Senate is the president of the Academic Senate, who happens to be the president of the University. The search for President Michael Drake's successor has already begun. I have the privilege to serve as chair of the Academic Advisory Committee, which is composed of faculty representatives from across the UC system and will play a part in the decision-making process. It should come as no surprise that I would like for the next UC president to support Academic Senate priorities. I look forward to working with the Regents Special Committee to identify and recruit an outstanding individual who will lead the University of California to its next great chapter.