

CLAY AWARDS | MAY 6, 2026



**PICTURED:** Tony P. Schoenberg, Linda S. Gilleran, Kevin R. Budner, Claudia Polsky, Annie M. Wanless, Kyle A. McLorg, Erwin Chemerinsky  
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CLASS ACTION

## Professors, Litigators Fight Back Against Trump's UC Grant Cuts — and Win

THAKUR V. TRUMP

CLAUDIA POLSKY, ERWIN CHERMERINSKY, UC BERKELEY SCHOOL OF LAW; ELIZABETH J. CABRASER, RICHARD M. HEIMANN, KEVIN R. BUDNER, ANNIE M. WANLESS, LIEFF CABRASER HEIMANN & BERNSTEIN LLP; ANTHONY P. SCHOENBERG, DONALD E. SOBELMAN, LINDA S. GILLERAN, DYLAN M. SILVA, KYLE A. MCLORG, KATHERINE T. BALKOSKI, FARELLA BRAUN + MARTEL LLP

**W**hen the Trump administration issued a series of executive orders and directives a year ago targeting for elimination hundreds of millions of dollars in federal research grants to University of California scholars, strong, effective and immediate pushback came from the school's professors.

Led by UC Berkeley clinical law professor Claudia Polsky, the researchers found ready support for their class action effort from Lieff Cabraser Heimann & Bernstein LLP and Farella Braun + Martel LLP. The team of a dozen or so lawyers has taken on the entire federal government — and while the case remains ongoing on several tracks, they've made significant progress.

In June, U.S. District Judge Rita F. Lin of San Francisco granted a preliminary injunction restoring tens of millions of dollars in grants across a spectrum of federal agencies. In July, the Trump administration announced that it would target UCLA in particular, and cut more than \$1 billion in grants from researchers there. The legal team again mobilized, arguing that UCLA researchers were covered by Judge Lin's

preliminary injunction, and in September, got more than a billion dollars in grants restored.

Lin said the federal government engaged in "quintessential viewpoint discrimination" when it rescinded the funding.

Later, when the federal government announced that it would be eliminating the single largest science grant to UC — the clean hydrogen project known as ARCHES — the team swung into action again, seeking restoration of a \$1.2 billion planet-saving model program.

Key to the effort was Polsky, a former deputy attorney general who was on sabbatical writing a book about toxic chemicals when the cuts were first announced. "I worked the case myself for about six weeks before I approached Lieff Cabraser, and once Elizabeth Cabraser, bless her, said yes, we brought on Farella," Polsky said.

She and the team were particularly struck by the refusal of UC administrators or the regents to get involved. "They simply did not show up," Polsky said. "I was stupefied by the

research carnage across the entire UC system and by the administration's refusal to defend it. They were missing in action from the start."

UC Berkeley School of Law Dean Erwin Chemerinsky stepped up to successfully argue before Lin for the preliminary injunction. Cabraser and colleagues put together a document database, available on the firm's website, so institutions anywhere can see how to fight grant terminations. Farella Braun partner Anthony P. Schoenberg and members of his firm supplied litigation firepower.

Farella Braun's Linda S. Gilleran said the fight was personal and professional. "I come from a family of scientists who rely on grants. Clean air and clean water don't come by accident. Research is crucial."

The case remains at the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals with a possible trip to the U.S. Supreme Court ahead. Polsky hasn't gotten back to working on her book. "There's still a tremendous amount to do," she said. "Maybe by this summer we can get a nap."