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**FORUM**

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## Disinviting Summers was justified

*John Cary Sims, a professor of law at the University of the Pacific's McGeorge School of Law in Sacramento, and Deb Niemeier, a professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering at the University of California, Davis, are responding to the Sept. 19 editorial, "Shirking controversy / UC missteps undermine role of university."*

**By John Cary Sims  
and Deb Niemeier**  
SPECIAL TO THE BEE

**E**ven though duck season hasn't opened yet, The Bee fired off both barrels at the faculty members of the University of California who objected to having former Harvard President Lawrence Summers address the UC Board of Regents. Hundreds of faculty members objected to the invitation that had been extended to Summers, and then Chair Richard Blum retracted it. The Bee suggested that Summers had been "censored" in a manner that infringed on academic freedom.

This controversy has nothing to do with academic freedom. Blum invited Summers to address the regents at a private dinner in Sacramento - away from an academic campus - where there would have been no opportunity for any meaningful public scrutiny or debate. Blum invited Summers without consulting the university community, and secrecy was maintained when Summers was not listed on the agenda or any other public document.

In short, Summers' appearance before

the Regents was stacked in such a way that no debate or discussion was possible, violating a bedrock principle of academic freedom. Summers was to be given privileged access to the governing body of one of the world's premier public educational institutions without any public accountability. When Blum learned that many faculty members objected to this arrangement, he retracted the invitation, as he had every right to do.

If Summers had been part of a public forum on campus, rather than speaking at a private dinner in Sacramento, his views would have been put on sale in the "marketplace of ideas." Despite the insulting and uninformed opinions he expressed about women scientists in a 2005 speech in Boston, we doubt that there would have been objection to a public discussion featuring Summers.

Blum has indicated that at the private dinner Summers would have addressed "the ability of UC to compete with private universities such as Harvard and Stanford." Given the contentious nature of Summers' tenure as president of Harvard, and his early exit from the presidency, the entire UC community has a vital stake in any advice he is providing to the regents.

The UC faculty did not in any way depart from the principles of academic freedom. Summers remains entirely free to present his views to university audiences and to the public at large, and we will defend his right to a public discourse, at the University of California and elsewhere.