

# 'Deeply Disturbing': No Nonprofit Is Safe as Trump Targets Harvard's Tax-Exempt Status

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President Donald Trump's administration is reportedly considering plans to revoke Harvard University's tax-exempt status, a major escalation against the Ivy League institution that critics said marks just the start of a broader assault on nonprofits that refuse to bow to the White House's demands.

CNN was [first to report](#) Wednesday that the Internal Revenue Service—where Trump has [installed an ally](#) as interim commissioner—is weighing whether to yank Harvard's tax exemption, news that came a day after the president [suggested](#) on his social media platform that "perhaps Harvard should lose its Tax Exempt Status and be Taxed as a Political Entity if it keeps pushing political, ideological, and terrorist inspired/supporting 'Sickness?'"

Earlier this week, the Trump administration froze over \$2 billion in federal funding for Harvard after the university's president said the institution would not comply with the president's policy demands. Specifically, as *The Harvard Crimson* [reported](#), Trump called on Harvard to "derecognize pro-Palestine student groups, audit its academic programs for viewpoint diversity, and expel students involved in an altercation at a 2023 pro-Palestine protest on the Harvard Business School campus."

Alan Garber, Harvard's president, said in response that "no government—regardless of which party is in power—should dictate what private universities can teach, whom they can admit and hire, and which areas of study and inquiry they can pursue."

Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.), the top Democrat on the Senate Finance Committee, warned in a statement Thursday that "if Trump gets away with weaponizing the tax system to target a political enemy, every American is at risk."

"The First Amendment and federal tax law make clear no president can raise a university's taxes because he doesn't like what they teach," said Wyden. "If this corrupt shakedown scheme stands, nonprofits from churches to temples to hospitals could be forced to echo Trump's MAGA line or see their taxes hiked. Any Republican who claims to believe in the Constitution and doesn't speak up is responsible for what happens next."

***"We know this assault won't end with Harvard, so I will be fighting back—and I encourage every single American to stand up against it and make their voices heard."***

Trump's attack on Harvard is part of a broader campaign of retribution against universities and other institutions and organizations that are unwilling to capitulate to his administration.

*The Guardian* [reported](#) last week that administration officials "have launched investigations into progressive and climate organizations, colleges, and recipients of government grants."

The Vera Institute of Justice, a nonprofit that fights mass incarceration, [said](#) Wednesday that the Elon Musk-led [Department of Government Efficiency](#) informed the group of "its plan to assign a [DOGE](#) team" to Vera "as part of its larger plan to assign DOGE teams to 'every institute or agency that has congressional monies appropriated to it.'"

"We are sharing this information broadly with other nonprofits that receive federal funding—so they can be aware of DOGE's plan to assign teams to investigate their operations," said Vera president Nick Turner. "We also are exposing this latest intimidation tactic targeting private, independent mission-driven organizations and undermining civil society."

Cole Leiter, executive director of Americans Against Government Censorship—a coalition [formed late last year](#) amid a Republican-led assault on nonprofits—said that the administration's decision to target Harvard's tax-exempt status makes clear that "they want to start shutting down organizations that present any sort of opposition to their goals or ideology."

"Today the organization being threatened by the government is Harvard, tomorrow it could be a community organization feeding the hungry or helping children with disabilities," said Leiter. "If the Trump administration decides it wants to target schools, groups, churches, or welfare organizations because they don't fall in line with their political agenda, it will open the door for any future administration to use this same unchecked power against more American citizens."

"This is a dangerous practice," Leiter added, "and it is one that should end before it ever begins."

An IRS decision on Harvard's tax status is expected imminently, according to *CNN* and *The New York Times*, which both cited unnamed people familiar with the matter.

The *Times* noted that "federal law bars the president from either directly or indirectly requesting the IRS to investigate or audit specific targets."

"The IRS does at times revoke tax exemptions from organizations for conducting too many political or commercial activities, but those groups can appeal the agency's decision in court," the newspaper continued. "Any attempt to take away Harvard's tax exemption would be likely to face a legal challenge, which tax experts expect would be successful."

Harvard said in a [statement](#) that the "unprecedented action" of revoking the university's tax-exempt status "would endanger our ability to carry out our educational mission."

"It would result in diminished financial aid for students, abandonment of critical medical research programs, and lost opportunities for innovation," the university said. "The unlawful use of this instrument more broadly would have grave consequences for the future of higher education in America."

Rep. Lloyd Doggett (D-Texas), who led the charge last year against Republican [legislation](#) that would have granted the Trump administration sweeping power to strip nonprofits of their tax-exempt status, [said](#) Wednesday that the threat to nonprofits "is re-emerging as Trump targets Harvard for standing for academic freedom against his war on higher education and intellectual inquiry."

Rep. Jerry Nadler (D-N.Y.) [called](#) the Trump administration's latest attack on Harvard "bullshit" and echoed others' warnings about the broader threat to nonprofits.

"This deeply disturbing and blatantly unlawful action is Trump's latest foray in his war to politicize higher education and degrade any institution that refuses to bend the knee," Nadler wrote on social media. "We know this assault won't end with Harvard, so I will be fighting back—and I encourage every single American to stand up against it and make their voices heard."