

Ypsilanti utility board halts University of Michigan nuclear weapons data center

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On April 22, the Ypsilanti Community Utilities Authority (YCUA) unanimously passed a resolution proposing a 12-month moratorium on providing water and sewage services to new data centers. The moratorium serves as a temporary roadblock to a \$1.25 billion computing facility proposed by the University of Michigan (U-M) and the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL).

The planned complex would be sited on 144 acres of land along the Huron River in Ypsilanti Township, across the street from the Ford Rawsonville Plant, comprising a primary 124-acre plot and an adjacent 20-acre parcel. The plans detail a facility requiring a power draw of 100 megawatts, an amount of electricity sufficient to serve 75,000-100,000 homes.

To prevent the supercomputers from melting down, the facility would rely on cooling systems that are projected to consume between 500,000 and one million gallons of fresh water every day, sufficient to supply more than 3,000 homes. This water would be siphoned from the YCUA, directly competing with the utility needs of the surrounding civilian population.

A proposed Thor Equities data center that could demand up to one million gallons daily will also be affected by the moratorium.

While the U-M/LANL complex features a 50,000-square-foot “Academic Research Facility” for unclassified university work, the core of the site is a fortified 240,000-square-foot “federal research facility” dedicated to classified national security research. Since the implementation of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty in 1996, the US military has not conducted live, explosive underground nuclear tests. To maintain, modernize and develop new variants of nuclear warheads without physically detonating them, the Department of Energy’s National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) relies on high-performance, hyperscale

computing.

When asked at a January 29 U-M open house event if the facility will be used in nuclear weapons research, LANL Deputy Laboratory Director for Science, Technology & Engineering J. Patrick Fitch responded:

The short answer is yes, because aspects of a nuclear weapon is key to our simulation expertise. ... We want this loop to include large investments in national security, so that spins back into the basic science, and what we learn here — that list of non-nuclear weapons stuff — spins into nuclear weapons. ... One of the two computers we’re planning in our 55 megawatts (section) — if this facility is built — will be for what’s called secret restricted data. ... So it’ll be for the nuclear weapons program. Not exclusively, but it’ll be able to do that work.

The U-M/LANL data center is an important element of the economic and military policy of the Democratic Party. Governor Gretchen Whitmer and the state Democratic establishment have worked to transform Michigan into an industrial, logistical and computational hub for the military-industrial complex.

Using the Michigan Strategic Fund and tapping into federal subsidies provided by the Biden administration’s CHIPS and Science Act, the state government is attempting to “reshore” critical military supply chains. Democratic local and state representatives, working closely with the trade union bureaucracy, have cynically packaged this militarization as a boon for the working class, touting the “creation of high-paying jobs” and “workforce development.” U-M promotional materials boast of creating 200 permanent jobs and 300 union

construction jobs at the site.

This push to build the U-M/LANL data center is another step in the militarization of the university system and its political alignment with the ruling class's drive toward authoritarian rule. US imperialism is preparing for war with rival nuclear-armed powers and for the suppression of internal dissent, while university leaders trade scientific principles, academic independence and worker protections for defense contracts.

Over the past year, the U-M administration has collaborated with a sweeping campaign of political repression. Five Chinese national scholars—Yunqing Jian, Chengxuan Han, Xu Bai, Fengfan Zhang, and Zhiyong Zhang—were fired by the university, charged by the Department of Justice (DOJ) with conspiring to smuggle biological materials, detained for months, and removed from the country. At Indiana University, Youhuang Xiang was deported to China after almost five months of detention. In all six cases, the DOJ elevated administrative lapses, which would ordinarily be handled with a fine, into felony conspiracy and smuggling charges carrying a potential 25-year prison sentence.

On March 19, Danhao Wang, a brilliant 30-year-old Chinese postdoctoral researcher in U-M's College of Engineering, took his own life at the G.G. Brown Laboratory building. Wang was subjected to hostile interrogation by federal agents just a day prior to his death. He was a rising star in advanced materials science, co-authoring a landmark April 2025 *Nature* paper on wurtzite ferroelectrics—semiconductors that could form the basis for the next generation of microelectronics.

On March 26, just a week after Wang's death, U-M President Domenico Grasso testified before the House Committee on Education and the Workforce at a hearing provocatively titled "US Universities Under Siege: Foreign Espionage, Stolen Innovation, & the National Security Threat." Grasso boasted of U-M's collaboration with the national security state, saying, "Safety and security is a *team* effort, and at Michigan, we know how important it is to be a *team player*." [Grasso's emphasis]

At the time of his testimony, Grasso and the university had suppressed news of Wang's death. The U-M president told the committee, headed by right-wing Republican Tim Walberg of Michigan and including Michigan Democrat Haley Stevens, that he had cut off collaboration with a Chinese university targeted by the committee and revoked student visas of Chinese researchers prosecuted by the Trump administration, making them subject to deportation. Stevens promoted

legislation to expand the definition of partnerships with "malign foreign talent programs."

The U-M administration's alignment with the drive for war and dictatorship has prepared it to be a partner in the fascistic restructuring of the military initiated by Secretary of War Pete Hegseth. Hegseth released a memorandum revamping the US military's Professional Military Education program, replacing Ivy League institutions with more ideologically compliant schools, including U-M, alongside Hillsdale College, a small Christian college in southern Michigan, and televangelist Jerry Falwell's Liberty University.

The Ypsilanti data center has encountered resistance from workers and students, which culminated in the August 2025 unanimous vote by the Ypsilanti Township Board of Trustees to pass Resolution 2025-23, formally declaring strong opposition to the data center and demanding the university relocate the project. This public pressure forced the April 22 Ypsilanti Community Utilities Authority decision to implement the 12-month moratorium on water and sewage services.

The 12-month moratorium is only a temporary delay. U-M, backed by the National Nuclear Security Administration and the Whitmer administration, will use this period to regroup, produce sanitized environmental impact studies, offer financial payouts and exert legal pressure to force the utility authority's hand. The fight to stop the data center cannot be won through appeals to the U-M administration or Democratic Party officials, who are fundamentally aligned with the war drive. It requires the independent mobilization of the working class.



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