

May 19, 2008

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Regent Committee for UW-Madison Chancellor Search

David G. Walsh, Chair  
Mark J. Bradley, Regent President  
Ambassador Thomas Loftus  
Charles Pruitt, Regent Vice President  
Colleene P. Thomas

Dear Members of the Regent Committee for UW-Madison Chancellor Search,

I am writing to you in regards to your decision to recommend one of four finalists to become the next Chancellor for the University of Wisconsin (UW) - Madison.

As a former UW-Milwaukee faculty member and currently President of the union of more than 17,000 public employees who are members of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) from across the state, including graduate employees and professional staff employed across the UW System, I appreciate that the UW-Madison Chancellor is often recognized as the leading voice of public higher education in our state. I also appreciate that the University has significant room for improvement and that the next Chancellor at UW-Madison will have many opportunities as well as a responsibility to advance the campus – and the state – strongly into the future.

One change that the University can make that would enhance the whole institution's abilities to stand up for itself is to remove the historically-idiosyncratic barriers that presently prevent the University's core workforce of faculty and academic staff from bargaining collectively.

Governor Doyle has explained his support for collective bargaining rights by telling reporters that faculty and academic staff should be "able to represent their own economic interests" just like any other workers in the state. Indeed, one reason why the State Senate voted 21 to 12 earlier this year -- with bipartisan support -- to extend bargaining rights to academic staff and faculty is that all other groups of workers in the state are permitted this basic freedom, including attorneys, accountants, physicians, and engineers.

As you select the next Chancellor for UW-Madison, it is important that the person you hire have respect for the fact that faculty and academic staff should no longer be denied the basic workplace right to collectively bargain.

Unfortunately, two of the finalists reportedly made statements during a series of luncheon meetings last week that are alarming.

First, Tim Mulcahy apparently stated that he would aim to “avoid faculty and academic staff organizing at all costs” and that he would hope that “things don’t get so bad that a union would be necessary.”

Beyond the disturbing interest to disempower the University’s core workforce, Mulcahy’s presumption that unionization would emerge only in reaction to “bad” conditions is misplaced and wrongheaded.

As Governor Doyle and other supporters understand, the University’s programs and people are presently the “path of least resistance” for the state legislature whenever cuts need to be made. When the University’s core workforce is able to organize with the same tools that all other workers in the state are permitted, there is ample evidence that the empowerment of employees will generate improvements for the University as a whole.

For example, the organization of forensic scientists as part of AFT – through Wisconsin Science Professionals (WSP) – has played a critical role in winning additional funds for the State’s crime lab. In other cases, professional staff employed by the University as well as numerous other state agencies who are part of the Wisconsin Professional Employees Council (WPEC) have negotiated wages that are substantively higher than those allocated -- without the benefit of collective bargaining -- to the University’s academic staff and faculty.

Likewise, the faculty and staff at Wisconsin's technical colleges have demonstrated the predictable outcome that collective bargaining facilitates competitive compensation programs.

Second, Rebecca Blank reportedly told the same luncheon series that she views unions as “typically adversarial” and more appropriate for workers who are “lower on the totem pole” than faculty and academic staff.

As it relates to the question of contentiousness, it is clear that the state legislature has taken an adversarial approach to the University’s employees too often over the years. To respond to these kinds of attacks, it should be clear to observers that faculty and academic staff – with the simple options provided by collective bargaining rights – would be best equipped to respond to these attacks.

On the question of “status,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education's* recent feature article about the departure of faculty from UW-Madison to other campuses highlighted the fact that institutions where the faculty and professional staff have democratically decided to unionize (e.g., Rutgers) are successfully raiding Wisconsin’s campuses.

Lest any of these reported comments were taken out of context or mischaracterizations of the finalists’ positions, I am copying each of them as well as others who are referenced above to support open communication.

In your deliberations, I am optimistic that you will prioritize the fact that the next Chancellor for UW-Madison will benefit himself or herself as well as the University as a whole if she or he supports the

basic workplace rights of the University's employees. Further, I am optimistic that you will appreciate that allowing the democratic empowerment of the University's core workforce is necessary for strengthening UW-Madison as well as the entire UW System.

Thank you for your consideration of my comments, and I look forward to future communications.

Sincerely,



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Mark Evenson, President, The Association of University of Wisconsin Professionals, AFT Local 3535  
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