

Rep. Taylor: In unprecedented move, JFC Republicans allot millions to establish partisan, conservative think tank at UW-Madison

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MADISON – Yesterday, the Republican-controlled Joint Finance Committee allocated \$3 million in state funds in an unprecedented move to use taxpayer money to fund a partisan, conservative think tank at UW-Madison called the Tommy G. Thompson Center on Public Leadership. Republican Assembly Speaker Robin Vos stated in media accounts that this Center was designed to counter “left-leaning” research organizations and “liberal thinking” on campus.

This comes on the heels of a bill Vos is attempting to push through the legislature that unconstitutionally punishes students for exercising their First Amendment rights by the threat of expulsion.

The think tank will actually be controlled by a board dominated by exclusively Republican political appointees without a single Democratic appointment. According to press accounts, UW Political Science Professor Ryan Owens, a former staffer to Governor Thompson who has received funding from the conservative Bradley Foundation, is vying to lead the Center. A significant portion, \$500,000, must be used to pay speakers for engagements at other UW campuses.

“After \$795 million in cuts to the UW System, including millions in cuts that UW-Madison had to absorb during the last budget, the priority of Republican legislators

is to fund a partisan propaganda machine to support their failing agenda that has stifled economic growth, resulted in crumbling roads and schools and the stagnation of middle income wages,” stated Taylor. “This is a serious misuse of public money for the purposes of pushing a partisan, right-wing agenda on UW campuses,” stated Taylor.

UW-Madison currently has its own public policy school, the world-renowned LaFollette School of Public Affairs which receives \$600,000 of public funds annually. The Tommy G. Thompson Center will receive \$1.5 million annually over the next two years, with more to come from the private sector.

“How ironic that the Republican leaders who tried to gut the Wisconsin Idea and abolish Wisconsin’s open records laws are the ones pushing this Center, which will undoubtedly end up subsidizing the speaking fees of their conservative buddies who will tour the UW System,” stated Taylor. “Right wing groups like the Bradley Foundation will most certainly dole out big bucks to this Center to promote their harmful agenda of privatizing public education and eroding the rights and wages of working people.”

Earlier this month, the Charles Koch Foundation made a substantial donation to UW-Stout for the creation of “Center for the Study of Institutions and Innovation.” In 2012 alone, the Koch brothers donated nearly \$400 million to defeat Democrats at the ballot box.