

Andrew Petersen: UW System engaging stakeholders on 'Blueprint'

Posted on Friday, May 22, 2020

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The COVID-19 pandemic has upended our lives. In higher education, it has sparked pointed questions locally and nationally about the short-term operations and long-term future of the University of Wisconsin System.

When the time came to hold a public discussion on the Blueprint for the University of Wisconsin System Beyond COVID-19, UW System President Ray Cross conducted media interviews and the Board of Regents scheduled a public meeting to discuss it and the very real, very serious financial challenges facing our state's cherished public universities.

As part of that nearly four-hour Regents open meeting, President Cross made clear that as an outgoing president, his ideas would need to be embraced not only by the Regents but by the next System president. Moreover, he made it abundantly clear to the media and to the Regents that the Blueprint would benefit from scrutiny by faculty, staff, students, and community leaders; in fact, he has encouraged it.

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Within one week, Regents began that process by inviting shared governance representatives from across the System to three virtual meetings, which included about 350 faculty and staff stakeholder participants this week. Shared governance, the process in which affected groups help in decision-making, is key to ensuring the stability and strength of the UW System post-pandemic, and we want to ensure we are engaged with them. Additional reform ideas and initiatives need to be identified, as nothing should be "off the table" as we look to reposition the UW System on a

strong footing post-pandemic.

Both President Cross and the Board of Regents are committed to being transparent and collaborative. That's why President Cross discussed his Blueprint at a public meeting. That's why we invited four chancellors to the meeting to discuss the myriad financial challenges confronting them and the devastating impact COVID-19 has had on their campuses. That's why a cross-section of four Regents are participating in the listening sessions with shared governance leaders.

The status quo is not sustainable, and reviewing reforms to drive efficiency, strengthen our online services, and showcase the distinctiveness of our universities will be a priority. The Blueprint is intended to set the table for discussion about our long-term future.

I know the long-term stability of the UW System is also the goal of our shared governance partners. We can all agree the UW System is the best investment our state can make to improve economic viability for state residents, to retrain displaced workers, to serve nontraditional students on campus and online, and to grow strong citizens for the future. The UW System maintains exceptional people and promise. We need to harness that energy and ingenuity as we move forward.

COVID-19 has accelerated challenges facing the UW, and this disease is a villain we must respect. That said, as Regent President, I along with my board colleagues remain committed to working with our shared governance partners with a sense of urgency because ensuring Wisconsin's future success is essential. The Wisconsin Idea of the 21st century, and all of its promise and opportunity, is just too important to ignore!

- Petersen is president of the UW System Board of Regents.