

# Johnsen withdraws from UW president search

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Jim Johnsen today suddenly withdrew his name from consideration for president of the UW System, saying Wisconsin university officials “have important process issues to work out.”

Johnsen, president of the University of Alaska system, was the sole finalist identified by a search committee to replace the retiring Ray Cross. His selection drew immediate concerns from faculty and staff, who were also critical of the process that identified him because they weren’t included on the search committee.

“After deep reflection as to where I am called to lead a university system through these challenging times, it is clear to me and my family that it is in Alaska,” [Johnsen said](#). “I appreciate the strong support from the search committee at Wisconsin, and for all those who supported my candidacy, but it’s clear they have important process issues to work out.”

The move comes just three days after Johnsen did a virtual campus forum in which he expressed excitement to see the “Wisconsin Idea” in progress. He also pledged if selected he would “repair” relationships with legislative leaders to navigate through upcoming financial challenges.

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UW System Regent President Andrew Petersen praised Johnsen, saying he was unanimously identified by the search committee as the best candidate to lead the system. He said the university will first work through its “immediate financial and operational challenges with the pandemic” before considering its next steps for a new search “when there is a better opportunity.”

“It’s disappointing, a dark day for the UW System,” Petersen said.

During a meeting last week, Regent Vice President Mike Grebe today defended the presidential search committee's decision to move forward with Johnsen as the sole finalist. He said other finalists backed out. He said this left the committee with three options: bringing back non-finalist candidates for consideration, restarting the search process from the beginning, or moving forward with Johnsen.

The first two options, he said, would be too burdensome or disingenuous.