

Thompson, shared governance groups seek to limit UW System budget cuts

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UW System President Tommy Thompson and a coalition of shared governance groups are seeking to limit cuts to the state's university system following Gov. Tony Evers' call for \$250 million in state agency budget cuts for the current fiscal year.

Thompson said additional cuts in state spending for the UW System would be "an obstacle" for safely reopening schools for the fall semester.

"Our universities are doing everything we can to provide in-person classes safely this fall and reductions in state support for the UW System are an obstacle to that work," Thompson said in a statement. "We are a vital economic engine and one of the state's largest employers. The UW System has already borne a disproportionate share of state cuts to date."

Thompson said he is working with the Evers administration to manage the cuts and secure needed resources for the school year. He said he believes he made "a compelling case" and that Evers would "be helpful" to the system.

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A system spokesman said it hadn't yet been determined what portion of the new cuts would come from universities.

Meanwhile, UW System shared governance groups argue the state's universities "should be a funding priority" during the COVID-19 economic crisis because of its contributions to the state economy.

The Public Representation Organization of the UW-Madison Faculty Senate,

Academic Staff Professional Organization and Associated Students of Madison in a collective statement yesterday called for a limit to additional system GPR cuts and boost university funding to help deal with the pandemic and reopen safely.

“We believe that making an investment in the University of Wisconsin System is an easy choice,” the statement read. “We call on the Board of Regents and UW System leadership, and the state’s elected representatives, to ensure that the UW System’s funding is not so significantly diminished that it cannot operate effectively for the people of Wisconsin.”

The statement said group leaders were “very surprised” when Evers previously directed DOA to cut \$70 million in state spending, and UWS accounted for nearly 60 percent of those cuts.

Evers yesterday directed DOA Secretary Joel Brennan to work with state agencies to find a quarter of a billion dollars in cost savings for the current fiscal year as the state deals with a revenue crunch due to COVID-19.

Agencies earlier this summer trimmed \$70 million to address anticipated revenue shortfalls amid the pandemic. The UW System accounted for about \$41 million of the earlier cuts.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has had a tremendous impact on our nation, state, communities, businesses, and families,” Evers said in a statement. “All state and local governments are now experiencing the difficult balance of providing vital services to residents in crisis while also managing tough fiscal realities.”

Spokesmen for Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald, R-Juneau, and Assembly Speaker Robin Vos were not immediately available for comment.