

Manydeeds considering bid to lead Board of Regents

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UW System Regent Edmund Manydeeds told WisPolitics.com he's considering a run for board president this June.

Manydeeds, an appointee of Dem Gov. Tony Evers, said he hasn't yet fully decided whether to put his name in the race but that he's "thinking about it." And as far as he knows, he's the only appointee on the 18-member board other than Regent Vice President Mike Grebe, an appointee of former GOP Gov. Scott Walker, who's looking to take over the leadership role.

Evers' appointees this year for the first time in his term hold a 9-7 majority of seats over Walker appointees. The state superintendent and Wisconsin Technical College System president also hold voting positions. Regents in a board meeting last month suggested there likely would be a contested vote for president this time around.

"I've given the other regents a heads up that I'm thinking about it," Manydeeds said. "But it's not a situation where you make speeches and run around asking people to vote for you, at least that's not the way I'm approaching it."

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Instead of actively campaigning for the board presidency, he said he's open to speaking with any of his colleagues who have questions or are considering voting for him.

Evers appointed Manydeeds, an attorney, to the board in 2019. He also previously served on the board from 2010 to 2017 as an appointee of former Dem Gov. Jim Doyle.

Regents every June vote for who will be president of the board, with presidents

traditionally serving only a year or two. The vice president then typically takes over the following year, though contested elections have happened in the past.

Manydeeds noted how in 2012, then-VP Brent Smith and Regent Mike Falbo both ran to succeed outgoing Regent President Michael Spector. Smith ultimately did take over as regent president that year, with Falbo then taking over after him in 2013.

“It’s not like it’s always, you know, you become vice president and you’re automatically going to be president,” Manydeeds said.

Grebe, an attorney with longtime GOP ties, didn’t immediately respond to a request for comment.

Meanwhile, Evers-appointed regents in a Senate Universities and Technical Colleges Committee public hearing told lawmakers they wanted to speak with all candidates considering a run for president before deciding which one to support.

The committee Thursday heard testimony from Regents John Miller, Corey Saffold, Héctor Colón, Amy Bogost and Kyle Weatherly on their confirmations to the board.

Committee Chair Roger Roth, R-Appleton, asked the regents if they would commit to an “orderly transition” this June by supporting Grebe. He said the board setup — with 16 governor-appointed members each serving seven-year terms — is meant to keep the UW System above partisan politics, as regents could theoretically serve under three different governors during their term.

Most regents said they hadn’t yet seriously talked with Grebe or any other interested candidates about the position and that they intend to do so in the coming weeks before throwing their support behind anyone.

But Weatherly, representing the 4th Congressional District in Milwaukee, told Roth he hoped Grebe’s bid would go unchallenged in order to maintain some perception of nonpartisanship for the UW System and the board.

“My goal is we don’t have a contested election,” he said. “My hope is that, frankly, it’s a voice vote and everyone will continue to believe that regents are a nonpartisan group. Because everything that I’ve seen on the inside has led me to believe that that is true.”

Weatherly added that in his time as a regent he has found Grebe to be “incredibly impressive” and “extraordinarily welcoming,” though he said he hadn’t yet talked with the presumptive contender about the position.

Multiple regents during the hearing noted the COVID-19 pandemic has made it difficult for them to really get to know their colleagues, as most meetings have been held at least partially online.

Additionally, Weatherly suggested it should at least be taken into consideration that Grebe only has one year left in his term on the board.

Current Regent President Andrew Petersen has held the role since 2019. And Weatherly said he felt Petersen and the board as a whole benefitted from his extra year of experience.

Evers appointed Weatherly to the board in May last year for a term ending in 2027.