

Reps. Shankland, Emerson, Shelton and Sen. Smith: Introduce “Reaching Higher for Higher Education” legislative package

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MADISON – This morning, Rep. Katrina Shankland (D-Stevens Point), Sen. Jeff Smith (D- Brunswick), Rep. Kristina Shelton (D-Green Bay), and Rep. Jodi Emerson (D-Eau Claire) held a press conference with higher education leaders to debut the “Reaching Higher for Higher Education” legislative package. The seven bills included in the package send a strong message to current and future students and educators in Wisconsin that they are supported and valued.

Rep. Katrina Shankland stated, “Wisconsin was once a leader in higher education, and we have the opportunity to restore our legacy again. For many, the cost of higher education is falling out of reach. Our students deserve to have the same opportunities that their parents and grandparents had, and that’s why we are introducing this package today.

Our bills will invest in public higher education by funding the UW System and Wisconsin Technical College System, expand funding for need-based financial aid at technical colleges and universities, expand the UW Tuition Promise to all UW System campuses, and fund a tuition freeze at UW System while ensuring all future tuition freezes are fully funded. This legislative package will make higher education more affordable and accessible to students in every community of our state. Our bills will also ensure our public higher education institutions receive the support they need in order to continue the promise of the Wisconsin Idea and the American Dream.”

Rep. Kristina Shelton added, “If we are to achieve the UW System mission to ‘ensure the survival of this and future generations and improve the quality of life for all,’ then we must be sure that all have the opportunity to participate in higher education classrooms to grow knowledge, wisdom, and values.”

Nerissa Nelson, a librarian, professor, and Common Council chair at UW-Stevens Point, shared, “The continued budget cuts to the UW System over the years have impacted the services and support available to students, not to mention the high stress levels they impose on faculty and staff, and the burnout that often accompanies these. Public higher education, including our UW System, is a public good, and the renewal of the Wisconsin Idea for the 21st Century cannot go without proper, sustainable state support.”

Jon Shelton, Vice President of Higher Education for AFT-WI and a UW-Green Bay Associate professor, said, “As an educator, I can tell you that our working conditions are our students’ learning conditions, and when we don’t have enough faculty and staff on our campuses, we can’t give our students all the support they need. We’ve got this terrific package of bills today, and all we have to do now is get them to the floor. It’s just common sense, and I look forward to the day when no student’s family hardship keeps them from fully participating in the Wisconsin Idea.”

“I’m proud to stand with my colleagues today and introduce legislation that will not only be critical to my district but will help bolster the workforce across Wisconsin,” **said Rep. Jodi Emerson.** “It is vital now more than ever that our state invest in our higher education systems to grow the state’s workforce and maintain affordability and accessibility for students.”

Sen. Jeff Smith concluded, “All Wisconsinites should have access to the opportunities that a higher education provides. Unfortunately, college affordability has been a longstanding concern and has deterred many students from completing – or even pursuing – a postsecondary degree. The Reaching Higher for Higher Education package will make students’ dreams of attending college more attainable by improving college affordability and investing in Wisconsin’s higher education institutions. It’s critical that we act on these bills to encourage students to continue their education and gain the skills to succeed in Wisconsin’s workforce.”