

Senate approves three bills to curb foreign influence at UW System

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The state Senate signed off on a trio of bills designed to curb foreign influence at the UW System, including one that would prohibit members of the Chinese People's Liberation Army from being admitted to or working for the university.

The bills passed along party lines as Dems decried them as the Legislature trying to micromanage the System.

Sen. Bob Wirch, D-Pleasant Prairie, noted the state once provided half of the funding to the UW System, but that's down to 15 percent. He urged lawmakers to "keep your hands off the UW." Meanwhile, Sen. Chris Larson, D-Milwaukee, argued the bills would only inflame the challenges facing Asian Wisconsinites as hate crimes have spiked.

"I would encourage my colleagues to vote no on xenophobia, to vote no on continuing racism from on high," Larson said. "Let's find a way to make sure we are a welcoming and cooperative state."

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But Sen. Roger Roth, R-Appleton, argued there is a difference between Chinese students looking to study at the System and those associated with a repressive Chinese government looking to improperly obtain information. He cited FBI reports that the Chinese government has sponsored economic espionage and poses a threat to intellectual property.

"No country today poses a greater threat to our security and economic prosperity than China," Roth said.

Along with SB 742, the Senate approved another bill that would require the

university to detail any cultural exchange programs that have been identified by the U.S. State Department as Chinese Communist Party propaganda tools and prohibit university employees and students from participating in Chinese recruitment programs.

The Senate also approved SB 745, which would require the university to disclose contracts and gifts from foreign sources and produce a report detailing them.