

# Thompson resigning as UW System interim president in March

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Interim UW System President Tommy Thompson will resign his post in March, writing to Regents President Edmund Manydeed today that doing so will allow the university to put its full attention on his successor.

Thompson, the longest serving governor in Wisconsin history, was brought in to lead the system on an interim basis on July 1, 2020, after a failed search to find a permanent replacement for the retiring Ray Cross.

In his letter, Thompson wrote he agreed to accept knowing two things: “that I was needed, and that it would be temporary.”

The three-page letter opens with the line, “I love Wisconsin.” It then ticks off a series of accomplishments, including leading the system during the COVID-19 pandemic and working with the Legislature and gov to restore authority to the Board of Regents to set tuition after a decade-long freeze for in-state undergraduates.

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“While I firmly believe that the pursuit of excellence never ends, I am satisfied that I have accomplished what has been asked of me and what the people of this state have sought,” Thompson wrote.

Thompson noted the regents will soon identify a candidate to become the full-time president, writing “the onboarding process will require the full attention of System staff, chancellors, faculty, and the many remarkable people that carry out the business of the System every day.”

The committee overseeing the search for a new president was to meet in closed

session today to select finalists for the job. The finalists won't be announced until a later date.

"Until the end, I will work to accomplish all that is needed before allowing staff the ability to prepare for the transition," Thompson wrote.

Along with serving in the state Assembly for 20 years and as gov for 14, Thompson was Health and Human Services secretary under President George W. Bush. He also launched a bid for president in 2007 that ended before the primaries began, flirted with running again for his old post as gov in 2010 and ultimately lost a race for U.S. Senate in 2012.

During his run as interim president, the 80-year-old Thompson became known for posting videos on social media promising to "smash" COVID-19. That includes pounding a bowling ball into a birthday cake on his 79th birthday in November 2020.

Manydeeds called Thompson the "right man at the right time" to lead the System.

"He answered the call as one of Wisconsin's greatest public leaders by accepting this role in spite of the challenges in front of him," Manydeeds said. "We are proud of what he accomplished in his time here and consider him, as always, a lifelong friend of the University of Wisconsin."

Read the [letter](#).