

# LeMahieu: Vos working on deal with UW on pay raises, release of \$32 million, funding engineering building

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Senate Majority Leader Devin LeMahieu told WisPolitics Assembly Speaker Robin Vos is working on a deal with the Universities of Wisconsin that would allow pay raises to take effect, release \$32 million in state funding and pave the way for a new engineering building in Madison.

A UW spokesperson told WisPolitics the discussions with Vos, R-Rochester, were broader than those three topics and are ongoing. The spokesperson said a deal wasn't necessarily imminent.

A deal would mark a significant development in the strained relationship between Vos and the UW that has included a series of university priorities being blocked by lawmakers.

Republicans nixed funding for a new engineering building on the Madison campus that Dem Gov. Tony Evers proposed in the capital budget he sent to lawmakers in the spring. The GOP-controlled Joint Finance Committee also withheld \$32 million in state funding as Vos sought the elimination of diversity, equity and inclusion positions.

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Vos then ramped up the pressure on the university this fall by proclaiming he wouldn't allow "another nickel" in state funding for UW unless the DEI positions were cut. That includes blocking pay raising for UW workers that were funded in the state budget signed this summer.

Vos later offered to allow the pay raises to take effect if the university agreed to

give the Legislature final say over positions created within the system.

LeMahieu, R-Oostburg, today declined to provide specifics of the talks, saying he believes a compromise was “very close.”

A Vos spokesperson didn’t immediately respond to a request for comment.

LeMahieu spoke with WisPolitics as part of year-end interviews with Capitol reporters. He said he understands why Vos sought to pressure UW to “actually focus on educating people and giving them career skills rather than focus on things that have absolutely nothing to do with education.”

Still, he said there’s strong support in his caucus for the engineering building as well as the wage increase. He noted more GOP members of the state Senate have UW campuses in their districts compared to Republicans in the Assembly. He also said there are a lot of UW employees who have nothing to do with DEI.

A WisPolitics review earlier this year found the Universities of Wisconsin has about 185 administrators whose responsibilities include DEI, the majority of which are on the Milwaukee and Madison campuses. The review also found UW spends about \$13.6 million annually on salaries for DEI positions.

The Joint Committee on Employment Relations has final say over implementing state employee raises funded in the state budget. The committee, co-chaired by Vos, declined to bring up the UW pay plan this fall while it approved raises for other state workers.

Like other state employees, UW workers are in line for pay increases of 4 percent, effective July 2, 2023, and another 2 percent, effective June 30, 2024.

“We put aside money in the budget for raises, and it’s time to get them done,” LeMahieu said.