

PROFS: Statement on Regent approval of UW-GOP deal

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At Wednesday evening's Universities of Wisconsin Board of Regents meeting, the Regents voted to approve an agreement between the Universities of Wisconsin and Assembly Speaker Robin Vos. The agreement will see the Legislature's Joint Committee on Employment Relations (JCOER) approve the University of Wisconsin pay plan, which was approved by the Legislature and signed by Governor Tony Evers, allow a number of building projects – including the much-needed UW-Madison Engineering building – to go forward, and approve the Wisconsin-Minnesota tuition reciprocity agreement change, among other items. In return, UW agrees to curtail its Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs through position caps and reassignments, freeze new administrative positions, eliminate the current UW-Madison TOP faculty recruitment program, and create an endowed professorship in conservative thought.

While PROFS is eager to see approval of the pay plan and the Engineering building, we are deeply dismayed that Speaker Vos has forced the University to the table to negotiate pieces of the budget, like the pay plan, that had already been passed by both houses of the Legislature and signed into law by the Governor. And we are especially angry that Vos continues to take aim at the university's initiatives on equity, diversity, and inclusion. These initiatives are central to UW's longstanding mission and to the success of the state of Wisconsin, not bargaining chips to be used to advance his narrow ideological agenda.

PROFS is concerned that the agreement represents the kind of brinksmanship that the Republican majorities in the Assembly and Senate will continue to engage in, particularly now that they see that it has had its intended effect – forcing the UW to the bargaining table over already-agreed upon budget measures. Speaker Vos' statement following the vote ominously foreshadows their intent: "We finally have

turned the corner and gotten real reforms enacted. Republicans know this is the first step in what will be our continuing efforts to eliminate these cancerous DEI practices on UW campuses.”

It's just this kind of veto-by-committee that Governor Evers has called out in his lawsuit against the Legislature. PROFS has been prepared to join the lawsuit as an intervenor because of the danger that Vos's ploy represents to the constitutionally mandated balance of power between the Legislature and the executive branch.

Chancellor Jennifer Mnookin has already noted in her message of last week that there are aspects of this agreement with which members of the university community are opposed. PROFS is among those groups who are deeply disappointed with how the agreement has the potential to erode our efforts in DEI. We also recognize, however, that Chancellor Mnookin and UW System President Jay Rothman were put in a very difficult position, and we commend them for their work to secure some significant gains for the university.

PROFS will continue to monitor the implementation of the agreement and its effects. In doing so, we have every confidence that Chancellor Mnookin will, regardless of the Republican Legislature's animus toward DEI as expressed in parts of the agreement, move forward with her commitment to the core values of the UW-Madison, ensuring that every member of our community feels welcome. PROFS will work with the chancellor to ensure that we fulfill those commitments.