

# Sen. Wirch, Reps. Ohnstad, McGuire: React to Parkside budget shortfall

Posted on Monday, Aug 21, 2023

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**Kenosha** – Today, the University of Wisconsin – Parkside announced it is considering furloughs of all staff and other measures to address a \$5.3 million structural deficit. Sen. Bob Wirch (D-Somers) and Reps. Tod Ohnstad (D-Kenosha) and Tip McGuire (D-Kenosha) issued the following response.

“This is a sad day. I am a proud Parkside alum, a member of the very first graduating class. Parkside allowed me to get my education while working full time, and Parkside is a leader for graduating students who are the first in their families to go to college. It’s a bargain, for traditional and non-traditional students, providing a top notch education at a fair price, while allowing students to work, maybe live at home and save some money. Make no mistake – these cuts will hurt our community and were entirely avoidable,” Wirch said.

During deliberations on the 2023-2025 state budget earlier this year, UW System President Jay Rothman warned that without sufficient state investment, many of its member schools would face cuts and possibly even campus closures. State support for the UW System has steadily declined, particularly since 2011 when Republicans took complete control of state government. Add to that a tuition freeze from 2013 through 2021; a mandate from the Republican majority for schools to spend down their reserve funds; and declining enrollments accelerated by Covid, and the result is that 10 of the UW System’s 13 schools – Parkside, Oshkosh, Milwaukee, Eau Claire, Green Bay, Platteville, River Falls, Stevens Point, Superior and Whitewater – are facing structural deficits in the millions of dollars. Earlier this month, UW-Oshkosh announced plans to cut about 200 non-faculty staff and administrative positions while instituting furloughs on others in order to deal with its budget shortfall.

“The Republicans have attacked the UW System from almost the first day of their majority. Many of us on the other side of the aisle and in the higher education world have seen this coming and sounded the alarm. Republicans either wouldn’t listen or didn’t care. If their goal is to make a college education inaccessible for average Wisconsin families, they are well on their way,” said Ohnstad.

McGuire added, “UW-Parkside has long been a treasure of our community, and the continued under-investment from the state undermines the families that seek to better their life through education, as well as the businesses that need skilled workers. In a time of plenty for our state’s surplus, there is no reason why we cannot do more to strengthen the UW System.”

In addition to deep financial cuts, since 2011, the Republican majority in the State Legislature have accused the UW System and its member schools of stifling free speech and “indoctrinating” students; have inserted themselves into campus and system-wide policy decisions, going so far as to threaten lawsuits; and targeted campus diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) efforts. Earlier this year, with a \$7 billion budget surplus, Republicans cut \$32 million from the UW System budget over DEI issues. A recent report from the nonpartisan Wisconsin Policy Forum found that Wisconsin ranks 43<sup>rd</sup> out of 50 states in terms of per-students state support for higher education. Under Republican Governor Tommy Thompson, state General Purpose Revenue made up half of the UW System’s budget; as of the 2021-2023 state budget that number was less than 18%.