

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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News Release

Universities of Wisconsin Board of Regents selects Tonjanita (Tonja) L. Johnson as next UWs President

MADISON, Wis.—The Universities of Wisconsin Board of Regents today selected Dr. Tonjanita (Tonja) L. Johnson as the next UWs President. The vote was unanimous.

Johnson, 57, is currently Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs at the University of Alabama System, a position she has held since 2019. Her appointment will begin on or about Jan. 1, 2027. She was recommended to the full Board of Regents by the Presidential Search Committee following public forums; meetings with chancellors, UWs staff leadership, and others; and interviews with a diverse 24-member committee.

"I am deeply honored by the confidence the Board of Regents has placed in me and excited about the opportunity to serve the people of Wisconsin," Johnson said. "Public higher education has the power to improve lives, strengthen communities, and shape a state's future. I look forward to working with our chancellors, faculty, staff, students, elected leaders, and partners across Wisconsin to ensure that our universities remain engines of opportunity, innovation, and economic vitality. My goal is to help our remarkable UW universities become even stronger, more connected, and more consequential to the future of Wisconsin."



"The Universities of Wisconsin have always been ladders of opportunity, opening doors for students and creating possibilities for generations ahead," said Regent President Kyle Weatherly. "Dr. Johnson understands that promise, and she also understands that fulfilling it in the future will require us to keep innovating. She will connect our universities even more closely to Wisconsin's future."

"From the beginning, our goal was to identify an exceptional leader who understands both the enormous responsibility and the extraordinary potential of the Universities of Wisconsin, and who can chart a bold course for our future," said Regent Vice President Ashok Rai, chair of the Presidential Search Committee. "Dr. Johnson brings the vision, experience, and leadership to do exactly that. She understands complex public university systems, she believes deeply in their ability to change lives and strengthen communities, and she has the ability to bring people together around a shared direction for the future."

Johnson will be the 10th President of the Universities of Wisconsin.

At the University of Alabama System, Johnson oversees academic and student affairs, including academic planning and program review, student success, and institutional research and effectiveness; serves as the

primary liaison to the Board of Trustees Academic Affairs and Student Affairs Committee; and works closely with campus and system leadership on institutional priorities, policy development and systemwide initiatives. She also represents Alabama's public universities with government agencies, education partners, and national organizations.

Johnson has also served as Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer at the University of Tennessee System, Chief Deputy to the President at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, and Associate Vice President for Marketing and Communications at Middle Tennessee State University. She has also held various executive roles at Mississippi Valley State University.

A native of Butler, Alabama, Johnson earned bachelor's and master's degrees in communication from the University of Alabama and a doctorate in urban higher education from Jackson State University.

To view a video message from Johnson, go to: <https://youtu.be/FYmWYFEJWFc>

Renée Wachter will continue to serve as Interim President until Johnson takes office. Wachter will return to the chancellorship of UW-Superior at that time.

A 1971 state law unified two Wisconsin public university systems under a single Board of Regents. The Universities of Wisconsin educate more than 164,500 students at 13 universities, serve more than 1 million Wisconsin residents, and employ about 41,000 faculty and staff statewide.

[Download photo of Dr. Tonjanita \(Tonja\) Johnson.](#)

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About the Universities of Wisconsin

The Universities of Wisconsin serve approximately 164,500 students. Awarding more than 37,000 degrees annually, these 13 public universities are Wisconsin's talent pipeline, putting graduates in position to increase their earning power, contribute to their communities, and make Wisconsin a better place to live. Nearly 90 percent of in-state Universities of Wisconsin graduates stay in the state five years after earning a degree. The universities provide a 23:1 return on state investment. The Universities of Wisconsin also contribute to the richness of Wisconsin's culture and economy with groundbreaking research, new companies and patents, and boundless creative intellectual energy. Learn more at [wisconsin.edu](https://www.wisconsin.edu).

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