



## Ambassador Tom Loftus

Notes for talk to PROFS forum.

March 10, 2011

I want to talk to you first tonight not as members of PROFs or the UW faculty, but as fellow citizens of the state of Wisconsin.

The people of this state through generations have formed a living and emotional bond with Madison.

The Wisconsin Idea that the borders of the state are the borders of the University is in the fiber of the people of this state.

One of my earliest memories was when I was four years old and a man from the university came to our farm near Stoughton to look at the tobacco crop and give advice.

He wore grey pants and had on a white shirt. Of course he was from extension, but no matter he was a man from the university and he came to our farm.

This one small experience, and thousands like it, is one of the many ways the people of this state feel bound to the University. They take a pride of ownership

The real trustees and builders of Madison are the people of this state -- they paid the taxes, sent their kids, forked over the tuition and cheered the teams.

If Madison were to become a quasi-private authority, as Governor Walker now proposes, it would probably remain a great school but I question whether it would still be the state's school.

To spin off Madison from the UW System and re-charter it as a quasi-private "authority" would sever the link between the people of the state and the University.

Governor Walker would cut state support for the UW Madison by \$62.5 million, freeze state support at that new reduced level, and for funding in the future he would give unlimited tuition raising power to a new Madison Authority Trustee Board.

I question whether this high tuition model works in Wisconsin. We are not a wealthy state.

The tuition sticker shock in years to come will inevitably mean that families, even middle class families, will decide Madison is not for them and they will look elsewhere.

The average family income of students at Madison is already over \$90,000 a year.

The convincing evidence that Madison will lose the citizens of the state is the proposal for the new board of trustees.

There will be 21 members. They will serve for three years terms versus the seven year terms for System Regents. A majority will be appointed by Governor Walker. The others will serve because of their position with or related to the campus. For example, designees of WARF, the UW Foundation and the Alumni Association will be automatic members.

Seventeen of the 21 have to be Madison alumni. This leaves out one heck of a lot of citizens of this Wisconsin.

There will be no Senate confirmation so that link to the voter is gone.

A quasi-private authority; high tuition; and, a board of trustees that excludes all but a select few: that, my fellow citizens, will break the tie that binds the people of this state to the University.

The Wisconsin idea will not be the borders of the state but the mailing list of the alumni club.

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Now I want to talk to you as faculty and your common bond with your colleagues in the University of Wisconsin System.

The real question today is whether the System will be put to sudden death.

Forty years to enact a merger of the UW and the old state colleges, and forty years of stitching the UW System into the seamless weave of good quality educational cloth that it is today – gone.

With 170,000 students spread over a dozen campuses, all of them getting a good education, the UW System is the success story of higher education in the world.

Think of the UW System as a great symphony orchestra - world renowned - what would possess us at this time to rip away the violin section?

Just the proposal to breakup of the System by Governor Walker has real consequences – the new Chancellor at Stevens Point told the Regents he would not have accepted the job or even applied if he had know the System was under question.

The head of the psychology department at UW La Crosse wrote a letter to the Board of Regents to report that, and I quote: “This week started with a stellar social psychology candidate rejecting our offer. He was in his third year at Creighton in a tenure track job, and he was unwilling to take the risk of moving to Wisconsin”.

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Now I want to talk to you about Madison. Most of the faculty and staff here will not see their pay or their security increase under the authority model.

You will be authority employees until the governor and legislature decide you are not.

Just ask the 5,000 employees at the UW hospital authority who were surprised to learn their collective bargaining rights were to be gone.

Ask the 8,000 staff at this campus that will lose their bargaining rights and never be able to get a raise higher than cost of living.

And, ask the Teaching Assistants, who will take a devastating cut in income when they start to pay much more for health insurance. Their very union is at real risk given the certification requirements in Governor Walker’s budget repair bill. What does an authority do for them?

These people are your co-workers.

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Finally, I address you in your role of those responsible of governing this university.

Is it worth it, as Governor Walkers proposes, that you trade state funding for the power of a new board of trustees to raise tuition?

You are often told that state support is only 17%. That is a number the Madison Administration gives to unwitting journalists.

If you exclude federal grants, and gifts, which you should, the percentage of state support for Madison is 33%. Using the same apples to apples comparison the number for the other campuses is 36%.

UW Madison gets \$476,488,001.00 from the State.

Why take a cut in this base budget without a fight? Especially since it is never to go higher – that is not playing the cards you are dealt. That is putting your cards face up and leaving money on the table.

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Take my advice – strongly state that you want the authority proposal out of the budget bill. To leave the fate of this great flag ship University to the whims and vagaries of individual legislators swimming about in a toxic sea of partisan rancor is to invite disaster.