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Strengthening Wisconsin.

PROFS Statement on College Affordability Package

Over the years, PROFS has worked with students, administrators and others at the university on various proposals to make college and graduate school more affordable, ensure that student debt is manageable, and promote internships and other strategies to make students ready for the job market when they graduate. Although the governor's college affordability proposals are offered in the late hours of the legislative session, we welcome the governor and legislators to the discussion.

The number one way to keep college affordable and maintain the quality that the people of Wisconsin have come to expect from UW-Madison is to maintain the state's commitment to funding the university. At the very least, the state should try to reinvest in the university after cuts, as other states have done.

The reality is that the recent \$250 million cut to the UW, coming on top of other cuts over the years, has had a serious negative impact on the university. And Wisconsin is an outlier when it comes to slashing funding for our universities as the economy struggles to improve. According to the recent *Grapevine* report, overall state funding for higher education across the country will increase 4.1% in 2016. Wisconsin is one of just three states (with Alaska and Arizona) that is cutting higher education funding by more than 10%.

Regarding the specific proposals contained in the package, allowing more deductibility of student loan interest makes sense, although we would suggest that it be a refundable tax credit so the truly needy will benefit. Further, the state should explore the option of refinancing debt, as Minnesota has done.

Providing more funding for internship coordinators also makes sense, although we would suggest that the program be used to encourage internships with more than just businesses. Internships with non-profits and government entities also provide valuable experience, even if a student ultimately goes to work in the for-profit sector.

Regarding the proposal to make the financing of college more transparent for students, it should be noted that, unlike other universities, UW-Madison makes it very clear to students when they are taking out a loan. While the requirements contained in the bill can be seen as yet another unfunded mandate for the university at a time when our budget is being slashed, we always are committed to the greatest possible transparency and will work with the requirements if they are signed into law.