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Wisconsin Higher Education Business Roundtable urges Legislature to support vision for a world-class university system

Troubled economic times make UW System management flexibility imperative

MADISON – The Wisconsin Higher Education Business Roundtable, a coalition of business leaders committed to education and economic development, called on Gov. Jim Doyle and members of the Wisconsin Legislature to support UW System management and budget initiatives that would protect the university's core mission and increase its operating flexibility during difficult economic times.

In response to biennial budget recommendations that could cut anywhere from \$120 to \$211 million from the university's general purpose revenue funding, the Roundtable's board of directors approved resolutions that address Wisconsin's need for a robust public university system to compete in today's global economy. Founded in 2005, the Business Roundtable is dedicated to ensuring the state is home to a world-class university system capable of technological breakthroughs, educational leadership and support for Wisconsin's unique quality of life.

"The Wisconsin Higher Education Business Roundtable has spent considerable time analyzing our state's educational needs as well as the economic challenges we face," said Randy Dimond, vice president and chief technical officer for Promega Corp. and a member of the Roundtable Board. "As business leaders, we know it is imperative to have a university system that can prepare workers for the demands of a global economy. Having a flexible and talented work force not only strengthens existing companies it helps create more jobs. A strong university system is critical to our state's economic vitality."

Dimond also indicated the UW System needs management flexibility to adjust to difficult budget times in ways that will not compromise its vital research and teaching missions.

"The UW System's cutting-edge research is improving public health and well-being in profound and often unpredictable ways," Dimond said. "Like a well-run technology company, the university system needs management flexibility to make the most of its research opportunities and capitalize on operational efficiencies — particularly during challenging economic times."

The resolution approved by the Roundtable Board encourages the governor and members of the legislature to support UW System proposals for streamlining capital budget options including:

- Raising the threshold at which lawmakers must approve new construction projects in the state budget from \$500,000 to \$2.5 million. Lawmakers would not have to approve projects funded by private donations and grants.
- Changing the way projects are budgeted so that lawmakers would give agencies a specific amount of money for building projects. The agencies could then transfer savings among projects as long as they stayed under the spending cap.

- Allowing UW System campuses to hire general contractors to lead projects and hire subcontractors.

In addition, the resolution encourages the governor and Legislature to support the university's efforts to maintain access to advanced education by increasing the availability of need-based financial aid for low- and middle-income families. It also urges a level of funding for the system consistent with the state's need to stimulate economic development via enrollment, scientific and technical research and competitive academic excellence.

In addition to Dimond, members of the Wisconsin Higher Education Business Roundtable Board include: Steve Brown, owner of Steve Brown Apartments; Michael Youngman, vice president-government relations for Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company; Mike Jones, vice president of corporate affairs for MillerCoors; Louis Maier, retired president and chief executive of Emjay Corp.; James Troupis, partner, Michael Best & Friedrich LLP; and Mark O'Connell, executive director of the Wisconsin Counties Association. The Roundtable also includes non-voting "mentor" members from the business community around the state.

To learn more about the Roundtable and review the resolution in its entirety, visit www.wiroundtable.org.