



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

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For Immediate Release

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Largest Scholarship in State History Proposed

\$5,000 scholarship would be merit-based for WI residents only.

MADISON...Today, State Representative Tyler August (R-Lake Geneva), State Senator Steve Nass (R-Whitewater), and State Treasurer Matt Adamczyk announced their proposal to create the Wisconsin Merit Scholarship. The scholarships, set at \$5,000, will be available based solely on merit to Wisconsin residents to attend UW System schools.

“Our legislation will create the largest scholarship in state history valued at \$5 million when fully implemented,” said August. “The scholarship will be significant, at \$5,000 per student using no newly allocated tax dollars. I am happy to report that the plan has the full support of UW System President Ray Cross.”

The scholarship will be determined by the UW Board of Regents based on university admission test scores (i.e. ACT, SAT) and high school GPA. The legislators pointed out that students already have access to billions in need-based aid. The only other state-funded merit based program is the Wisconsin Excellence Scholarship, set at \$2170 and is available to the top graduate in each high school.

“It was important the bill targets students based on merit,” said Nass. “We want to keep our best and brightest here in Wisconsin and this bill gives the UW System that tool.”

The funding for the scholarship bill comes from the sale of Board of Commissioners of Public Lands (BCPL) lands to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Constitutionally, the BCPL is tasked with selling all lands given to it by the federal government at statehood. The BCPL has already sold 98% of the land and this bill would sell the remaining 2% of land to the DNR. The land, almost entirely located in northern Wisconsin, is estimated to be worth around \$80 million dollars. Specifically, the bill

directs \$10 million per year from the Stewardship Program to be transferred to the Normal School Fund (NSF) at the BCPL to purchase the land over 8 years. The NSF is constitutionally required to distribute any earnings from the fund to the UW System.

“As a commissioner of the BCPL, this plan finally allows us to fulfill our constitutional duty to sell our lands to benefit the UW System” said Adamczyk. “This is a no-brainer as we create a \$5 million annual scholarship not only by selling our lands as constitutionally required, but also by doing so without making the taxpayers pay for it.”

When fully implemented, the NSF would have over \$100 million dollars in it. Assuming a conservative 5% rate of return on the fund, there would be \$5 million available annually for scholarships to be awarded by the UW System. In comparison, the NSF is only returning \$300,000 to the UW System – this would grow that amount 15 times larger. With scholarships set at \$5,000 it estimated that over 1,000 students will be able to take advantage of these scholarships.

August and Nass stated they are circulating the bill for cosponsors this week and hope to introduce the bill by the end of the week.

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