

Guest Column:

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One Step Closer to Making a New UW-Eau Claire Phillips Hall a Reality

As Western Wisconsin Republican legislators, we are proud to see the \$231 million renovation of Phillips Hall on the UW-Eau Claire campus will be included in the upcoming state budget vote. Many of us voted to begin this project over four years ago, and now we have the opportunity to secure the final piece of funding. It is our hope that the state budget will pass with support from all area legislators and this vital project can begin as soon as the winter of 2024.

Phillips Hall, a 60-year-old obsolete and decaying structure, is clearly in need of replacement. Though Phillips Hall is one of nine academic buildings on campus, it currently accounts for approximately a third of all maintenance work orders. Because of the building's architecture, needed equipment for research is now limited to only being placed on the ground floor due to structural weight limits. Furthermore, due to an outdated electrical infrastructure, glitches endanger sensitive equipment, with some experiments relying on 100-foot extension cords to maintain research samples. And, as a result of the building's numerous structural defects, there are persistent leaks that necessitate covering equipment nightly to prevent water and bug damage.

If the budget is signed into law with the project included, we know it will be the catalyst for Western Wisconsin's "Knowledge Boom," allowing our amazing students to work in cutting-edge laboratories and assisting the institution in remaining a national leader in undergraduate research. Over 1,500 students are now enrolled in degree programs housed in Phillips Hall, with the bulk of them working on projects with Mayo Clinic, which has pledged to pay for 10,000 square feet of research space in the new structure. Xcel Energy, ProHealth Care, and Hewlett Packard are among the other important local private sector partners.

We cannot train our present workforce in the current building in this new age of advanced technology and the demand for highly-skilled Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math personnel. As a result, practically every local government and business organization in the Eau Claire area has endorsed this new facility. We must put aside our political differences and approve a budget that includes this critical initiative, which will cement Western Wisconsin's status as a leader in science workforce training.