



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

P.O. BOX 8952 • MADISON, WI 53708

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Contact: Rep. Katrina Shankland, (608) 267-9649
Rep. Jill Billings, (608) 266-5780
Rep. Dianne Hesselbein, (608) 266-5340
Rep. Jimmy Anderson, (608) 266-8570
Rep. Shelia Stubbs, (608) 266-3784
Rep. Jodi Emerson, (608) 266-7461

Assembly Committee on Colleges & Universities Democratic Members Respond to Finalist Recommendation for UW System President

MADISON – On Tuesday, June 2, the University of Wisconsin System announced only one finalist under consideration to be the next System president: Jim Johnsen, the current president of the University of Alaska. It is common practice to include multiple finalists for such positions. In the past two years, UW System named multiple finalists when searching for new chancellors at UW-Stout, UW-Whitewater, and UW-Green Bay.

In response, the Democratic members of the Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities released the following joint statement:

“We are deeply disappointed to see the search committee break with precedent yet again by announcing only one finalist for UW System President. From day one, the search and screen committee has excluded the voices of faculty, staff, and students. Now that they have only announced one finalist, shared governance stakeholders are rightfully expressing their concerns. Jim Johnsen has recently faced no confidence votes on two of the three campuses in Alaska. He does not inspire the confidence needed in Wisconsin to take on the steep challenges the UW System is facing.

“Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the UW System is navigating financial pressures and many critical conversations about the future of higher education. It is only right that its president should be committed to and able to earn the trust of those who work for and attend all 26 UW System campuses.

“We are living through times of incredible uncertainty, but this is no excuse for failing to uphold the traditions of transparency and shared governance that once made the UW System a model for the rest of the country. We, as the Democratic members of the Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities, question the search committee’s decision to not release multiple finalists for this position. We urge President Cross and members of the search committee to reconsider their recommendation and include additional candidates. We stand with the shared governance stakeholders who are voicing their frustrations and offering thoughtful solutions. It’s past time for them to have a seat at the table, and we urge UW System leadership to listen to them and respond with empathy and support.”

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