



MARK MILLER
WISCONSIN STATE SENATOR

P.O. Box 7882 Madison, WI 53707-7882

November 1, 2017

President Ray Cross
University of Wisconsin System
1700 Van Hise Hall
1220 Linden Drive
Madison WI 53706

Dear President Cross:

Thank you for taking the time to visit with members and staff of the Senate Democratic Caucus on October 26 to share your vision for the proposed University of Wisconsin Colleges and University of Wisconsin Extension Restructuring.

I fully recognize the challenge you face as the numbers do not lie. Lower enrollment and an aging state population demand sound planning and forward thinking for our University of Wisconsin System not only survive but to thrive. I would have preferred a briefing on your ideas from you and your staff before we read about the possible restructuring in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. I understand you had not planned on the media sharing the proposal when it did.

Given the situation we face and the options you laid out, it appears to me that your idea to link each two-year college with a four-year university has merit. I support making a UW education more accessible and more affordable. I also believe moving UW-Extension to the state's land-grant institution is a sound idea.

However, I believe this move of Extension to UW-Madison must also include Broadcasting and Media Innovations, including Wisconsin Public Television and Wisconsin Public Radio. Placing Wisconsin Public Broadcasting under the auspices of the University of Wisconsin System President, as you propose, presents many challenges.

The Office of the President of the University of Wisconsin System is a political one, whether it is held by you, your predecessor or your successor. The president is appointed by a politically appointed body which is appointed by a highly political office holder, the Governor of Wisconsin. We must keep Wisconsin Public Broadcasting insulated from the political world as much as possible. I firmly believe that maintaining WPT and WPR in UW Extension provides that critical buffer.

I am deeply concerned that housing WPT and WPR in the Office of the President will inherently create a chilling effect on the free exchanges of ideas that we have come to expect in public broadcasting in Wisconsin. Wisconsin Public Broadcasting is the very manifestation of the Wisconsin Idea. I believe that the "...continual and fearless

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sifting and winnowing by which alone the truth can be found” must continue, unabated, without fear of unwelcome reaction from political policy-makers at the top end of State Street. The last thing the people of Wisconsin need is a state legislator or two influencing content and programming decisions for WPT and WPR.

Without the shield from politics WPT and WPR enjoy under the current structure, it is not difficult to come up with a list of controversial issues that Wisconsin Public Broadcasting leaders may feel reluctant to raise during the many Wisconsin-produced programs.

I am encouraged by your comments that you will create a ‘firewall’ between your office and Wisconsin Public Broadcasting. I am further encouraged that you have included Malcom Brett, Director of Broadcasting and Media Innovations of UW Extension, in your discussions about the restructuring. I understand he shares your mandate of independence for WPT and WPR. However, I understand Mr. Brett plans to retire within a few months. And, as you well know, a UW System President is not bound by promises made by his or her predecessor.

President Cross, as you develop your vision into a full-blown proposal on Restructuring UW Colleges and UW Extension to be voted on by the Board of Regents, I emphatically encourage you to reconsider moving Wisconsin Public Broadcasting out of UW Extension and into UW System.

Wisconsin Public Radio has been in operation for more than 100 years. It has been more than 60 years since Wisconsin Public Television first broadcast to Wisconsin residents. We have come to rely on honest and accurate programming on Wisconsin Public Broadcasting. Please continue the independence necessary for WPT and WPR to share unbiased knowledge with Wisconsin residents and keep these invaluable state resources in UW Extension.

Sincerely,



Mark Miller
State Senator
16th Senate District

cc: Board of Regents