

Letter from Tom Loftus to the Cap Times:

I urge Governor Walker not to include the idea of making UW Madison a quasi private authority in the budget bill. And, as a UW System Regent, I request Chancellor Martin to withdraw her support.

Attempting to spin off Madison from the UW System in a budget bill will bring a divisive issue into a legislative process ill equipped to produce bipartisan consensus.

The budget is decided by the party in power. It is not bipartisan. The UW System's future would be subject to a process of trade-offs with non-related issues. There would not be the time to deliberate the question by itself, and there would not be an opportunity to hear from all those generations of Wisconsinites who have paid the taxes, footed the tuition bills, built the buildings and cheered the teams -- the true owners of UW-Madison.

A proposal to remove UW-Madison from the UW System in the budget bill is a guarantee that we will return to the tribalism of the past when each campus and their legislators fought for their turf and decried any perceived advantage one campus might get that they did not. The final budget is decided eventually by a few leaders in the middle of the night. I know. I was there. I remember the pitiful scene of chancellors emerging from the shadows to plead with me like beggars with briefcases.

Before a bill creating the current UW System was passed into law there was a decade of debate and every citizen with an opinion was heard from, and heard from again.

Even after the merger law was passed and the System was a legal reality it took several more sessions in the 1980s to adopt a faculty and staff pay regime based on comparing each campus with a similar campus elsewhere in the country, and not UW Madison. This is the peer system to determine pay scales we still operate under twenty five years later.

The then Minority Leader Tommy Thompson and I chaired a Committee on the Future of the UW System to lay the groundwork for this peer pay system. We travelled the state -- campus to campus -- and listened to everyone who wanted to speak. We asked for the input of not just the faculty and staff and students, but anyone in the community with an opinion. It took months. We had given our opening statements so many times that at one hearing I gave his and he gave mine. No one noticed. Why? Because we had come to sound pretty much the same.

The peer group pay regime took months more to pass. All of this was helped along by the tireless advocacy and public statements of (UW-Madison)

Chancellor Donna Shalala and the other chancellors. They patiently laid out the reasons why this would work and that this was what it meant to be a in a System. They explained, over and over again, this would work for their campus.

The January memo from Chancellor Martin to the governor's office outlining a plan to spin off Madison from the System demonstrates in chilling detail the controversy that would to come if bon voyage to the flagship Madison campus were proposed in the budget bill.

There would be double-digit tuition increases.

There would be a Board of Regents for Madison exempt from confirmation by the State Senate. This would break the only bond that the Wisconsin voter has to influence Madison, their university.

In the memo it is proposed that Madison faculty and staff become some type of hybrid state employee. This radical idea is something that is unwanted and unnecessarily frightening to those who have decided their talents and work would be with the University as part of a family of state public servants.

Regrettably, the Regents were not apprised of Chancellor Martin's ideas before they were sent to the governor's office.

All of the budget flexibility items the Regents have asked the Legislature for over the years, regardless of the party of the governor appointing them or the majority party of the State Senate confirming them, can be granted without removing Madison, or any other campus, whether it be Milwaukee or Platteville, from the System. And, this flexibility should be granted.

The future of the UW System needs to be looked at to help it evolve. Governor Walker would do Wisconsin a service by proposing a process that is deliberative and designed to produce a bipartisan consensus on the future of the UW System. This would be a process that hears from all directly and is not filtered through temporary occupants of offices of power.