

Senate Judiciary Committee  
Senator Dave Zien, Chair  
July 27, 2004

Testimony of John D. Wiley, Chancellor, UW-Madison

“TABOR”

Thank you Senator Zien and members of the Committee for providing me the opportunity to testify today in opposition to the process by which the legislature is considering legislation to make changes to the Wisconsin Constitution. The TABOR proposals that have been made public throughout this spring raise significant concerns about the university’s ability to provide an affordable and accessible education to Wisconsin residents as well as the university’s ability to continue to successfully garner federal and private support. It is important that these consequences be fully understood, and today’s hurried process does not allow that.

I would like to take a few moments to briefly describe some of the potential, if not likely, consequences of TABOR-like proposals on UW-Madison. As Chancellor of UW-Madison I can best address the issues specific to this campus, but many of my concerns apply to the entire University System. I should note, however, that I prepared these remarks just three hours ago without the knowledge of the specific details of the proposal that is being considered today since that had not been made public. I really feel I must emphasize this point. No one in this room can predict the consequences for public higher education in the state if this proposal is adopted today. Moreover, the crucial linkage between a sound higher education system and the state’s economic vitality is going to be put at risk in ways we cannot possibly fathom.

TABOR proposals of any sort threaten UW-Madison’s ability to fulfill its mission to teach, to do research and to engage in meaningful outreach that benefits all of Wisconsin’s citizenry. Allow me to provide a few examples:

- Capping tuition arbitrarily interferes with the balance between cost and quality considerations in providing an education.
- However, even if tuition is exempt, if state tax dollar support for the University is limited, we run the grave risk of pricing out all but Wisconsin’s wealthiest students.
- Access to higher education would be limited, particularly since proposals we have seen do not take into account any enrollment changes. Enrollment does not typically follow changes in the state’s entire population base.
- Millions of dollars in private gifts for bonding would be put at risk, especially those from donors and other funding sources that require a state match for their gift.

- Federal and private grants might be capped under the TABOR proposal being considered today. Even if they aren't, our ability to successfully generate these outside dollars is threatened if we do not have the basic state support required to leverage these funds.

These are just a few of the potential consequences, all of which deserve to be fully examined before going ahead with making changes to the Constitution. It is important to consider that these do not include other consequences which are unintended or that I could not offer you today since I had not seen the specific proposal being considered. I was grateful this spring for the thoughtfulness in which you and your colleagues considered some of these impacts on the University and I encourage you to continue that thoughtfulness today by not advancing a proposal before you, I and the people of the state of Wisconsin have a chance to thoroughly examine all of its possible implications.