Chancellor Van Galen’s Statement on Governor Walker’s Budget Proposal

January 28, 2015--University of Wisconsin-River Falls Chancellor Dean Van Galen comments on Governor Scott Walker's budget proposal:

There exists a significant budget deficit in the State of Wisconsin and we have anticipated a possible budget cut to the UW System as part of the Governor’s 2015-17 state budget proposal. Although key details are yet to emerge, the main elements of the Governor’s proposal for the UW System include a $150 million base budget reduction to the UW-System and a block grant from the state with independent “public authority” over spending.

The proposed $150 million/year base budget reduction over the biennium for the UW System would undoubtedly have a damaging effect on all UW institutions and, I would argue, on the future of the State of Wisconsin. If the budget reduction is approved by the legislature and is implemented, the impact on UW-River Falls would be very serious. Based on historical distributions of budget reductions among UW System campuses, we would anticipate a base, recurring budget reduction of approximately $4.2 million for our campus. This is even more challenging based on last year’s required spend down of university reserves.

Regarding the proposed “public authority” model for the UW System, this has the potential, depending on the details of implementation, to grant the UW System some of the flexibilities we have long sought. This could include delegating more authority to the UW System and campuses, and providing a more predictable funding source. At this point, there are many questions around how the UW System as a public authority would operate, and the details are critical. In my view, it will be important to preserve a strong system of shared governance and other policies and practices that have served the UW System so well.

Throughout the budget process we will be providing updates on the budget and the proactive steps we are taking to address this situation at http://go.uwrf.edu/budgetinfo. I encourage our community partners to stay informed on the state budget and convey the important role public higher education plays in Wisconsin and the St. Croix Valley to our elected officials.

Over the past several years, our campus has been fiscally prudent in managing our resources. However, in all honesty, a budget reduction of this magnitude would involve some very difficult and painful choices and actions. These are difficult times. Working together, always remembering the great value of our work and its impact on the lives of our students, we will meet this challenge.

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