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June 9, 2025

The Honorable Ron Johnson
U.S. Senate
328 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
U.S. Senate
141 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Bryan Steil
U.S. House of Representatives
1526 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Scott Fitzgerald
U.S. House of Representatives
2444 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mark Pocan
U.S. House of Representatives
1026 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Glenn Grothman
U.S. House of Representatives
1211 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Derrick Van Orden
U.S. House of Representatives
1513 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Tiffany
U.S. House of Representatives
451 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Gwen Moore
U.S. House of Representatives
2252 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tony Wied
U.S. House of Representatives
424 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Members of the Wisconsin Congressional Delegation:

I write today following the release of President Trump's FY26 Discretionary Budget Request and to provide an update on areas of importance to the Universities of Wisconsin. As Congress continues to work through the FY26 budget and appropriations process, I ask for your consideration of these requests.

As a premier system of public higher education, the Universities of Wisconsin serve more than 164,000 students each year. Awarding nearly 36,000 degrees annually, the universities are Wisconsin's talent pipeline, putting graduates in a position to increase their earning

power, contribute to their communities, and make Wisconsin a better place to live. Nearly 90% of resident graduates are still in Wisconsin five years after earning a degree. Our universities also contribute to the richness of Wisconsin's culture and economy with cutting-edge research, support of entrepreneurs and new companies, development of valuable intellectual property rights and other innovation, and boundless creative intellectual energy. Through a constellation of 13 universities statewide, the Universities of Wisconsin are a tremendous academic, cultural, and economic resource for Wisconsin, the nation, and the world.

Thriving public universities are vital to remaining globally competitive, and across the Universities of Wisconsin, we remain committed to ensuring access to our universities is possible for students of all socio-economic backgrounds. It is for this reason that I was deeply disappointed to see the broad and – in my opinion – indiscriminate cuts to federal financial aid programs contained within President Trump's FY26 Discretionary Budget Request.

As you know, the FY26 Discretionary Budget Request calls for a reduction of the maximum Pell Grant amount by \$1,685 – or nearly 23% - over the 2024-2025 award year. In fact, the budget states, "The growing Pell shortfall necessitates this decrease, as maintaining the current maximum award and eligibility would put the program in an untenable financial position. The Administration looks forward to working with Congress to develop a long-term, sustainable solution."¹ While I agree that Congress needs to urgently address the shortfall within the program, I am concerned that cuts of this magnitude will negatively impact current students and the nearly 31,600 Pell Grant recipients across our 13 universities.

Further, efforts to eliminate TRIO, GEAR-UP, and SEOG are equally short-sighted. Taken together with proposed reductions to Federal Work-Study, the budget request continues to disadvantage the very students who these programs are meant to serve and for whom any cut or change to the program may impact whether they can attend an institution of higher education. For context, in 2023-2024, over 74,000 students across the Universities of Wisconsin received some form of federal financial aid including \$13 million in work-study funding and over \$10 million in SEOG grants to 14,600 students.

Dating back to the GI Bill which helped our WWII veterans, federal financial aid has long helped millions obtain a degree to the betterment of themselves, our communities, and our economy. It is my hope that Congress will ensure we can continue to provide these same kinds of valuable educational opportunities to future generations of students as you work through the annual appropriations process.

¹ <https://www.ed.gov/media/document/fiscal-year-2026-budget-summary-110043.pdf> (Page 31)

Finally, I would be remiss not to mention that the proposed cuts to federal research agencies ranging from the National Institutes of Health to NOAA and the National Science Foundation are equally concerning. At each of our 13 universities, research is taking place that positively impacts our lives and the lives of all Wisconsinites. As just one example, a significant portion of our research is focused on improved treatments for diseases such as Alzheimer's and cancer. In addition, nearly 30% of students in their senior year at the Universities of Wisconsin participated in research with a faculty member in 2023. These types of high impact practices are shown to not only improve the college experience but to help improve critical thinking and abilities well beyond the lab. To remain globally competitive, the U.S. needs to increase investments in research and development, and it is my hope that Congress will continue to wisely invest in our research enterprise.

While not all aspects of the President's Budget Request will be included in the legislation that Congress considers, these provisions are of central concern to the Universities of Wisconsin. As funding decisions continue to be made, it is my hope that we will find opportunities to partner together for the benefit of the communities and students we all are privileged to serve.

Thank you for your continued service to Wisconsin and your attention to these issues. If you or your team have any questions, concerns, or would like to discuss this issue further, please do not hesitate to be in touch.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jay Rothman", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jay Rothman

President, Universities of Wisconsin