Chairman Feyen and members of the Senate Committee on Economic Development & Technical Colleges:

My name is Ian Robertson, and I am the Grainger Dean of the College of Engineering at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee and testify today in support of the funding and enumeration of the UW-Madison College of Engineering building project in Special Session Senate Bill 1. Thank you to the senators on the committee for their ongoing support of this project.

Building a new multidisciplinary engineering educational and research facility at UW-Madison will enable growth in the College of Engineering. It will allow us to increase the number of undergraduates by hundreds of students, meaning we will be able to accept more than 1 in 7 applicants – student demand for a UW-Madison engineering degree is that high.

College of Engineering alumni live and work in all 72 counties in Wisconsin. They are and will continue to be vital to the state’s workforce and economic development needs. We hear from Wisconsin employers like Plexus, Oshkosh Corp, Rockwell, Sub-zero Wolf-Cove, Kohler and others that they need more UW-Madison engineers. In recent years, our engineering graduates had access to more than 12,000 job opportunities – the competition to hire them is that intense.

The State of Wisconsin needs to have more engineers to drive workforce development, and to keep Wisconsin-based industries competitive. The reputation of the University of Wisconsin-Madison College of Engineering allows us to attract top quality engineers and keep them in the state upon graduation. We can educate more of these engineers and meet the demand from Wisconsin industry to provide the engineers needed to compete in the global marketplace. Educating more engineers requires the growth of the college; this requires building the appropriate space and adding the faculty and staff necessary to ensure student success and maintain the quality of a UW Madison engineering degree. This is a proven track to ensure the state’s competitive edge; there are 450 companies that come to the College of Engineering career fair, and our undergraduates begin their careers with starting salaries averaging $75,153.

Our ranking as a top engineering college attracts the best students and faculty. Of course, the ranking is predicated on educating engineering leaders and our research prowess – our annual research
expenditures exceed $100 million and make over 100 patent disclosures. However, attracting the top talent is competitive and engineering colleges at Illinois, Ohio State, Michigan and Purdue and elsewhere have been constructing new instructional and research facilities, increasing opportunities for students to study engineering, and hiring more faculty and staff. Our facilities, even with our aggressive renovation campaign, prohibit significant growth in the number of students and in the faculty and staff to educate them, and in engaging in research that will make it attractive for companies to locate to Wisconsin. The U.S. is investing billions into research designed to reestablish our nation’s leadership in critical technologies, which is essential for future economic growth and national security. This money will be directed toward top engineering programs; Wisconsin’s ability to secure this funding is closely tied to the new building, it will enable Wisconsin to lead in re-establishing our leadership in critical technologies and attract companies to the state.

The project represents a financial and workforce partnership with the State of Wisconsin. The total project cost is $347 million. We have already secured over $100 million in private fundraising commitments, with the ultimate goal of raising $150 million for the project. These private gifts are contingent on state support of the project in this biennium. The state would provide $197 million in general fund supported borrowing (GFSB).

We look forward to partnering with the state to grow and meet demands from Wisconsin employers and continue to help drive innovation in our state. I am happy to answer any questions at this time and I encourage legislators to visit us on campus to learn more about the engineering program at UW-Madison and the building project. If you have any questions, please reach out to Senior Director of State Relations Crystal Potts (crystal.potts@wisc.edu; 608-265-4105).

For more information, please visit www.engineeringthefuture.wisc.edu