

Regents' Resolution on a Proposed Constitutional
Amendment Regarding Revenue Limits on
State and Local Governments

BOARD OF REGENTS:

Resolution:

WHEREAS, Chapter 36 of the Wisconsin Statutes vests in the Board of Regents the responsibility for the governance of the University of Wisconsin System, directing the Board of Regents to ensure that the public university system in Wisconsin meets the needs of Wisconsin residents by developing its human resources, and providing access to a quality higher education for students of all ages, backgrounds and income; and

WHEREAS, establishing a formula in the constitution to limit revenues will cause significant reductions in state funding to higher education and other discretionary programs because mandated, formula-driven or entitlement programs receive funding first; and

WHEREAS, historically, in less difficult times, the university has been subject to budget reductions; therefore there is no reason to believe that the University of Wisconsin System would not be the target of future cuts, which would force the university to admit fewer students and/or significantly increase tuition and fees; and

WHEREAS, the proposed constitutional revenue limit would have a disproportionate impact on the transfer of knowledge by UW Extension in every county and limit access to the most affordable two-year UW College transfer institutions because they would be hit by both county and state revenue limits; and

WHEREAS, constitutional revenue limits would decrease the ability to invest in our state's economic growth by limiting revenues to leverage Wisconsin's fair share of federal research funds which contribute to solutions for our future health, homeland and economic security, and spin-off jobs to keep our children employed in Wisconsin; and

WHEREAS, instead of the state constitution, attention needs to be given to reforming the state budget process and state statutes to better reflect public priorities; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Regents and the University of Wisconsin System are committed to working with state government to accomplish such reform in a way that embodies the wisdom of this nation's founders in having elected officials make responsible budget decisions and be held accountable for them by taxpayers.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED the Board of Regents does hereby oppose the proposed constitutional amendment and authorizes the President and representatives of the Board to communicate to the Legislature its opposition to said amendment for the following reasons:

1. The Board of Regents strongly opposes the enactment of any constitutional amendment that substitutes “government by referendum” for representative democracy in which there is accountability for individual decisions and discretion of elected legislative representatives. It is the responsibility of elected officials to exercise their individual judgment in making revenue and expenditure decisions, and in responding to unforeseen and emergency circumstances, and therefore it is an abrogation of their responsibility as elected representatives to support a constitutional amendment that would require statewide referendums for individual legislative matters.
2. The strategy of the University of Wisconsin System is to increase the number of baccalaureate degree holders in the state of Wisconsin, a strategy which is necessary in order to compete in the knowledge economy. This strategy will require an investment in the university after several biennia of deep budget cuts. A restriction of state revenue tied to a cost-of-living formula unrelated to many of the university’s most significant expenses will make this strategy unachievable, and will instead require significant tuition increases, dramatic cuts in financial aid for low and moderate income families, and enrollment caps. These results are not in the best interest of the citizens of Wisconsin.