



REPUBLICANS TO CUT UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN BUDGET IN FIGHT OVER DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION - ASSOCIATED PRESS

Posted on June 14, 2023 by HARM VENHUIZEN | ASSOCIATED PRESS



Photo: Attendees watch the 170th University of Wisconsin-Madison commencement ceremony at Camp Randall Stadium in Madison, Wis.

Republican state lawmakers were poised Tuesday to cut funding for University of Wisconsin campuses as the GOP-controlled Legislature and school officials continue to clash over efforts to promote diversity and inclusion.

The vote comes just days after Republicans refused to fund the university's top building project priority — a new engineering facility on the flagship Madison campus.

Tensions between Republicans who control the Legislature and the state's university system are nothing new. But the fight this year centers on issues of [free speech and UW's work to advance diversity](#) and racial equity.

Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, the state's top Republican, said ahead of a meeting of the budget-writing committee on Tuesday that he wants it to cut all funding the university system would use for diversity initiatives. He estimated the cuts would total \$32 million.

"I hope we have the ability to eliminate that spending. The university should have already chosen to redirect it to something that is more productive and more broadly supported," Vos told The Associated Press.

UW spokesperson Mark Pitsch said salaries for current system employees specifically tasked with working on diversity, equity and inclusion amount to roughly \$15.6 million annually. That number does not include funding for diversity events or other initiatives.

Vos has previously called campus diversity offices a waste of taxpayer money and said they further racial divides. Meanwhile, UW System President Jay Rothman hired a new chief diversity officer with an annual salary of \$225,000 who began work on Monday. He did not publicize the hiring at a UW Board of Regents meeting earlier this month.

"I want the university to grow and succeed, but if they are obsessed with spending all the scarce dollars that they have on programs that are clearly divisive and offer little public good, I don't know why we'd want to support that," Vos said.

The fight reflects a broader cultural battle playing out across the nation over college diversity initiatives. Republican lawmakers this year have [proposed more than 30 bills in 12 states](#) to limit diversity, equity and inclusion efforts in higher education, an Associated Press

analysis found in April.



Democratic Sen. Kelda Roys, whose district includes the UW-Madison campus, called Vos petty and criticized the push to eliminate diversity initiatives.

“You’d be hard pressed to find a major organization in this country that isn’t doing something to help them achieve equity and inclusion,” Roys said. “The UW is the economic engine of the state. Making any cuts to the UW, especially politically motivated ones, is just going to harm every person in this state.”