



Office of the President

1700 Van Hise Hall
1220 Linden Drive
Madison, Wisconsin 53706-1559
608-262-2321
tthompson@uwsa.edu
www.wisconsin.edu

January 7, 2022

Regent President Edmund Manydeeds III
Office of the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System
1860 Van Hise Hall
1220 Linden Drive
Madison, Wisconsin 53706

Dear Regent President Manydeeds:

I love Wisconsin. As you have heard me profess on many occasions, I believe the University of Wisconsin System is among our state's greatest assets, second only to its people. I have worked relentlessly over the past 18 months to lead this organization and put the Wisconsin Idea into action to improve the lives of all Wisconsinites.

I was honored to be asked by the Board of Regents to serve as System President, particularly through what could have been its darkest time. While challenging on many fronts, we worked together to continue to provide the quality of education our students deserve and parents expect. We not only performed but prevailed in our fight against COVID's deleterious impact on our universities and our communities – and in doing so we made our campuses some of the safest places in Wisconsin.

But not content with keeping only our universities safe, we led the fight against this insidious disease in every corner of the state. In November 2020, we were the first public university system in the country to expand our testing capacity to the public in all our communities. To this day, we have continued to provide this resource, with our universities having provided over one million COVID tests. And hundreds of our extraordinary students answered the call to serve on the front lines in health care facilities and vaccination clinics.

Together, we accomplished this and much more.

My top priority has always been our students. In addition to equipping them with a world-class education, we committed to providing a safe environment for them and our employees while maximizing in-person instruction, restoring the college experience, and deploying new resources to support their emotional well-being.

I was able to report to the Board of Regents last October that every campus in our system was financially stable. In incredibly challenging times for campus administrators, faculty, academic and university staff, and our students and their families, we were able to balance the books and formulate responses to lagging state investment and a continued freeze in tuition.

I was able to report that while other universities and colleges nationwide experienced significant falloff in enrollments, UW System outperformed its peers, with enrollment declining only slightly more than one percent as we entered the 2021-2022 academic year.

By working with the Legislature and the Governor, tuition-setting authority has been restored to the Board of Regents after nearly a decade. This same willingness to faithfully engage with policy makers from both political parties has brought the UW System closer to a return to confidence with these elected officials. While that trust needs to be continuously earned, the System has significantly improved its engagement with elected officials.

We formulated an operational state budget request that resulted in no reduction to base funding and a modest increase to establish programs we could all agree would elevate our state. While the UW System would have greatly benefited from further state investment, on balance, the result allows us to continue our mission. Further, our success in the capital budget will allow us to build the upgrades and provide the programs necessary to help students succeed now and into the future.

We have implemented significant operational changes, such as a Systemwide procure-to-pay program that enhances efficiency and accountability in the purchasing process. We accelerated the Administrative Transformation Program to modernize our enterprise resource functions, and we have streamlined the payroll process to reduce redundancies in human resources.

Since day one, I have worked tirelessly to implement these and other necessary reforms to strengthen the backbone of our System. This organization needs a strong advocate and tough evaluator. I have done this with an urgency and focus expected by those who know me.

While I did not seek this responsibility, it has been extremely rewarding to lead and work alongside truly remarkable people at UW System Administration and our universities. On the front lines of this undertaking, the UW System enjoys the great benefit of outstanding leadership from our chancellors, who are focused on delivering the best outcomes for their students, their communities, and this state. And our universities are taking a central role in helping drive economic development throughout Wisconsin.

I want to thank you and all the regents for the confidence you placed in me to lead, with special appreciation to former Regent President Andrew Petersen, former Regent Vice President Michael Grebe, and current Regent Vice President Karen Walsh for recruiting me to serve in this capacity. I am grateful to the Board for allowing me to lead in the only way I know how – with all my heart and with the deepest affection for this state and its many gifts.

When I agreed to lead our System, I did so knowing two things; that I was needed, and that it would be temporary. I have been encouraged and heartened that so many of my fellow citizens and university colleagues have taken the time to personally express their gratitude for my willingness to lead an organization that has been so instrumental in my personal and professional life, and to the life of Wisconsin.

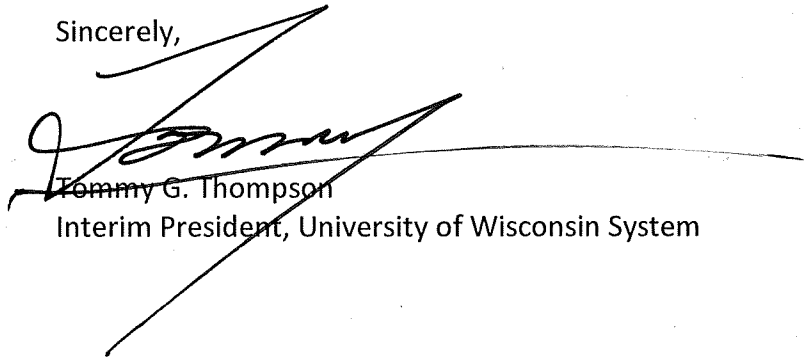
While I firmly believe that the pursuit of excellence never ends, I am satisfied that I have accomplished what has been asked of me and what the people of this state have sought. I am confident our foundation is as strong as ever. It is time to allow you and the board the ability to prepare for a successor to lead the UW System into the years ahead.

As the regents will soon identify a candidate to succeed former UW System President Ray Cross and me as Interim President, the onboarding process will require the full attention of System staff, chancellors, faculty, and the many remarkable people that carry out the business of the System every day. Until the end, I will work to accomplish all that is needed before allowing staff the ability to prepare for the transition.

Therefore, I will leave as UW System President at the end of March 18, 2022. Ed, I greatly appreciate your leadership - and especially our friendship - over the past several months. I will spend the coming weeks advancing our legislative agenda, finalizing remaining priorities, visiting campuses to express my thanks in-person, and preparing for the upcoming Board of Regents meeting.

My mother was Irish, so I take my leave with mixed emotions and an everlasting affection for this institution I have been proud to lead.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tommy G. Thompson', is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and cursive.

Tommy G. Thompson
Interim President, University of Wisconsin System