



UNITED COUNCIL

of University of Wisconsin Students, Inc.

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Geographic Representation on the UW Board of Regents

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BACKGROUND

The University of Wisconsin System Board of Regents is an 18 member governing body comprised of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the President of the Wisconsin Technical Colleges System board, two UW students and fourteen citizens at large appointed by the Governor. Since the creation of the current board in 1974¹ the vast majority of the fourteen citizen positions have been filled exclusively by citizens from the Madison or Milwaukee areas, often precluding membership from other areas, particularly from the northern and western portions of the Wisconsin.

AB 276/SB 223 would divide the state into seven geographic districts, created on the basis of population, county borders and the location of UW campuses, and require that at least one at large citizen member of the Board of Regents reside in each district. Given the current makeup of the Board of Regents two of the proposed districts, one containing the campuses of UW-Parkside and UW-Whitewater and the other containing the campuses of UW-Barron County, UW-Eau Claire, UW-Stout, and UW-Superior, have no members on the board.

DISCUSSION

The duties of the Board of Regents require members to review and analyze policies that govern all 26 UW campuses. Although the University of Wisconsin System serves the state of Wisconsin as a whole, each campus also provides unique services to the communities they are located in, the advantages and challenges that one campus may face could be completely divergent from another. Requiring that at least one member of the Board of Regents be from each of these seven districts will provide unique perspectives from around the state to be expressed throughout board deliberations.

Currently and in the past the board as a whole has often deferred to members with particular expertise relating to their background and familiarity with a particular campus or area of the state; however, due to the current lack of geographic diversity on the board, members are often required to make second hand assumptions or rely on their knowledge of campuses that may be entirely dissimilar from those that such policies might greatly impact.

¹ Wisconsin State Statute 36

The remedy proposed in AB 276/SB 233 would provide for such geographic representation without unduly limiting future governors ample freedom to appoint the most qualified citizens to the board. Indeed, even with the current makeup of the board only two seats would need to shift in order to bring the board into compliance, allowing 8 of the 14 citizen members to continue to reside in the Milwaukee or Madison regions.

Altering the requirements for service on the UW Board of Regents in this fashion would not require any member to exclusively represent any particular campus; however, it could provide the board as a whole with firsthand knowledge necessary to ensuring that the borders of the University truly do match the borders of the state.

REQUESTED ACTION

United Council of UW Students, Inc. would greatly appreciate your support and vote for AB 276/SB 223 relating to composition of the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin.