May 3, 2011

The Honorable Alberta Darling
The Honorable Robin Vos Co-Chairs,
Joint Committee on Finance Wisconsin State Legislature
Room 305 East, State Capitol
Madison, WI 53702

Dear Senator Darling and Representative Vos,

The undersigning are writing this letter to express our strong support for the New Badger Partnership (NBP), a proposal that is presently being discussed in your committee as part of the State budget. As faculty members of the Mathematics Department of the University of Wisconsin-Madison we recognize the reality of the current circumstances and we appreciate the sustained and generous support we receive from the State of Wisconsin. We feel our school urgently needs the provisions of the NBP for the reasons listed below.

-- UW-Madison is ranked in the top 20 worldwide, with many departments ranked in the top 10. It is a major economic force in Wisconsin. Its impact on the economy of Wisconsin, both in terms of direct money flowing into the state in the form of grants (which support the local economy as well), and in terms of successful companies spun off by research generated at UW-Madison, cannot be overestimated. It is generating jobs and state revenue like no other state enterprise. Without new flexibility in raising funds and allocating resources, the quality of the university is very likely to decrease dramatically. This would be a major, long-term, and potentially irreversible loss for the state of Wisconsin. In light of the new major cuts being proposed to state funding for the university, we urgently need new flexibility to create solutions to budget problems if we are to keep our hard-earned top position in the world of higher education.

-- Many leading state universities (Berkeley, Michigan, Urbana, etc.) have already implemented measures giving them flexibility similar to that proposed by the NBP, or are quickly positioning themselves to achieve it. They are doing this because they recognized a worrisome pattern: brilliant minds are highly sought after in the market, and are being lured away from state universities like UW-Madison. The market for the brightest minds has become increasingly competitive, with private schools in the US and universities from other countries, especially China, Korea, Germany, and UK, making it their priority to recruit the best faculty. These schools are able to make immediate decisions without several layers of government approval. Without a new compensation scheme the university risks losing in a very short time its best faculty members, one of the most important assets this school has. The current operating mode of UW-Madison is not supple enough to allow competition, and the NBP would improve this dramatically.

-- There are important differences between the needs of a world-class research university, which competes on an international scale, and those of a state or regional campus competing on a local scale. Some of the provisions of the NBP are unique to UW-Madison. While we are determined to preserve our cooperation with the other campuses in the UW-system, the "one-
size-fits-all" approach of the Wisconsin Idea Partnership lacks many of the features that are essential to keeping UW-Madison in a leadership role on the world scale.

-- Under the NBP, the main mission of the University, that of providing an affordable, top-quality education for the citizens of the state, will be preserved. After consecutive budget reductions the quality of education at the University is already in jeopardy: we have bigger class sizes and fewer opportunities for the educational experience to evolve and grow with emerging fields. Although the Madison Initiative for Undergraduates has greatly ameliorated this trend, the NBP will allow us to move resources to ensure that quality is not at risk. A system of fellowships based on financial need is already in place (through the Madison Initiative for Undergraduates and other programs), and under the NBP, while tuition would increase in general, we will have the flexibility to offset the increase by fellowships for those who cannot afford it, and with more help for those families who need it. At present, UW-Madison tuition is significantly below the level of its peers, and the NBP is only proposing to raise it to a level close to the average of the tuition at peer state institutions.

Let us close by stating the obvious: while it is very expensive to maintain a world-class research university, it costs much more to bring up the level of a school to the top tier. Given the enormous positive impact a world-class university has on its neighboring community and economy, practically every state and nation is spending capital to establish one. We already have UW-Madison, whose name is widely respected and recognized. In these times of lean budgets the university needs to be able to use and allocate the existing resources in the best possible way to keep its position, and the public authority status is the appropriate venue to do that. We urge you to give it your support.

Sincerely,

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