

Chancellor Brian Levin-Stankevich
Remarks at Eau Claire Area Chamber of Commerce Annual Holiday Legislative Breakfast
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire
Dec. 17, 2010

Good morning. This morning's breakfast welcomes to our campus a number of newly elected, re-elected, and in the case of Terry Moulton, newly re-elected, legislators. Two of our new Eau Claire representatives, Warren Petryk and Kathy Bernier, are Blugolds, and we are proud to count them among our nearly 70,000 alumni.

We will help our new representatives master that learning curve on higher education quickly. I do, though, want to recognize the work of our local legislative delegation these past four years. Senators Kathleen Vinehout and Pat Kreitlow, Representatives Jeff Smith and Kristen Dexter, and then Representative Terry Moulton all supported major UW-Eau Claire initiatives. These included a commitment to funding and building our education building, currently in what is called "advanced enumeration" in the capital budget for 2011-13, a \$44.5 million project and the first state-funded building on our campus in 30 years. It is vital to this campus and this community that the state proceed with this project, and we will be asking the members of our legislative delegation to support the capital budget spending needed for the construction.

Our area delegation also helped us gain approval to allow our students to allocate their fees toward the new university student center and, just this Wednesday, the Children's Center.

Collectively, these projects and associated infrastructure improvements will result in more than \$100 million in construction spending — supporting hundreds of local jobs. The bidding process to construct the replacement of our current student center, a \$48.8 million project, is now under way. Bids will be opened January 11 and, if all goes as planned, we will break ground this spring on both the university student center and the Children's Center. Both of those projects are being funded through student and user fees (revenue we generate from our customers), not tax dollars.

Our legislators were also instrumental in securing UW System Board of Regents representation for this part of Wisconsin. First, student Regent Aaron Wingad was appointed by the Governor — and this year Eau Claire attorney Ed Manydeeds joined him. After decades of not having a regent from Eau Claire, we now have two.

I am recounting these accomplishments because they are clear examples of what we can do for the university and the community when we work together. The new student center, the education building and regent representation were all issues that were supported during past Chippewa Valley Rallies.

Higher education is an essential ingredient for economic competitiveness and prosperity. Governor-elect Walker has set the goal of creating 250,000 new jobs in Wisconsin in the next four years. We cannot achieve this goal without working together.

I want to assure you that UW-Eau Claire is now, and will continue, doing its part to help Wisconsin recover.

- Our employees are doing their part by not only foregoing pay increases, but by taking a 3.3 percent annual pay cut through eight annual furlough

days each year of this two-year budget period. By the way, our university employees are the only public education employees in Wisconsin to experience pay reductions instead of contractual raises.

- The Blugold Commitment, tuition our students have agreed to pay above the tuition set by regents to enhance their educational experience, is resulting in the hiring of dozens of additional faculty and staff — creating the kind of good-paying jobs the Chippewa Valley needs.
- Our Materials Science Center, Center for Business Solutions, Small Business Development Center and College of Business all provide services that directly support both established and start-up businesses in the region.
- Our enrollment this year has again exceeded 11,000 students — students who buy goods and services at local businesses, who work as employees at your companies, and who enrich the community through their considerable talents in music, theater, athletics, service-learning hours dedicated throughout our community and other programs.

With state allocations now less than 25 percent of our total operating budget, we need to start to look at our university not as a state agency but as a public purpose enterprise. To be successful, we need the same tools as any enterprise that you might represent. And by all accounts, we have been successful.

In higher education, our challenge is to balance access, cost and quality. UW-Eau Claire is outstanding at all three. I already told you our enrollment is over 11,000 this year, an increase of nearly 2 percent over last year — so we are accessible.

As to cost? Even with the Blugold Commitment, we are affordable. An October 28 College Board report shows that our cost to attend, including tuition, fees, room and board, is about \$3,000 per year less than the national average for similar public institutions. In addition, U.S. News & World Report ranks UW-Eau Claire third among the magazine's top-ranked Midwestern universities in the number of students receiving Pell Grants, a number that represents how well we serve low-income students.

And our quality, according to many different measures (just check our website for the continuous parade of recognition we receive), continues to be among the best not only in the Midwest, but the United States.

Ultimately, like your businesses, it is our students (our customers) whose opinions matters most. A recent survey of our young alumni ages 25-39, conducted by the American Council on Education as part of a national survey, shows an extremely high degree of satisfaction. Some key findings:

- 99 percent of our alumni have a favorable impression of their alma mater;
- 95 percent agree that the time and money spent to earn their degree was worth it;
- 94 percent said UW-Eau Claire charged a fair price for their education (compared with only 76 percent nationally).

I'm sure you will agree, these are great grades!

If we are to maintain this level of performance or even, as we desire, continuously improve upon it, we need the tools any enterprise must have. Can a minority shareholder (the state) continue to exercise 100 percent control over such aspects as fund-specific revenue and spending, the number of employees we can hire, the details of every construction project and even the date on which we begin our fall semester? If anything, fewer public resources argue for even greater flexibility in order to stretch those dollars further. This is increasingly recognized in state after state that is restructuring its higher education business model.

It is, therefore, astonishing that one of the first proposals in this new legislature is to place price controls on University of Wisconsin campus tuition. I would urge those who campaigned on market principles and a reduced regulatory environment to apply those principles to all enterprises that add value to the citizens of this state, private and partially state-supported.

We will ask you to join us in urging responsible solutions to cost and access while helping us to build a sustainable model for higher education excellence for Wisconsin's future.

Finally, on the subject of working together: We are nearing completion of our 20-year facilities master plan process. I spoke earlier about the \$100 million in construction projects for our campus currently under way, and the master plan identifies many more projects, including potential partnerships between the university and community to create shared facilities to house fine and performing arts, major events and conferences.

I have said this before and I'll repeat it this morning: I believe that together the university and community can create the kinds of quality facilities that neither could afford to build alone.

We are putting our intentions to work toward that goal in our master plan, and I look forward to working together to explore ways to make those new community/university facilities a reality.

Thank you for coming, and have a great holiday season!