

Remarks at the Wisconsin Associated County Extension Committees State Conference

by David Wilson, Chancellor
June 27, 2006

Thank you, and good morning, everyone.

It is an honor to attend my first WACEC state conference, to spend some time with our valued county partners from across the state.

I may be new to Wisconsin, but I'm very familiar with Cooperative Extension and the importance of our local partnerships, and I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today.

As I travel around Wisconsin, people have given me a very warm reception.

I'd like to take a few minutes to discuss my top priorities as chancellor. Then, if time allows, I'd invite you to tell me what's on your mind, and what the university can do for you and the communities you serve.

Years ago, I learned about the "Wisconsin Idea," and I was impressed by this simple but powerful notion – that the state's public university could extend its reach to the far corners of the state... providing knowledge to citizens that could improve their lives and transform their communities.

Back then, I was smitten with the Wisconsin Idea. Today, you might say that I'm married to it.

As a chancellor, I am the chief executive of two outstanding institutions, and "caretaker" of this powerful idea. Even after nearly two months on the job, I'm still awestruck by the scope of our work...

Today, while we're at this conference, nearly 2,500 people will contact a Cooperative Extension educator in one of your 72 counties.

Elsewhere today...

- **580** people will take part in a Continuing Education course
- **35** entrepreneurs will turn to a Small Business Development Center for training, and

- **82,000** people will watch a Wisconsin Public Television program, and another **59,000** will listen to Wisconsin Public Radio
- About **230** people will attend a class or event at an Extension Conference Center...
- ... and **290** prospective UW students will submit an electronic admissions application through UW HELP – part of Extension’s Outreach and E-Learning division.

Along with UW-Extension, the 13 UW Colleges also partner to deliver impressive educational opportunities.

With personal attention, small classes and low tuition, we provide **more than 12,300 students each year** with the “best start” toward their college education.

In all of these ways, and many others, UW-Extension and UW Colleges work to align educational opportunities with the most pressing needs of our society. We see today’s version of The Wisconsin Idea as a two-way connection, in which we engage in an ongoing conversation with all Wisconsin people.

That takes me back to our conversation here today. I want to begin that dialogue with a word – **IDEAS** – which provides a useful framework for helping us remember what we talked about today.

As your UW-Extension chancellor, I plan to focus my attention on five key areas:

I – Innovation

D – Diversity

E – Economic Development

A – Access

S – Stewardship

I-D-E-A-S... Let me discuss each of these five areas briefly, then invite your comments and questions.

First, “I” for Innovation...

UW-Extension has long history of transferring technologies and top-shelf research from the university to the grassroots level.

Next month, at Farm Technology Days in Sheboygan, we'll see the latest agricultural innovations on display – new technologies that help keep Wisconsin farms profitable and productive.

Many of those new technologies began at a university. As Wisconsin farmers consider using these new approaches, many of them will consult one of our county Extension agents to determine if they truly represent a sound investment.

This evidence-based approach helped make Wisconsin's agriculture industry the envy of the world.

Building upon that "innovation tradition," I believe that we can use the same model to cultivate and support other business sectors by translating new discoveries into new economic opportunities and new jobs.

Along with innovative technology, Wisconsin needs innovative thinkers whose expertise is grounded in a solid liberal arts education... people with critical thinking skills, who respond to big challenges with bold solutions.

That's exactly the kind of preparation that our UW Colleges graduates receive during their freshman/sophomore years.

While we encourage innovation, we must "talk the talk and walk the walk." We must demonstrate innovative thinking and creative ways to expand educational opportunities. This will require the use of new technologies and new delivery methods that make higher education more convenient ...more responsive ...more efficient ...and more effective.

Next in the IDEAS framework is "D" for Diversity...

Just as we acknowledge that the economy is changing, we must also recognize that Wisconsin's demographics are shifting, and our university must respond.

[The world is flat... the walls have come down...]

As I noted before, we have a key role in transferring scientific discoveries to the "real world," helping people make wise choices and good investments.

We take the same approach when it comes to social trends, using the latest research and reliable data to you and other community leaders understand the forces and trends that are changing your workforce and placing new demands on your local agencies.

That evidence-based will provide valuable insight for you as you consider ways to stimulate and sustain your local economies in this changing social climate.

...which brings me to the “E” in IDEAS: Economic Development.

Listen to any economist talk about high gas prices, and you’ll hear the term “supply and demand.”

Working in support of Wisconsin’s economy, UW Colleges and UW-Extension also focus on supply-and-demand.

On one hand, we provide a steady supply of educated workers.

On the other, we play a role in stimulating demand for those workers, by stimulating the growth of businesses to employ those workers.

To increase peoples’ earning power, we must begin with increased educational attainment. On both measures, Wisconsin currently lags our neighboring states.

If we can increase the number of working adults with four-year degrees, we can begin to close that gap. In turn, that will boost local and state tax revenues, providing more funding for essential services, including higher education.

Through our university-county partnership, UW-Extension is building a stronger economy in many different ways.

We’re helping to preserve Wisconsin’s core business sectors, such as agriculture, manufacturing and tourism.

We’re working to revitalize main-street business districts, analyzing local labor needs and helping communities develop long-term strategies for growth.

Through the 13 campus-based Small Business Development Centers, we’re also providing specialized education and support for small businesses, which represent the largest source of new jobs.

Next... The “A” in IDEAS is for Access...

For me, educational access is not an abstract notion. It is real, and it is vital.

Clearly, access to knowledge transformed my life. When people give themselves the gift of education, they transform their own future and they become trailblazers for others. But, often, that trail is littered with obstacles.

For many hard-working Wisconsin families, one barrier to education is the sticker price. That barrier becomes more and more challenging as we absorb successive state budget reductions while attempting to preserve the quality of higher education in Wisconsin.

For older students who juggle work and family obligations, flexibility is another barrier. With this in mind, we are working across the UW System to offer more online degrees and specialized services for “non-traditional” students.

This is an area where we can make a tremendous difference in the state’s economic future, as we work to train tomorrow’s workforce and re-tool today’s workers for the new economy.

Long after students earn their degree from a UW campus, UW-Extension must be there to preserve access to all of the university’s resources and all of its lifelong learning opportunities.

As we do all of these things... striving to be innovative and diverse...

As we focus on economic development and access...

We must always be good stewards of the public dollar.

That’s the “S” in IDEAS – Stewardship. That’s a fancy label for trust.

As counties and universities alike work to squeeze every bit of value out of every penny, I promise you that UW-Extension will be open and transparent about how your \$20 million annual investment is being used.

In business terms, we will work to demonstrate that you are seeing a significant return on that investment in community-based education.

Our local, state and national partnerships have always helped us deliver tremendous value to our students and clients. As chancellor, one of my main roles is to nurture those strong relationships. That’s why I’m so happy to have this time together with our WACEC colleagues.

Over the next several months, I expect to see a few of you again, as I visit the UW-Extension county offices and the 13 UW Colleges campuses.

As I make those visits and engage in personal conversations with other state residents, I'll be listening to peoples' specific suggestions and concerns, and I will use that feedback as the building blocks for a new strategic plan... a "shared vision" for UW-Extension and UW Colleges.

As we craft that shared vision, I promise that we will protect what these two fine institutions already do well, and preserve their core missions. And we will think creatively about the future of our state, the emerging needs of our citizens and the roles we can play in addressing those needs.

I've told you a little about my "IDEAS" as chancellor, but I really want to allow time to hear your thoughts, so I'll stop there and take questions...