

Wisconsin Counties Association State Conference

Remarks by Chancellor David Wilson

La Crosse, Wis. – September 18, 2006

Good morning... and thank you, Mark, for inviting me to share a few remarks at your state conference.

As Chancellor of both the University of Wisconsin Colleges and the University of Wisconsin-Extension, I understand and appreciate the vital importance of our partnerships with Wisconsin Counties. It is an honor to spend time with so many of our friends from across the state.

On behalf of my colleagues across the state, I want to thank you for the strong partnerships you have with our two institutions.

Combined, you and the 72 counties you represent invest about \$20 million annually to support local Cooperative Extension offices. That investment leverages an additional \$60 million in state and federal funds.

At our 13 UW Colleges – the freshman/sophomore campuses of the UW System – we rely on longstanding county partnerships to provide and maintain those outstanding facilities.

Combined, 14 counties and 3 cities invest more than \$9 million in our UW Colleges facilities every year.

Since coming to Wisconsin on May 1st, I have visited 20 of the county Extension offices and 10 of the UW Colleges... well on my way toward my goal of visiting all 72 UW-Extension offices and all 13 UW Colleges during my first 18 months as chancellor.

Without exception, people have greeted me with genuine warmth and hospitality. They have also offered their sincere, enthusiastic appreciation for the important work that we do – together...

- Graduates from our UW Colleges tell me how those 13 campuses provide affordable and accessible opportunities for a first-rate university education.
- Small business owners tell me how the UW's Small Business Development Centers are helping them launch new ventures and create new jobs.
- Working adults, who juggle careers, families and college courses, tell me how online degree programs and flexible learning options help them advance their careers.
- 4-H members tell me how their educational projects and club activities give them valuable hands-on learning experience.

- And just last week, when I sat down with a group of farmers and other people from the agriculture industry, they told me how much they rely on UW-Extension's support to remain a profitable, productive pillar of Wisconsin's economy.

Even after 5 months on the job, I am still awestruck by the scope of our work...

Today, while we are here at this conference, nearly 2,500 people will contact a county-based Cooperative Extension educator.

They come seeking information about agriculture, gardening, nutrition, financial management, economic development, youth programs and other topics.

Today, about 12,000 people of all ages will go to class on a UW Colleges campus. With personal attention, small classes and low tuition, we offer them the "best start" toward their college education.

In 27 Wisconsin counties, more high school graduates choose to attend the UW Colleges over any other UW System institution.

Enrolling more than 4,000 in-state freshmen last year, the UW Colleges – as an institution – ranks second only to UW-Milwaukee in providing educational access for Wisconsin's home-grown talent.

As I've traveled around the state, I've talked about five key areas where I'm focusing my attention.

- **Innovation**
- **Diversity**
- **Economic Development**
- **Access**
- **Stewardship**

I-D-E-A-S. If you don't remember anything else from my remarks today, just remember that word – "ideas."

For those of you who attended the Wisconsin Associated County Extension Committees conference, this may be a bit of review, but let me touch on each of these five priorities briefly.

First in "ideas" comes the "I" for Innovation...

UW-Extension has long history of innovation – bringing new technologies and cutting-edge research from the university to the grassroots level.

Building upon that “innovation tradition,” we can cultivate and support other business sectors by translating new discoveries into new business 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 at our 13 county-owned campuses.

Next in the IDEAS framework is “D” for Diversity...

As I noted before, we have played 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 reliable data to help local leaders better understand the demographic trends that affecting our workforce and placing new demands on your local services.

It’s important that our university continue providing evidence-based research to you and other local leaders, offering valuable insights about the best ways to sustain your local economies and improve the services you provide in this rapidly changing social climate.

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

As key components of Wisconsin’s economic engine, UW Colleges and UW-Extension focus on supply-and-demand.

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

On the other hand, the university also plays a vital role in stimulating demand for those workers.

Partnering with the Wisconsin Counties, UW Colleges and UW-Extension work both sides of that equation.

As I’ve described, the UW Colleges provide individuals with access to a college education.

At the same time, UW-Extension supports the businesses who will employ those college graduates, and provides high-impact educational programming on the most compelling community issues of the day.

Positioning Wisconsin for growth and success requires that we provide broad “access” to all of the public university’s resources. That’s the “A” in IDEAS...

For many hard-working Wisconsin families, one barrier to educational access is the sticker price. For older students who juggle work and family obligations, flexibility is another barrier.

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.

When ordinary taxpayers need answers, "access" to their university is as close as the telephone, the computer, the television or the local county Extension office.

Preserving that access – the very foundation of our storied "Wisconsin Idea" – will forever be my top priority as chancellor.

Finally... the "S" in IDEAS stands for Stewardship.

That's really a fancy label for trust.

Counties and universities alike work to squeeze every bit of value out of every penny.

I promise you that UW Colleges and UW-Extension will be open and transparent about our business. We will work every day to show you a tangible, positive "return on investment" in these two institutions of higher education.

[pause]

As I said, I spend a lot of time talking about those five areas.

But I spend even more time listening – listening to people talk about issues that are important to them.

Already, I've heard one common theme among both university colleagues and county partners – the need to find innovative ways to reconcile increased demands with decreased -- or flat -- funding.

As we face this challenge together, and confront other emerging issues, please know that UW-Extension and UW Colleges are ready to work collaboratively with you to find workable, practical solutions.

As I travel to your county, I hope that we will meet again, so that I can listen to your ideas... your concerns...your top priorities. You help us stay connected to Wisconsin people and the compelling needs of local communities, so it's important that we maintain open lines of communication.

Until we have that opportunity to continue this dialogue, thank you again for inviting me to join you today. Thank you for your partnership, and thank you for your friendship.

I hope you have a terrific conference!