



February 8, 2018

### **Governance Committee Denounces Remarks by UW System President**

In October 2017, news broke of University of Wisconsin system president Ray Cross's decision to propose a merger of the system's two- and four-year institutions. It was the latest in a number of unilateral and secretive actions taken by system leaders, the state legislature, and Governor Scott Walker, condemned at the time by the AAUP and AFT Wisconsin as constituting ["a concerted attack on the university as a public good and on the university's role in fostering democratic participation."](#)

The day after the news of the proposed merger, President Cross, facing backlash from faculty, staff, and students, wrote the following in an email message to a system regent: "Getting hammered by the 'shared governance' leaders because they weren't involved in the process; however, had they been involved we wouldn't be doing anything!!"

President Cross's remarks, which came to light last week, have drawn quick condemnation. The lone student representative on the twenty-five-member restructuring committee immediately released a statement that read in part: "It is my sincere hope that divisive sentiments toward the employees and students of the University of Wisconsin System will no longer be tolerated. The comments made were simply inappropriate and must be addressed immediately."

The UW-Madison chapter of the AAUP followed with [an open letter](#) to President Cross, expressing its "deep concern about your willful disregard for the role of shared governance" and concluding:

With the surfacing of your emails, it is particularly difficult for people who are supposed to share responsibility with you in governing this institution to have any confidence in your leadership. When you treat the core principle of shared governance as a concept so worthy of derision and disregard that you surround it with "air quotes" in an email to a member of the Board of Regents, it is difficult to envision ever regaining that confidence. In short, your attitude and words have done further damage to an already damaged relationship.

The AAUP's Committee on College and University Governance joins the growing chorus of voices denouncing President Cross's ill-judged remarks and calling on him to explain them.

The committee further calls on President Cross to actively work with faculty, staff, and students on developing policies and practices that will restore a meaningful and productive system of shared governance.

To inform that effort, the committee recommends: 1) the AAUP's [Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities](#), which was jointly formulated with the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB) and the American Council on Education more than fifty years ago; and 2) a recent [AGB white paper on shared governance](#), which concludes that "shared governance is an essential component of America's higher education institutions that needs to be preserved and enhanced."