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## Panel votes to cut University of Wisconsin budget by \$250 million, eliminate tenure

By [SCOTT BAUER](#) Associated Press

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MADISON, Wis. — The Legislature's budget-writing committee voted Friday to cut the University of Wisconsin's budget by \$250 million and eliminate tenure protections for faculty from state law — moves derided by Democrats who argued the changes would hurt both higher education and the state's economy.

The Republican-controlled Joint Finance Committee, on a party line vote, also approved continuing a tuition freeze for two more years and rejected Gov. Scott Walker's plan to give UW more independence from state laws and oversight.

Instead, more limited flexibilities would be given to UW to save money on purchasing and the university would be exempt from state rules on building projects funded entirely through gifts or grants. Republicans expressed remorse about the cut, but said the flexibilities would help UW deal with it. The cut was \$50 million less than Walker proposed.

"The university doesn't deserve this cut," said Sen. Luther Olsen, a Republican from Ripon. "This is just reality."

The provisions were added to the state budget, which the committee is likely to complete next week. From there, it heads to the Senate and Assembly, both controlled by Republicans, where it could be changed before it's voted on next month. Walker can then make extensive changes through his broad veto power.

About a dozen protesters were removed by police throughout the meeting for speaking out against the committee's moves.

Sen. Alberta Darling, the other co-chair, called the entire proposal part of a new partnership between UW and the Legislature "based on trust and relationships."

UW System President Ray Cross echoed that comment, saying he was grateful that the cut was to be reduced and along with the new flexibilities "illustrates a willingness to open a new dialogue and partnership between the Legislature and the UW System."

UW had pushed for years for that independence to help deal with the budget cut given that it can't raise tuition on in-state students. The 13 four-year and 13 two-year institutions in the UW

System have been announcing layoffs and other budget cuts to deal with a \$300 million reduction.

The proposal would remove tenure protections from law, leaving it to the UW Board of Regents to restore. The board, whose members are appointed by Walker, could also fire any staff or tenured faculty member.

Cross and board vice president Regina Millner promised to immediately incorporate tenure into its policy.

The committee also voted to make changes to shared governance provisions, taking power away from faculty, students and staff to have a voice in campus decisions and giving more authority to campus chancellors and the UW System Board of Regents.

Democrats tried to undo all the cuts, but didn't have the votes.

"People don't like these cuts," said Rep. Chris Taylor, a Democrat from Madison. "They don't want to cut our public education system."

Walker's original proposal included the cuts tied with a tuition freeze and a transformation of UW's organizational structure into a new model known as a public authority. Walker cast it as an extension of the 2011 law known his signature legislative achievement that essentially ended collective bargaining for most public workers, including K-12 teachers.

Walker is expected to launch a presidential run once he signs the budget into law late next month or in July.

His plan for UW ran into opposition from Republicans who were reluctant to cede so much authority to the university, in part over fears that it would lead to higher tuition increases.

Walker had wanted to limit future tuition increases after two years to no more than the rate of inflation. The committee was not going to go along with those limits.

Republican Sen. Steve Nass, of Whitewater, said that was bad news for the middle class and the move sends "a green light to UW Administrators that the sky-is-the-limit on tuition in fall 2017."

Other states have been investing more money in higher education after years of cuts. This year, only five other states — Arizona, Illinois, Louisiana, Connecticut and West Virginia — are considering higher education cuts.

In the past decade, state spending on higher education per student in Wisconsin dropped 20.3 percent compared with 5.9 percent nationally, according to data provided by the nonpartisan Legislative Fiscal Bureau.

The 26 institutions in the UW System serve about 180,000 students statewide.

