Wisconsin Conference of the
American Association of University Professors

Statement on UW System President Finalist

June 2, 2020

AAUP Wisconsin expresses its strong opposition to the selection of University of Alaska System President Jim Johnsen as the sole finalist for the position of UW System President. The faculty at both the Anchorage and Fairbanks campuses of the Alaska system voted no confidence in Johnsen's leadership in 2017, and the Anchorage faculty called on their Board to suspend Johnsen in 2019.

These are disqualifying attributes in any candidate. Basic norms of decency and respect toward our colleagues in Alaska dictate that we oppose Johnsen's candidacy in the strongest possible terms.

The problems here are compounded by the search committee's decision to name Johnsen as the sole finalist. This is a departure from accepted academic standards. It suggests either a weak candidate pool or a fixed search. The Regents chose to pursue an unprecedented search process that excluded faculty, staff, and non-Regent students. This is its predictably egregious result.

We call on the Regents to withdraw Johnsen's candidacy immediately and declare a failed search.

We will not allow a new system president to unilaterally pursue an agenda of consolidation and closure of programs and campuses. That is Johnsen's track record in Alaska, and it will be his charge from the Regents here in Wisconsin. Should the Regents persist in installing Johnsen, we will advocate for him to be removed as soon as Walker appointees lose their majority on the Board next spring.

We reaffirm our commitment to the Wisconsin Idea and to bringing the fruits of higher education to the people of Wisconsin all over the state. We invite the Regents to join us in championing the mission of the UW System by working to improve rather than dismantle public higher education in Wisconsin.