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[00:01:37] **Speaker 1** As the fall semester is poised to begin, Wisconsin's major research university, UW-Madison, is grappling with the potential of tens of millions of dollars of cuts to federal funding, most of it cuts to National Institutes of Health research funding. But the cuts span other disciplines like money from the Department of Energy, the National Science Foundation, and the Department of Defense. What does this mean for the state's flagship university? We check in with the Senior Associate Dean for Basic Research, Biotechnology, and Graduate Studies at the UW School of Medicine and Public Health, John Audia. And thanks very much for being here.

[00:02:15] **Speaker 2** Thank you for hosting me.

[00:02:17] **Speaker 1** So all told, what is the hit to federal research funding at UW-Madison as it stands now?

[00:02:22] **Speaker 2** So we've experienced enormous delays in a lot of funds that we were expecting to arrive on campus nationwide. That amounts to about $5 billion in shortfall in NIH funding to go to research institutions. We've been fortunate in some senses in that many of our grants have come through. However, many more are sitting, waiting, where there's an expectation for months. I personally even went through a period of time where I waited on a grant to be awarded for four months. Beyond the time that I expected it to start. This has enormous impacts on our ability to fund our research, to fund out people. And luckily though, UW-Madison has stood up bridging programs, which have been phenomenal. So our chancellor, Chancellor Jennifer Mnuchin, has just reached out and really enabled us to continue to thrive, even in an era where there's a lot of uncertainty.

[00:03:14] **Speaker 1** Where is this uncertainty being felt most acute?

[00:03:18] **Speaker 2** I would say it's in our larger research programs, when there's interruptions in funding to our large grants, this really affects a lot of individuals. And unfortunately, there has been directives from the National Institutes of Health to remove certain language from the work that we're doing, some of the directions that we've been taking historically in really very important areas. Those types of disruptions. Lead to really enormous challenges in ensuring that our people are able to stay employed. We have put a people first mentality. We want to ensure that the folks that are currently working at the university are able continue to do so and pursue their lines of research.

[00:03:59] **Speaker 1** I know that one area that people often focus on when they talk about research at UW-Madison is Alzheimer's and dementia research. How much federal funding is, does that research get and is that at risk?

[00:04:16] **Speaker 2** So right now, we bring in over $100 million a year in research funding from National Institutes of Health and other federal sources in support of our work directed against Alzheimer's disease, as well as related dementias. Currently, the grants that we have in that area, the largest ones, led by Dr. Sterling Johnson, for example, a grant called Clarity, which is hoping to identify biomarkers for dementia. This grant was funded on time, fully funded. Our Alzheimer's Disease Research Center, its core grant, was funded late, but fully funded Many other institutions across the nation have not seen their funds come in when they are expecting them. We've been fortunate to this point, however.

[00:05:03] **Speaker 1** What is the guidance coming out of NIH that puts some of this or other research at risk?

[00:05:09] **Speaker 2** So there's layers now of additional review that very little, it's quite opaque to be honest. We don't actually know who is actually reviewing the grants after the point the scientific review process is done. Those additional layers of review that are being led by the administration, whether it's within the HHS Health and Human Services or at NIH specifically, we really don't understand. Why they exist, what value, what purpose they serve, but what they do do is cause delays in those grants being funded and the money being able to be dispersed to the institution.

[00:05:47] **Speaker 1** Is some of it they're looking at research that goes to disadvantaged populations?

[00:05:53] **Speaker 2** Absolutely, and as I think many of us know, our disadvantaged populations are often the most impacted by various types of disease. Alzheimer's disease is no different. We see that Alzheimer's rates are much higher in groups that are suffering from economic disadvantage, from environmental disadvantage. And when we have to remove language related to those areas. It actually goes against what the science is telling us by studying what's happening in those populations around the state of Wisconsin. Our rural populations, our urban populations, that is absolutely critical for us to be able to meet the needs of everyone across the entire globe, across the United States.

[00:06:39] **Speaker 1** Are cuts to indirect costs for research operations happening?

[00:06:43] **Speaker 2** So far, they haven't started. There is sort of this idea that this is coming in the future. And there's huge concern. We've seen, for example, messaging from the National Science Foundation, from the Department of Defense, that are requiring us to put in place smaller amounts of indirect costs, which funds the institution, the actual fabric of the university that allows this research to be done. I like to equate it to the idea of buying a steak at the grocery store and bringing it home. If you don't have the refrigerator to store that steak, it's gonna spoil. If you have the gas that ultimately fuels the fire to cook that steak it's not gonna be anything you would wanna eat. And that's what the indirect costs pay for. It's really the infrastructure of the university that allows the research to happen. Not yet, we're really worried about where things could go in the future however.

[00:07:40] **Speaker 1** I was going to ask, what do you think the future holds for all of this?

[00:07:43] **Speaker 2** So there's been work happening at a national level to develop what's called a FAIR model for to re-delivering those costs that aren't the ones that go directly to the research itself. And I think this work has actually been very important. Our own Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration has served on this group called JAG. I can't remember the acronym. But basically this group has come up with a really FAIR Model, hence they dubbed it FAIR. That's gotten in front of the Office of Management and Budget at the administration. We've been trying to work with our partners in the administration to see the value of what those costs actually enable in terms of our ability to do research.

[00:08:33] **Speaker 1** So if some of this research this year was delayed but eventually dispersed, what about next year?

[00:08:39] **Speaker 2** So a big concern is still that delta of about $5 billion that hasn't made it out of NIH. Come the end of the NIH fiscal year, which is the end September, if those funds aren't dispersed, they're very likely to be reverted back to Treasury. So those are dollars that become, they were appropriated by Congress, but not actually fulfilled. That then happens, the worry is the next budget, under a continuing resolution, which we're fully anticipating from the federal government, They don't have a directive. To spend the same volume of what was appropriated the prior year, and so the amount of funding on the table goes down. That's going to make research funding very difficult to achieve. It's going result in smaller grants potentially. It's gonna result in fewer faculty being funded and able to conduct their really important work.

[00:09:30] **Speaker 1** All right, we leave it there, John, thanks very much.

[00:09:33] **Speaker 2** Thank you for hosting me today. It's all good.

[00:09:48] **Speaker 1** Thank you. Absolutely. So, I didn't want to be indulgent even.