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[00:00:00] **Speaker 1** Really nice occasion.

[00:00:02] **Speaker 2** Good good good good federal investigations over DEI programs and anti-Semitism, international students having their visas revoked, funding cuts, and threats of more. The universities of Wisconsin is coming under the scrutiny of the Trump administration, with flagship UW-Madison at the epicenter. With that in mind, we wanted to check in with Chancellor Jennifer Mnuchin. We offer this disclaimer, PBS Wisconsin is part of UW- Madison. And Chancellor, thanks very much for being here. Thanks for having me. So, the university is facing many headwinds right now. What stands out as your biggest concern at UW-Madison?

[00:01:09] **Speaker 1** Well, you're right. It's a challenging time in higher education across the entire sector right now, including for us. I think the biggest challenge is around questions around federal funding, especially for research and also more generally. Federal funding is our single largest component of our budget and we're really proud to be an extraordinary research flagship. We're doing research on so many different kinds of topics from from cancer research to incredible studies about Alzheimer's to public policy engagements and so much else and right now there are a lot of questions about what that funding is going to look like in the time ahead. So that's probably my single biggest concern.

[00:01:50] **Speaker 2** Understood. What is the current status of cuts to research over head costs and funding losses?

[00:01:56] **Speaker 1** Well, there have been a number of executive orders, but several of them have been paused through legal processes right now. So there have efforts to bring down the facilities and administration rates for NIH, as well as the Department of Energy. And in both of those cases, those are now on hold. Courts have imposed a hold in both of those instances. All of the funding that... That we get from the government is used to support research. And so if these rates drop, it's not just about overhead. It's about renovating laboratories. It's not buying equipment. It's supporting the core science that we do.

[00:02:43] **Speaker 2** Now UW-Madison is under investigation by the Trump administration over DEI and anti-Semitism. What kind of sanctions for funding and program cuts has that resulted in?

[00:02:55] **Speaker 1** So at this point you're right that we are one of a great many, many dozens of institutions all across the country that do have Title VI complaints connected to anti-Semitism. One investigation was opened back in January 2024. It actually is about a protest incident back in October 23, October 2023. So nothing recent. And we certainly condemn anti-Semitism in all of its forms, and we are cooperating fully with that investigation. But we have not heard anything recently about it, and it's about an incident that happened quite a long time ago.

[00:03:37] **Speaker 2** Now, we saw that Harvard University's president rejected the administration's demands and saw an immediate federal funding cut of more than $2 billion. Would you or could you reject whatever the demands are?

[00:03:52] **Speaker 1** You know, that's a very speculative and hypothetical question at this point. We're all watching Harvard and a number of other institutions very carefully to see how they are behaving and proceeding. We are, we're just not in that situation right now. I mean, we are, again, there are many dozens, probably more than 100 schools that do have Title VI complaints and we are among those schools, but we haven't faced anything like what you're describing there.

[00:04:21] **Speaker 2** We know that international students have had their visas terminated throughout the UW system, but more than two dozen of them at UW-Madison. What is your response to those actions?

[00:04:34] **Speaker 1** It's been very concerning, frankly. We've had, you're exactly right, we've had more than two dozen students, both current students and some recent graduates who are lawfully working in the country this year, face removal from the SEVIS system. And in many of these cases, we really, we and they don't know why, or it's because of something literally as minor as a traffic ticket. And some of these students were, are literally weeks away from graduation. In our community, international students are an incredibly important part of everything we do here. You know, our very first international student was actually part of our first class at UW-Madison back in 1849. And we're proud that we've had global students and staff and faculty throughout our history. And many of them go on to do incredible things. Some of them stay right here in Wisconsin. And it's been interesting for me to learn that a number of entrepreneurs here in the state got their start when they came as international students or staff here to UW-Madison. And then they've gone on to build companies right here in Wisconsin. And so we absolutely want to support our students. I do also recognize that those who come to our country have the responsibility to follow the law and that the administration has the right to structure visa processes. But what's been very, very concerning is that it seems like some of these students are being caught up in a dragnet when they really haven't done any.

[00:06:07] **Speaker 2** Have you expressed that to the Trump administration?

[00:06:15] **Speaker 1** Not directly. I did actually write about this in the local newspaper this morning, so it's something I feel strongly about. We're also trying to provide support and information to all of our students that are affected. Well, what is the university doing on behalf of these students? Well, we're trying to give them the information so that they can make the best decisions for themselves. One of our students did receive a temporary restraining order on their SEVIS record. It would not be lawful here in the state of Wisconsin for us to provide direct legal services. What is your guidance to these students? You know, everybody's situation differs. They're at different stages of their life and from different countries. And so I don't think there's a one size fits all answer. We do have several people who are working with reaching out to each individual student and trying to give them the support they need.

[00:07:19] **Speaker 2** Meanwhile, what are you girding for at the state level around funding for the UW in the midst of a legislative DEI audit, which found millions of dollars in DEI spending across the system was not tracked?

[00:07:37] **Speaker 1** Yeah, thanks for that question. We're obviously also in the middle of a state budget process, and we really appreciate that the governor has prioritized the universities of Wisconsin, including UW Madison, in his ask. And we are very hopeful that the state legislature will decide that. That we do need to make an investment in our system of higher education. We're an economic driver. We are preparing students for the jobs of tomorrow. And we think that we offer a lot of benefit to our wonderful state. I also do understand that there's people who have questions and concerns about some of the things we do and some of choices that we make. And we're happy to have those conversations. And I think we need to be open to asking What do we need to do better? What do need to differently? And we should be open to change, but we should also recognize that we are providing a transformative education to 52,000 plus students here in our great state of Wisconsin, that our graduation rates are at their all time high, that our application numbers are also at their time high. And that two thirds of our students are graduating, two thirds our undergraduates are graduating with absolutely no debt. And the average time to graduation is under four years. So there's all of these amazing things happening in our student community and all of the successes. And so we need to keep reminding people of all of really great things, even as we also take seriously whatever concerns or questions that community members or others have.

[00:09:22] **Speaker 2** On the specificity of that audit, auditors said that the UW does not require a universal definition of DEI, making delineating spending on it difficult. How do you define it?

[00:09:36] **Speaker 1** You know, I think that's actually fair. I think over the last decade, as there was an effort to try to make sure that we, and this was something that was happening at schools all over the country, not just us. And in fact, it was something that here in Wisconsin, the executive branch was asking for, that as we focused on DEI, we didn't always define our terms. We didn't have as much specificity about metrics as we should have. And I think that those are our fair concerns. At the same time, I think we absolutely want to be a place where all of our students, no matter what their identities, no matter, what their backgrounds, no matter their beliefs can succeed and can thrive and can reach their full potential. And we want to being a place that is helping all of us.

[00:10:27] **Speaker 2** What is your reaction to everything that's happening to higher education right now and at UW-Madison?

[00:10:37] **Speaker 1** I think this is, you know, people throw around words like unprecedented, but this is a challenging time for higher education, and it's a time to both ask what have we been doing well and what do we need to do better, but it's also a time to recognize that higher education is part of what makes this country great. But the... To come back to research where we started, the compact between the federal government and universities has sparked incredible innovations. It's made us the envy of most of the globe, and we're a place that people from all over the world want to come study. We're a place that is inventing things, commercializing them, creating startups, giving students the opportunity to be more tomorrow than they were yesterday. And I understand that there are concerns about the cost of higher education. I understand that there's concerns about the ideological tilt of higher education, I understand that there is concerns about. You know, whether students can leave us without debt and whether they can get degrees. But here at UW-Madison, they are graduating, they're not having overloaded amounts of debt, and I'm really proud of the education that we're providing. And so I hope that our sector can be clear-eyed about possibilities for doing things better, but I also really hope Our nation, as people look at this set of issues and opportunities and challenges, will recognize that so much of what has made America strong actually is deeply tied to our extraordinary world-class system of higher education. And we sure need to hope that we can keep it, keep and preserve that.

[00:12:33] **Speaker 2** Jennifer Menouken, thanks very much. Thank you. Yes, I did. Thank you. Thank you for indulging us with those. But we don't often get a chance to speak with you. And so we appreciate your time.

[00:12:51] **Speaker 1** Happy to do it at a very important moment.

[00:12:53] **Speaker 2** Yes, thank you. Thank you, take good care.

[00:12:56] **Speaker 1** You too. All right, bye.