

## Osteopathic college before Assembly panel

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MADISON — Officials from Jefferson County and the City of Jefferson made their way to Madison on Thursday to attend a public hearing on a bill seeking a \$25 million construction grant for the proposed \$125 million College of Osteopathic Medicine in Jefferson.

The proposal, authored by state Rep. Cody Horlacher, R-Mukwonago, and co-sponsored by state Sen. Steve Nass, R-La Grange, would require the college to raise \$75 million before the state money could be approved.

Horlacher represents the 33rd Assembly District, which includes Jefferson County in the cities of Fort Atkinson and Jefferson; towns of Hebron, Jefferson, Oakland, Palmyra, Sullivan and a portion of the Town of Koshkonong, and the Villages of Palmyra and Sullivan.

The hearing was held before the Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities in the state Capitol.

Those in attendance from Jefferson County included Genevieve Coady, executive director of the Jefferson County Economic Development Consortium; Ben Wehmeier, Jefferson County administrator; Bill Brandel, Jefferson Common Council member; Jim Schroeder, Jefferson County Board of Supervisors chairperson; Dale Oppermann, Jefferson mayor; Ben Brantmeier, Jefferson city attorney; and Tim Freitag, Jefferson city administrator.

Also in attendance were project directors Mark Lefebvre and Jennifer DeKrey.

Osteopathic medicine is described as a “whole-person” approach to medicine. A student in osteopathic medicine does everything an M.D. student does, plus another 200 hours of study, and about 60 percent of D.O.s (Doctors of Osteopathy) enter the primary care field.



### FUNDS SOUGHT

FUNDS SOUGHT — An Assembly bill seeking \$25 million in funding for the proposed College of Osteopathic Medicine in Jefferson was presented to the Assembly Colleges and Universities Committee Thursday. Above, state Sen. Steve Nass, left, and Rep. Cody Horlacher present the bill to the panel. For more photos, [click here](#). — Daily Union photo by Alexa Zoellner.

“This is a big idea. This affects healthcare, education and the economy,” Horlacher told the committee members. “This would be the first new medical school in Wisconsin in over 100 years. . . . The focus behind this has been to create competition in the marketplace, re-examine the model for educating medical students and to educate Wisconsin students who can return to the communities they grew up in to raise their families.”

It is important, he said, to create opportunities for students to study in a field that focuses on primary care. That would impact all residents of Wisconsin, especially those in rural areas that are in great need of “these vital resources.”

Horlacher spoke about how Jefferson is uniquely situated to allow for economic growth throughout the state and region.

“This college will be an economic driver, creating jobs not only during construction, but throughout the life of the project and the college,” he said. “We have an opportunity to address both the shortage of primary care doctors in the state and drive economic development while creating good-paying jobs and opportunities in various medical-related careers for an area that has been one of the hardest hit in the state in terms of job loss.”

Nass echoed Horlacher’s sentiments and added some of his own thoughts.

“For as long as I’ve been here, there has been a need — in the rural areas in particular — for more doctors,” Nass said. “The unique thing about this bill is . . . that the money would come on the back end, not on the front end. The requirement that the Osteopathic College come up with \$75 million first before the state would offer up one dime, I think, that’s very important. We’ve always said, ‘put your money where your mouth is,’ and have been willing to do that.”

Following Horlacher and Nass’ presentation were Lefebvre and DeKrey.

“Our remarks this morning are formed by a combined 50 years of experience in higher education, specifically in the health and life sciences where we worked on behalf of the UW-School of Medicine and Public Health,” Lefebvre said. “Our remarks are also informed by the last 30 months where Jennifer and I traveled Wisconsin, criss-crossed the state, talking to everybody who would share a common interest in creating a new medical school.”

Lefebvre is the former vice president for health and life sciences at the University of Wisconsin Foundation and DeKrey, of Jefferson, is former chief financial officer of the University of Wisconsin Foundation.

“This is a broad spectrum issue,” Lefebvre continued. “When we talk about the idea, the animating idea that is underneath this new school, many people have referred to this as a historic moment. A moment of change where the practice and delivery of medicine is changing in response to legislative mandates that exist, financial considerations that are in the marketplace,

and that we're moving from what really perhaps has been an age of specialization to an age of primary care."

He said the concept is embodied nowhere more perfectly than in the movement around osteopathic medicine, adding that there are about 20 schools of osteopathic medicine in development across the country, as opposed to a handful of new allopathic (M.D.) medical schools that are emerging.

Lefebvre also spoke about the notion of creating a funding consortium to help fund the creation of the \$125 million college.

"We are under way in conversations with a wide range of philanthropists known to us that we've worked with for decades. They are interested in this project," he said. "In all of the projects that we've undertaken in the last 25 years, we have been motivated by the notion of creating a funding consortium. We have never believed that anyone had to take the overall burden for any project.

"A very distinguished philanthropist said to us, 'tell us what the city is doing, tell us what the county is doing, tell us what the state is doing and we'll join you at the table,'" Lefebvre added.

The two project directors also addressed the need for medical residencies in Wisconsin.

"While my background is not specifically in the medical field, I took that background that I have and started talking about, 'why can't you endow medical residencies?'" DeKrey said. "We know from our work with philanthropists in the state that many of them are very interested in ideas at the state level. But at the same time, they want their philanthropy to benefit the area that they come from — their city, their county, the place that they grew up in, the place that they work in — and so how can we leverage that, both interested in things in the state and interested in things in their local economy, and it seemed to apply very well to this residency model."

She said that, while some of the residencies that would be endowed at a community level would be available only for the College of Osteopathic Medicine, many would be open to the students of the two existing medical schools, the Wisconsin College of Medicine and the University of Wisconsin-School of Medicine and Public Health.

"We know there are a lot of Wisconsin kids that don't get the opportunity to go to a medical school in Wisconsin," DeKrey said. "They also don't have the opportunity for a residency (in Wisconsin), which in most cases means they will not be back to the state. What we're trying to do is provide those students with the opportunity to attend a medical school in Wisconsin, to have a residency in the location they grew up in, that their families are in."

According to DeKrey, one of the potential donors she and Lefebvre are in discussion with is extremely close to committing to fund more than half-a-million dollars for two residencies.

Oppermann and Wehmeier spoke about various aspects of Jefferson and how the school would impact the area, as well as the state.

“Educating osteopathic physicians in Jefferson could have a positive impact on healthcare in all 72 counties of Wisconsin,” Mayor Oppermann said. “Especially in rural and urban areas that are presently underserved. ... A College of Osteopathic Medicine would provide perpetual economic benefits to the entire State of Wisconsin by stimulating growth in the healthcare and associated support industries.”

The mayor also expressed excitement from within the area for the creation of the college and pointed out that Jefferson County has been declared “in economic distress” due to the massive number of job losses suffered in 2015. The anticipated job losses totaled more than 10 percent of all jobs lost in Wisconsin last year.

Wehmeier expressed similar sentiments and explained that there would be a massive positive impact on the number of jobs, both in Jefferson County and in the State of Wisconsin as a whole.

In addition, written testimony was provided by Coady, Boldt Construction of Milwaukee and the Jefferson Common Council.

Speaking in opposition to the bill were Dr. Elizabeth Petty, senior associate dean for academic affairs at the UW-School of Medicine and Public Health, and Dr. John Raymond, president and CEO of the Medical College of Wisconsin (MCW).

Raymond listed six main arguments against the bill and creation of the new college.

“I must express the strongest level of opposition to this proposal on behalf of MCW and organized medicine in the State of Wisconsin,” Raymond said. “Its proponents are well-intentioned, but poorly informed. The proposal itself is seriously flawed in several respects. First and foremost, the premise that there’s a need for 150 new medical professionals per year in Wisconsin simply is wrong.”

He said that the MCW and UW-School of Medicine already have addressed the shortages.

Other points he made were that the proposed new medical school is inefficient, duplicating infrastructure that already exists; that the new school would not address the need for more residencies; and that there would be no room in Wisconsin hospitals to provide clinical training to 150 new students per year.

Raymond also said that saying osteopathic schools are better at producing primary care physicians is “rhetoric” and “debatable at best.”

“Sixth and finally, the proposed school will actually increase the cost of medical education in Wisconsin, despite what Rep. Horlacher said,” Raymond declared. “But we know from new D.O.

schools that entered the market in other states, in particular Ohio, the cost of rotations goes up. D.O. schools need to find rotations in hospitals; they're willing to pay for that. How do they pay for it? — the increased tuition and they pass the money through from the students to the hospital system. That creates somewhat of an arms race and everybody needs to pay.”

Raymond said the economics are not favorable to creating a new medical school.

Petty wholeheartedly agreed.

“We agree with MCW that a new medical school in the state is not the optimal solution to a very important problem,” she said. “We have unique programs that have been created in the state to specifically train students to become healthcare professionals, physicians, that work and serve our communities.”

Following the hearing, Lefebvre, DeKrey, Horlacher and Nass expressed their satisfaction with the hearing.

“I think it went very well,” Nass said. “It still is going to be challenging to get the bill passed, but if it doesn't work, we're not going to quit now. There's next session and we'll go right back at it.

“The Medical College of Wisconsin was opposed to it, but ... some of the things the MCW stated, I think, can easily be refuted,” he continued. “But I get it, that's politics, and what they are doing is, this is a turf battle. They don't want another medical college coming in. We do need residencies out there. What they tried to portray is that no, they're taking care of that. Well I would disagree with that. That's not the case. We could use another medical school, especially getting doctors out into the rural area and the sooner we can do that, the better.”

The next step in the process will be to see whether the bill will go to an executive session within the Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities, where committee members would vote on the bill. Whether or not an executive session on the bill will be called is unknown at this time.

If the bill passed an executive session, it would be sent to the Rules Committee where it would then be ready for floor action.