Missouri colleges take $42M in cuts, vow to hold tuition steady

By JASON NOBLE and MARA ROSE WILLIAMS
The Kansas City Star

JEFFERSON CITY | Missouri colleges and universities agreed Tuesday to accept $42 million in budget cuts and pledged to hold tuition steady for most students in the next academic year.

Gov. Jay Nixon announced the agreement in visits to Missouri State University and the University of Missouri-St. Louis, calling it critical to keeping college affordable during the recession.

"To turn this economy around, Missourians must be trained, educated and ready to work, and that’s why it was vital that we kept tuition flat for Missouri families," Nixon, a Democrat, said in a statement.

Under the agreement, universities would see a 5.2 percent cut next year in the $807.9 million currently allocated for four-year institutions. The reductions would be spread across the state’s 13 public universities.

The freeze on tuition would apply only to in-state, undergraduate students. Officials said tuition likely would rise for graduate and out-of-state students, and the plan does not preclude possible increases to room, board and other student fees.

University presidents agreed to the plan because without it they feared the troubled economy could force even larger cuts from the state.

"This agreement mitigates the magnitude of the cuts," said Gary Forsee, University of Missouri president. "We have been protected. We obviously like the certainty of this."

Bo Fraser, chairman of the University of Missouri Board of Curators, said the agreement represents a recognition of the state’s financial plight.

"The state is in an extreme budget situation," Fraser said. "This seems like a reasonable solution. Even though we don’t like that we are going to get cuts, everyone is going to have to share in the pain."

However, the arrangement is not a done deal. Governing boards from the universities could still reject it or the Republican-led General Assembly could approve a budget with different or deeper cuts than those outlined by Nixon.
Lawmakers are “expecting bad news” concerning the budget when they return to Jefferson City in January, but it’s far too early to know what cuts are necessary, said state Rep. Allen Icet, the House Budget chairman.

But Icet, a Republican, agreed that if the governor’s office has worked out an arrangement that university officials are comfortable with, the legislature is apt to accept it.

Of the $42 million in cuts, about $21 million would be absorbed by the University of Missouri’s four campuses. The bulk of that, about $11 million, would come from the Columbia campus, Forsee said.

No one knows yet what new reductions campuses would make. They’ve already cut back on travel and administrative costs, reduced programs and staff and imposed hiring freezes.

“The good part about the latest proposal is that students and families will not be burdened with added costs,” Fraser said. “We are not going to put the budget woes of the state on the backs of the students.”

Aaron Podelefsky, president of the University of Central Missouri, added that — while he would “rather be seeing double-digit increases” in the state’s higher education budget — “I do think because of this plan Missouri will be the envy of surrounding states.”

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Missouri's public university students will pay the same tuition and academic fees next year that they did this year, according to a plan again brokered by Gov. Jay Nixon.

The state's public, four-year schools have agreed for the second year in a row not to raise tuition on in-state, undergraduate students for the 2010-2011 school year. In exchange, Nixon has agreed to keep funding at just under 95 percent of this year's budget, again saving universities from more draconian cuts some feared.

Universities will still lose 5.2 percent, or $42 million, in state funding, however.

The agreement is subject to approval by the General Assembly and the institutions' governing boards.

Under a similar agreement this school year, Missouri's four-year, public colleges and universities froze tuition in exchange for stable funding.

Before last year's freeze, Nixon said, tuition at the state's public colleges and universities increased by 7.5 percent annually over the past decade.

Here's the rest of the release:

ST. LOUIS - For the second year in a row, in-state, undergraduate students at Missouri's four-year, public colleges and universities won't see tuition or academic fees rise by a penny.

That's the good news Gov. Jay Nixon announced today during visits to the University of Missouri-St. Louis and Missouri State University in Springfield.
"To turn this economy around, Missourians must be trained, educated and ready to work, and that's why it was vital that we kept tuition flat for Missouri families," Gov. Nixon said. "As tuition skyrockets by double digits in other states, university leaders, faculty members and my administration have worked together to put Missouri students first and protect them from tuition spikes for the second year in a row. By helping keep higher education affordable, we are taking bold steps to prepare the workforce that will move Missouri forward."

Under a new agreement with Gov. Nixon, Missouri's public, four-year schools have agreed not to impose a tuition increase on in-state, undergraduate students for the 2010-2011 school year. Despite economic challenges that are requiring difficult cuts throughout state government, Gov. Nixon has agreed to maintain higher education funding at approximately 95 percent of the current fiscal year's appropriation. This works out to be a reduction of 5.2 percent, or $42 million. This agreement is subject to approval by the General Assembly and the institutions' governing boards.

If approved, this will be the second consecutive year Missouri students have benefitted from a tuition-freeze agreement between Gov. Nixon and leaders of the state's public four-year institutions. Under a similar agreement for the 2009-2010 school year, Missouri's four-year, public colleges and universities froze tuition in exchange for stable funding in the Fiscal Year 2010 budget. Prior to last year's freeze, tuition at Missouri's public, four-year colleges and universities increased by an average of 7.5 percent a year over the past decade.

This innovative partnership among higher education leaders, faculty members and Gov. Nixon's administration is helping prevent the dire situations emerging in many other states, where tuition has jumped by an average of 6.5 percent nationally in the past year. In some states, that increase has been as much as 17 percent.

"Higher education is one of the best ways Missourians can ensure their competitiveness for the jobs of the 21st century," said Carolyn Mahoney, president of Lincoln University and president of the Council of Public Higher Education. "To turn this economy around, we must help more students access our programs and learn at our institutions. This agreement will help keep higher education affordable for Missouri students and families, and it will help our institutions fulfill their missions even during these challenging economic times."

Gary Forsee, president of the four-campus University of Missouri system, said the state's universities share Gov. Nixon's desire to ensure that Missouri's families continue to have access to quality education.

"The governor's action today strikes the best balance in a difficult and fiscally challenging time for our state," President Forsee said. "This agreement mitigates the magnitude of the cut that higher education would otherwise have received and enables us to hold undergraduate tuition flat for one more year. Our dedicated staff, faculty and administration will continue to be part of the solution as they focus on our long-term role to prepare the state's future workforce, do groundbreaking research, and create jobs through economic development."

Michael T. Nietzel, president of Missouri State University, said that this continued partnership will have real benefits for Missouri's students.
“First and foremost, higher education is about our students, and we must ensure that a four-year education remains as affordable and accessible as possible,” President Nietzel said. “I am pleased that our institutions have been able to partner with Gov. Nixon once again to make sure tuition remains flat for Missouri students, while funding for higher education remains strong. During these difficult economic times, we must all be willing to compromise and do our part to help move Missouri forward. We appreciate Gov. Nixon’s commitment to higher education, and we look forward to continuing to work with him to do what’s best for Missouri students.”

Under the agreement with Gov. Nixon, the institutions may put a tuition increase on their books for next year, but will not charge in-state, undergraduate students for that increase. This agreement will take effect upon approval of the Fiscal Year 2011 appropriation, as long as the approved appropriation at least matches the Governor’s recommended budget.

“I thank the leaders of Missouri’s four-year colleges and universities, the faculty members, and all those who came together to make this agreement possible,” Gov. Nixon said. “We’ve all had to make tough choices about ways we can become more efficient and maximize our limited resources. By working together, we have been able to preserve our shared priority of making higher education as affordable as possible for Missourians. That’s something that should make us all proud.”
Governor acts to aid higher ed

Nixon proposes flat tuition in exchange for fewer cuts.

By Janese Heavin

Published November 17, 2009 at 10:30 a.m.

Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon this morning announced a plan for the state to spare higher education from significant budget cuts next year if public universities keep in-state tuition flat. It’s an amended extension of the current agreement between the state and higher-education institutions. Under the proposed arrangement — which will affect 2010 tuition and the state’s fiscal year 2011 budget — Nixon has vowed to fund higher education at 95 percent of the current fiscal year appropriations. That works out to be about a $42 million cut, according to Nixon’s office.

Nixon announced the agreement at the University of Missouri-St. Louis today and is expected to discuss it again on the MU campus tomorrow, although the time and location of the appearance are still being finalized.

In a prepared statement, UM System President Gary Forsee said the deal “strikes the best balance in a difficult and fiscally challenging time for our state. This agreement mitigates the magnitude of the cut that higher education would otherwise have received.”

But technically, Nixon doesn’t have the authority to uphold his end of the bargain, Rep. Chris Kelly, D-Columbia, said this morning. And Kelly, who serves on the House budget committee, said he feels “absolutely no obligation” to adhere to the terms.

“It’s important nobody take the governor too seriously,” he said. “Last year, people went along with him on this, not understanding they have to be very careful to read the fine print. ... We’re not bound by this in any way. The General Assembly could cut the university more or less” than the proposed 5 percent.

The governor is “hopeful members of the General Assembly would stand with Gov. Nixon to support Missouri families on this issue,” his spokesman, Scott Holste, said. “Gov. Nixon certainly looks forward to working with legislative leaders in the coming months to make this deal stick.”
But Nixon and lawmakers stuck to the current deal only in the most technical sense, Kelly said. Although basic higher-education funding was spared, the MU Health system saw cuts, as did other UM-related operations such as the State Historical Society of Missouri and the Missouri Kidney Program. Nixon also originally proposed a $14 million cut to MU Extension, although he later restored the allocation to his proposed budget.

"Does Extension still have to worry?" Kelly said. "Do kidney patients still have to worry? Do the hospital and cancer patients still have to worry? Or, like last time, are they subject to cuts above and beyond this? Because the last time around, 'I'm not cutting you,' says the governor, and then he did."

Holste contended that the agreement preserved core higher-education funding only and that Nixon stuck "100 percent with that agreement."

The deal would not protect funding to University Hospital. Spokeswoman Mary Jenkins said health administrators understand budget challenges, but "at this point, we’re hoping there will be no further cuts in MU Health Care’s appropriation," she said. Noting that the hospital provides roughly $40 million a year in charity care, she said, "Additional reductions in our state appropriations would have a significant impact on the future of health care delivery and our ability to serve as a safety-net hospital for the state."

In-state tuition at MU is $245.60 per credit hour for undergraduates. Students also pay course fees, which remained unchanged from 2008. Out-of-state tuition is $369.70 per credit hour, and graduate fees are $298.70.

Although the existing deal allowed universities to increase 2009 tuition for graduate and out-of-state students, MU kept those rates flat this year. It’s too early to say whether that will be the case again next year. MU administrators declined to comment on the agreement until Nixon’s visit tomorrow.

Reach Janese Heavin at 573-815-1705 or e-mail jheavin@columbiatribune.com.
Gov. Nixon, university presidents agree to freeze tuition again
By Michelle Hagopian, Rebecca Berg, Stephanie Fleming, Ben Wieder

November 17, 2009 | 9:55 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA — The Missouri General Assembly has to approve a promise from Gov. Jay Nixon that in-state undergraduates won't pay more in tuition next year.

Nixon announced a proposal Tuesday that Missouri's four-year public colleges and universities will not see higher tuition or academic fees, a promise he also made in January for this fiscal year. In return, the state won't decrease funding much.

But federal stabilization funds are set to expire by 2012, so schools will have to make cuts unless they get more money from other sources.

The agreement has to pass through the institutions' governing boards and the General Assembly, which begins its session in January. The General Assembly makes the state budget, which the governor approves.

According to a news release, Nixon has agreed to maintain higher education funding at about 95 percent of the this year's appropriation — a reduction of $42 million.

If the agreement passes both the General Assembly and the institutions' governing boards, it will affect 13 Missouri public universities, including the entire University of Missouri System.

"There will be no increase for Missouri families," Holste said.

In other states, tuition has increased by an average of 6.5 percent nationally in the past year, the release stated. Some have seen increases of nearly 17 percent.

MU's tuition has increased every year for the past decade before the current freeze. The largest was an 18.1 percent increase for the 2003-04 school year.
Because it must pass through the General Assembly, the decision to freeze tuition is one that is evaluated annually, Holste said.

UM System President Gary Forsee said freezing tuition after years of budget cuts and rising tuition has "started to stabilize this roller coaster that we've been on."

Forsee said it is important to plan for 2012 now.

"Every dollar now has a multiplying effect later," Forsee said.

Forsee will meet with administrators Wednesday to address some of the budget issues.

According to the MU Cashiers Web site, in-state undergraduate students pay $245.60 per credit hour, whereas out-of-state students pay that fee plus $369.70 per hour. In-state graduate students pay $298.70 per hour.

Here's how the rest of MU's undergraduate fees break down:

- **Recreation Facility Fee** — Students enrolled in more than six credit hours pay $133.11 per semester for use of the Student Recreation Complex.
- **Student Activity Fee** — Undergraduates enrolled in more than 11 credit hours are charged a $157.56 per semester fee. If the number of credits is not more than 11, the fee is determined per credit hour or any fraction of that.
- **Prepaid Health Fee** — A $92.78 per semester fee is charged to students enrolled in more than six credit hours, and is optional to those with fewer hours.
- **Information Technology Fee** — Students are charged $12.20 per credit hour.

In addition to these fees, many schools within the university charge students accepted into their programs with specific course fees.

But these supplemental course fees are not included in the tuition freeze. In addition, graduate, out-of-state and department fees are excluded from the freeze, Forsee said. He said they could rise but the decision to do so is made with the discretion of universities.

Lex Akers, MU College of Engineering associate dean for academic programs, said the school charges $54.50 per credit hour for students enrolled in engineering courses. Though he is uncertain if these fees will increase, he said he is sympathetic to students.
"If we can hold funding to the university during these difficult financial times, it's wonderful for both the university and the citizens of Missouri," he said.

In May, Missouri lawmakers passed a budget that spares colleges and universities from cuts to their core operating budgets for the 2009-10 school year. They did so by tapping into millions of dollars of what's known as the "budget stabilization" portion of the federal stimulus package, as previously reported in the Missourian.

Future Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Rob Mayer, R-Dexter, said in a news release that Nixon's announcement is premature.

"We have yet to determine the coming year's budget consensus revenue," Mayer said in the release. "That means we do not yet know how much money will even be in the state's bank account to fund the critical functions of state government."

Mayer said he wishes the freeze agreement will extend to fees other than tuition.

"It is my hope that the agreement includes freezes in the ancillary costs that students incur while attending college, such as their room and board, meals and recreation fees, among others," he said.

Other state legislators, such as Sen. Joan Bray, D-St. Louis County, and House Budget Chairman Allen Icet, R-St. Louis County, said they supported the governor's strategy to make it clear what he wants early.

"I think it's great for Missouri families and students to know they're not going to have to dig deeper in their pockets," Bray said.

Both legislators said it was still early in the process and specifics could change as more details about how the final budget will look become more apparent.

Nixon will speak at a press conference at 9 a.m. Wednesday at the Reynolds Alumni Center. Forsee and MU Chancellor Brady Deaton are also expected to attend.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Nixon proposes continuation of tuition freeze at public state universities  
No MU mention

By Rebecca Berg, Stephanie Fleming

November 17, 2009 | 7:03 p.m. CST

JEFFERSON CITY — Gov. Jay Nixon announced Tuesday he will propose continuing a tuition freeze for public four-year colleges and universities in Missouri. This time it comes with budget cuts.

In exchange for the freeze, Nixon said he will maintain current higher education funding at just under 95 percent of the current budget. The proposed 5.2 percent cut would equate to about $42 million, according to a statement by the governor's office.

With many state programs facing major budget cuts, 5.2 percent might save higher education funding from some of the larger cuts the legislature will have to make.

Nixon's spokesman Scott Holste called the decrease in funding "modest" and said universities are on board with the proposal.

"The universities realize that there has to be some belt-tightening, and they realize that this will keep their funding relatively stable as opposed to more drastic cuts," he said.

Holste said Nixon thinks the proposal is an important first step towards achieving fiscal stability in Missouri.

"The governor really believes that this is a way that we can help with continued economic recovery by ensuring that we have a well-educated and well-skilled work force and that we keep college affordable for the middle class," Holste said.

Sen. Scott Rupp, R-Wentzville, said he thinks Nixon's announcement might be premature.
"Basically, the governor is tying his hands to a large section of the budget, and that just means there are going to be more severe cuts to the mentally handicapped children with developmental disabilities, which I think will be hard to get support for," he said. "To take one giant section off the table by doing a special deal is going to make it that much more difficult to come up with alternatives."

Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Rob Mayer, R-Dexter, said while he agrees with the governor's efforts to freeze tuition, there are other expenses institutions could impose on students instead.

"For the proposal to be effective, other fees like room and board and recreational fees that need to be frozen, too," he said.

State legislators, such as Sen. Joan Bray, D-St. Louis County, and House Budget Chairman Allen Icet, R-St. Louis County, said they supported the governor's strategy to make it clear what he wants early.

"I think it's great for Missouri families and students to know they're not going to have to dig deeper in their pockets," Bray said.

Both legislators said it was still early in the process and specifics could change as more details about how the final budget will look become more apparent.

It isn't the first time Missouri public universities have agreed to a tuition freeze. The governor's proposal for the 2010-2011 school year would be a continuation of a tuition freeze put in place for the 2009-2010 school year.

Paul Wagner, the deputy commissioner for higher education in Missouri, said undergraduate tuition for Missouri students would look the same as last year if the governor's budget proposal is adopted.

"Flat is flat," Wagner said. "Flat last year is flat this year."

Holste said the effects of the freeze last year led to the governor's decision to propose a continued mandate on tuition.

"This was a big help this year," Holste said. "We want it to continue to be a big help to students and families next year."
The governor's office did emphasize, however, that the tuition freeze would only apply to undergraduate tuition. Graduate and out-of-state student tuition changes will be made at the discretion of the universities.

The proposal announced by Nixon on Tuesday will be subject to approval by the General Assembly when the legislature returns in January. Holste said he expects the legislature to decide on the issue by May, which is when session ends, at the latest.

The university and college governing boards will also have to approve the measure before it can be finalized.
Forsee's office to talk graduate, non-resident tuition, fees

By Janese Heavin

Posted November 17, 2009 at 4:02 p.m.

Tuition for in-state, undergraduate students at MU won't increase next year, but does that mean students won't pay more?

Not necessarily, although it's too early to say whether course and other fees will increase next year. UM System President Gary Forsee said this afternoon that he and his staff tomorrow will be reviewing academic course fees, housing fees and other charges students pay on top of per-credit-hour tuition. Tuition for graduate students and non-resident students also will be considered, he said during a town hall meeting at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. The meeting was audio streamed.

This year, course fees, recreation facility fees and other fees remained unchanged from 2008 to 2009. The Student Activity fee increased from $122.88 per semester to $157.56 this year for undergraduates. Graduate activity fees also increased roughly $30.

Just a side note: Contrary to an email from a "ticked off parent" sent to reporter/blogger Mike Martin, who posted it in his e-newsletter, these fees are not just two years old. During an unrelated interview with MU administrators, I asked about these fees and was told that some date back to the 1970s.

Want to compare tuition and fees for yourself? Here's the 2009 list, and here's the 2008 list.
Missouri Greeks in Columbia tighten party rules

The Associated Press

COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) — University of Missouri fraternities and sororities have put new limits on off-campus parties after two sexual assaults and a bus accident at a Boone County winery.

The new restrictions cap the allowed number of party guests at 700 and limit two Greek chapters to serve as party sponsors. Each sponsoring group must appoint “sober monitors” to track compliance with the rules.

The change comes after a 22-year-old student from Springfield was injured trying to stop a bus leaving Les Bourgeois (lay boozh-WAH') Vineyards in Rocheport.

Separately, two 18-year-old women reported being sexually assaulted in September in connection with late-night parties at the winery.
H1N1 vaccine available for more Columbia residents
By Larissa Dalton

November 17, 2009 | 2:58 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA – The H1N1 vaccine is now available free for healthy people ages 6 months to 24 years and people with a chronic medical condition ages 25 to 64 years.

The Columbia/Boone County Department of Public Health and Human Services has made the vaccine available to people beyond the limited priority groups because it has “done a satisfactory job vaccinating those in the CDC-recommended narrow priority groups,” according to the health department Web site.

A clinic is scheduled for Wednesday, Nov. 18, at the Health Department on 1005 W. Worley in Columbia from 2 p.m. until 6 p.m.

This clinic is open to the following groups:

- people ages 6 months to 24 years
- those ages 25 to 64 years with chronic illnesses
- health care or EMS workers who have not yet been vaccinated

The Health Department is expecting another shipment on Wednesday morning, so they do not know exactly how much vaccine they’ll have. "We are confident that we will have enough, or we wouldn't have scheduled the clinic," Geni Alexander, spokeswoman for the Health Department, said.

No appointment is needed for the clinic; vaccines will be given on a first-come, first-served basis. While they have no way of knowing how many people will come, the department is expecting a large turnout.
“Tomorrow is the first time that anybody with a chronic illness under age 65 can get it,” Alexander said. “So when you look at it that way, we’re expecting a huge crowd.”

FluMist, the nasal version of the vaccine, will not be available. Everyone will get the injectable vaccine that contains the preservative thimerosal, according the Health Department Web site. The preservative-free vaccine is only available to children under 3 years old and to pregnant women.

On campus

MU students can get the vaccine during a clinic from 5 p.m. until 8 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 19 at Center Hall. This is open to students age 24 and under and those with chronic medical conditions, according to the MU Student Health Center Web site.

"This is not for faculty, only students," Pam Rowe, spokeswoman for the MU Student Health Center, said. "At this point, we're following the CDC guidelines."

Students who have signed up to be on an H1N1 waiting list will get first dibs on these vaccines and are being contacted by the Student Health Center. To be added to the list, students can visit the health center Web site and complete a form.

The health center has about 400 doses of the vaccine, Rowe said. Some of them will be set aside for students who have appointments. The health center is also contacting the first 100 students on the waiting list to make appointments.

The rest of the vaccine will be available at Thursday’s clinic.

Rowe said the health center will be receiving small but frequent allotments of the H1N1 vaccine, so there will be more clinics after the Thanksgiving break.

"We will be able to vaccinate a lot of people," Rowe said. "We're excited we're going to be able to give out this quantity."
Students at Stephens College were able to get the H1N1 vaccine on Tuesday, Nov. 17. Health services at Stephens had 200 vaccines available to students during Tuesday's clinic.

"We are hoping to get more vaccines within the next week," said Erica Webster, a student working in Stephens' health center. "If we're able to get more, we'll advertise a clinic for our students."

Columbia College also held clinics on Tuesday with 300 vaccines made available to students only, according to Beth Frye, administrative assistant in campus life.

No other clinics are scheduled at this point. Columbia College serves a daytime, evening and online student population, so the vaccine is limited to enrolled students for now, Frye said.

Boone County residents should check the Health Department Web site, and students should check with their campus health centers for continued updates about H1N1 clinics.
A controversial health report calling mammograms unnecessary for most women younger than 50 has created a firestorm of debate by reversing years of conventional advice.

The guidelines released Monday by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force say the harms of mammograms outweigh the benefits for younger women, and breast self-exams are worthless to prevent deaths.

The panel's recommendations, which are generally respected and accepted by medical schools, doctors and insurance companies, were met with outrage from some health care organizations.

The American College of Radiology, which represents doctors who perform and analyze mammograms, said the recommendations could lead to "countless unnecessary breast cancer deaths."

"To me it sounds like they're taking women under the age of 50 and saying, 'We're not going to teach you to do breast exams, we're not going to screen you, so if you get it, sorry, tough, you're dead," said Dr. Catherine Beal, a radiologist at St. Anthony's Medical Center.

Most medical organizations still call for all women 40 and older to receive annual mammograms.

Beal said she doesn't agree that the risk of false positives, overdiagnosis and
unnecessary treatments outweighs any benefit from the X-ray screenings.

"Yes, there is anxiety, but are you telling me women aren't strong enough to take that, in exchange for diagnosing breast cancer early and saving their life?"

But some cancer advocacy groups welcomed the task force's recommendations as an acknowledgment of the imperfections of screenings and a starting point for more nuanced research into cancer prevention and treatments.

The National Breast Cancer Coalition put out a statement saying "mammography screening has significant limitations and should be a personal choice rather than a public health message."

Other doctors and patients said the new guidelines raised questions about the task force and its methods.

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force is an independent panel of experts created 25 years ago by Congress to regularly review the benefits of cancer screenings and other preventive medical care.

Its mammogram recommendations are not the first to start a debate. Last year, the task force updated its guidelines on prostate cancer by not endorsing universal screenings and recommending against them for men older than 75.

The panel's decisions are based on reviews of scientific data and evidence. Insurance, costs and other financial issues are not taken into consideration.

For mammograms, the task force looked at mathematical models to determine what would happen if women were screened at different ages and time intervals.

"We're not looking at the politics, we're not looking at insurance coverage, we're not rationing care," said Dr. Michael LeFevre, professor of family and community medicine at the University of Missouri-Columbia, who has served on the task force for five years. He is the only representative from Missouri or Illinois.
"We're looking at whether the benefit to patients outweighs the harms."

The recommendations made by the task force are aimed at a general and healthy public, not people at high risk for certain diseases. Panel members have said their guidelines should be a starting point for conversations between patients and doctors.

Along with LeFevre, the 16-member committee is made up of other family physicians, gynecologists, nurses and pediatricians who work in hospitals around the country.

Most of their recommendations, for everything from cholesterol checks to hearing tests, are updated every five years based on new information.

LeFevre was nominated to the committee by the American Academy of Family Physicians. Task force members typically stay on for four years, but there is no upper limit.

Each member of the panel serves on the committee as a volunteer.

"Everybody does it because they think it's important work and it serves the community to have evidence-based recommendations available," LeFevre said.
People worried, confused by new mammogram recommendations

By Alanna Nunez

November 18, 2009 | 12:01 a.m. CST

COLUMBIA — Women are responding to the new recommendations on mammograms with worry and confusion.

Tuesday at Ellis Fischel Cancer Center, Paul Dale, a surgical oncologist, said he was already receiving phone calls from his patients.

"Just this morning, I had several women in their 40s call and cancel their mammograms," he said. "They asked, 'Why should I take this unnecessary test?"

Matt Splett, a spokesman for MU Health Care, said the cancer center hasn’t taken an official stance on the new recommendations.

The U.S. Preventive Service Task Force has changed its recommendations for breast cancer screening. The task force now says that women should begin regular mammograms at age 50 — instead of 40 — and that they should get them every two years, instead of annually. The guidelines also recommend that women stop performing self-examinations.

Dale said he’s unhappy with the recommendations. He said the benefits of mammography outweigh the potential risks. He cited a steady decline in the death rate of breast cancer, attributing it to early detection, in part because of mammograms.

"I've never once had a patient diagnosed with cancer leave saying, 'Wow, I wish I hadn't had that mammogram because it hurt,'" he said. "They always leave saying, 'My life might have just been saved.'"

The new guidelines are meant to lower the potential harm associated with mammograms and do not apply to women who have a high-risk of breast cancer. These harms include false positives, unnecessary biopsies and increased stress about cancer.
"It's important to understand that we are not recommending that women don't get mammograms," said David Grossman, a member of the task force and a professor of health services at the University of Washington. "We think it should be a woman's choice."

Grossman stressed that the task force recommends that when women reach their 40s, they talk to their doctor about family health history, other risk factors and their general fears and anxiety about cancer before deciding to undergo a mammogram.

"Mammograms make great sense to women in their 60s," he said. "But the risk of breast cancer is much higher for someone in her 60s."

It’s unclear what percentage of breast cancer cases are diagnosed in women under the age of 40. Overall, the risk is low and increases with age.

For women in their 40s, there is a small net benefit, Grossman said, but it's small because there are substantial harms.

"I think it's a travesty," said Michael Richards, a radiologist at University Hospital. "I think it's an attempt to take women in their 40s and throw them under the bus."

Doctors are still learning about breast cancer, he continued. But what they do know is that women in their 30s and 40s tend to present with more aggressive forms of cancer than women in their 60s or 70s. So if the cancer isn't caught early, the survival rate is very low.

Richards said he had not received any calls from female patients about the new guidelines, nor had he heard about appointments being canceled.
League of Women Voters sparks renewable energy discussion
By Andrea Nenow

November 18, 2009 | 12:01 a.m. CST

COLUMBIA — Increasing renewable energy use in Columbia is possible.

That is the message the Columbia-Boone County chapter of the League of Women Voters tried to send residents at its Green Power Forum on Tuesday night. The league worked to present people with relevant information about renewable energy sources.

The Friends Room at Columbia Public Library was filled with people passionate about renewable and efficient energy. Before the start of the forum, casual discussions could be heard relating to electricity generators, heat and wind turbines.

Four panelists were allotted 10 minutes each to speak about a different form of energy, addressing subjects including how each type has been used in Columbia and what it would take to increase their output.

**Hank Stelzer, an MU Extension forestry specialist, spoke first about the MU Power Plant’s use of biomass and also addressed what types of materials can be transformed into energy. Stelzer explained that biomass is made commonly from switch grass, hay crops, tree chips and urban waste, such as storm debris.**

He said by the end of the summer or early fall of 2012, the power plant will have a generator that burns biomass exclusively.

Charles Pappas, of the Missouri Department of Natural Resources, discussed the pros and cons of wind energy, saying it is free and clean but also variable — it doesn’t blow with the same strength every day or at the same times of day.

Pappas said wind variability can be managed by increasing the number of wind turbines in an area but creating reliable wind energy is expensive. Pappas projected that a single
wind turbine can cost between $1.5 million and $2.5 million. Due to the struggling economy, however, the price of turbines has averaged most recently at $1.6 million.

Additional costs of wind energy include its transmission.

"Wind energy tends to be where no one is living," Pappas said. "So, you have to transport it where the people are."

Jay Hasheider, energy services supervisor at Columbia Water and Light, told Tuesday’s crowd that the city’s solar work began in 2007 with a small-scale demonstration at the Columbia Area Career Center.

He also addressed what Water and Light is doing to encourage solar energy use, including $400 or $800 rebates to individuals for installing solar water heating in their homes and $500 rebates for each kilowatt of power up to 10 kilowatts for installing solar electric systems.

Hasheider also discussed Columbia’s Solar One program, which challenges the city to get 1 percent of its power from the sun by 2023. The program started in June 2008.

Customers who are interested in promoting solar energy can pay an additional $4 a month, which the city uses to pay for solar panels placed around the community. It is the hope that with this program, local businesses will become solar producers by constructing buildings with solar panels and selling their energy to the utility company in 10-year contracts.

"The price of solar is coming down and all the predictions say that will continue in the future," Hasheider said.

Dick Parker, a member of the league’s energy matters committee and a retired biologist, discussed his plan for Columbia, which would greatly increase the city’s use of renewable energy and allow for 80 percent carbon-free electricity by 2020. His strategy calls for 51.9 percent of Columbia’s energy to come from biomass, 20.1 percent from wind and 3.4 percent from solar power.

According a renewable energy ordinance put in place on Nov. 2, 2004, and approved by 77 percent of voters, Columbia must generate 5 percent of its electricity from renewable
sources by the end of 2012. Furthermore, the city must generate another 5 percent of its electricity from renewable energy every five years until the year 2022.

"We can do it," Parker said. "We can move to renewable energy; it is basically an issue of citizens' will."