Mizzou pres pans climate change bills; enviros irked

By Bill Lambrecht
Post-Dispatch Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — In the climate change battle in Washington pitting region against region, the often skeptical Midwest has acquired a new ally: University of Missouri President Gary Forsee.

In a letter written to Missourians in Congress, Forsee declared that the University of Missouri opposes cap-and-trade legislation that has passed the House and a Senate committee because of projections of higher electricity costs.

"As currently written, we have grave concerns and oppose this legislation for the detrimental impact it will have on the University of Missouri system," Forsee wrote.

Forsee, the former president and CEO of Sprint Nextel Corp., went on to say that the legislation could force the university to pay between $5 million and $8 million initially and then up to $2 million annually thereafter.

University spokespersons did not respond to a request this afternoon to interview Forsee about his calculations or his lobbying plans.

Forsee's declarations did not sit well with environmental advocates.

The Clean Energy Works Coalition put out a statement this evening saying that Forsee's letter was "a great surprise" considering that he had signed the American College and University Presidents' Climate Commitment.

"It is regrettable that the highest-ranking official at one of Missouri's most important academic institutions would renege on such a forward-thinking promise in favor of reliance on out-dated, dirty technology," the statement read.

The coalition represents some of the nation's major environmental organizations, among them the Sierra Club, the Natural Resources Defense Council, the League of Conservation Voters and the Pew Environmental Group.

"It is our hope that President Forsee returns to his previously stated position of concern for the impact of the University of Missouri on the health of our climate and that he begins to take steps toward responsible action as he had previously pledged to do," the statement added.
Rep. Blaine Luetkemeyer, R-St. Elizabeth, whose district includes the Columbia campus, welcomed Forsee's announcement and distributed it to reporters.

Luetkemeyer has been an outspoken critic of both climate change legislation and the science that underlies it. He is a chief sponsor of legislation that would cut off funds for the UN-sponsored Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the hundreds of scientists from around the world who warned of grave impacts from a warming planet. The bill has thus far failed to advance in the Democratic-controlled Congress.

The proposed cap-and-trade system would give polluters flexibility to buy and sell credits within an ever-decreasing ceiling of greenhouse gas emissions. The debate has often featured a regional rivalry pitting members of Congress from the East and West against an alliance of Midwest, South and Plains states' representatives.

Cap-and-trade bad for MU, Forsee says

Measure would cost power plant millions.

By Janese Heavin

Tuesday, November 24, 2009

The University of Missouri is opposing federal legislation that would put caps on its greenhouse gas emissions because those limits would cost millions, UM System President Gary Forsee said in a letter to federal lawmakers.

"Given the impact of such unattainable increases on the university’s already hard-pressed budget, we urge you to oppose these bills or ensure that specific exemptions are included," Forsee wrote in the letter, sent to Missouri’s entire congressional delegation.

Cap-and-trade legislation already passed in the House and passed out of the Senate Environment Committee this month. The bill would require industries to limit greenhouse gas emissions in a phased-in process starting in 2012 and running through 2050. Industries emitting more pollutants than allowed would have to buy credits to do so, and industries emitting less than the limits could sell, trade or save those unused emissions. The goal is to provide incentives to pollute less.

Under the current versions of the bill, MU’s power plant would have to purchase credits, Forsee said. He estimated that doing so would cost between $5 million and $8 million during implementation — more than half of MU’s current annual energy budget of $13 million — and another $1 million to $2 million every year afterward. Those figures are based on estimates from the Environmental Protection Agency and Energy Information Administration on the impact of the current House bill, MU spokeswoman Mary Jo Banken said.

U.S. Rep. Blaine Luetkemeyer, R-Mo., was pleased to see Forsee’s opposition to the plan, spokesman Paul Sloca said. Luetkemeyer voted against the House bill.

“Obviously, Blaine is encouraged by the letter and encouraged that the university and system are taking a stand on this,” Sloca said. “It’s a reflection of what the majority of people in the Ninth District have already shared.”

Sen. Claire McCaskill, D-Mo., is paying close attention to how universities, as well as small businesses and families, will be affected, her press secretary, Maria Speiser, said. McCaskill “recognizes that climate change is a serious problem that must be addressed, but she won’t support a bill that unfairly passes the costs of fixing it to Missourians and their businesses,” Speiser said. “People in Missouri have no choice but to be dependant on coal-based utility companies.”
MU already has worked to reduce energy consumption and will continue to develop solutions to the energy crisis, Forsee wrote. Banken said MU uses biomass fuels to replace 5 percent to 10 percent of coal and is building a new biomass-fired boiler to further reduce coal use by up to 25 percent.

But the university should do more, said Hank Ottinger, chairman of the Sierra Club’s Osage Chapter.

“I think the flagship University of the State of Missouri should be a leader in CO2 reductions,” he said.

“I’m happy they’ve made inroads on that with their power plant and they have a really very good, commendable energy conservation plan, but to stand in the way of fixing what is essentially a global problem? I can understand his point of view. Money’s tight everywhere in the country except maybe on Wall Street. But to me, that’s not an excuse. ... The U.S. has to be a leader on this, and we haven’t been. Unless we are, other countries aren’t going to step up.”

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MU anti-pollution efforts win funding

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The University of Missouri has received a $112,500 grant to help fund projects aimed at reducing pollution.

The Environmental Protection Agency Region 7 grant, which will be matched by the university, will allow MU's Environmental Assistance Center to expand efforts to help businesses conserve water and energy and reduce toxins.

The money also will result in either a minor or certificate program for pollution prevention within the UM System.

Efforts are expected to result in a reduction of 4,500 metric tons of greenhouse gases, a reduction of 200,000 pounds of hazardous wastes and a savings of 1 million gallons of water.
MU athletics will return subsidy — Growing profits from college athletics could mean more money for the rest of the University of Missouri’s cash-strapped Columbia campus. The school’s athletics department will gradually return its annual $1.5 million subsidy for debt service back to the overall campus budget over the next several years.

NCAA research shows Missouri among just 25 major-college sports programs to turn a profit in the 2008 fiscal year. Tigers athletics generated $1.4 million in profit that year, and $2 million in the 2009 fiscal year. (AP)
Town hall meeting set for MU campus

Tuesday, November 24, 2009

University of Missouri System President Gary Forsee will host a town hall meeting for faculty and staff next month on the Columbia campus.

The one-hour forum will start at 10:30 a.m. Dec. 9 in Monsanto Auditorium in the Bond Life Sciences Center. Forsee will discuss the economic climate, its effects on the university and what’s being done to ensure the stability and success of MU and the system.

Audience members are invited to participate in the discussion. Those who can’t attend the forum will be able to listen in via live webcast at www.umsystem.edu.
Obama hints at tougher Afghan strategy
By Konrad Yakabuski
U.S. President walking a fine line between mollifying Democrats, avoiding being called a ditherer

U.S. President Barack Obama, sounding increasingly hawkish, has become the decider. After weeks of painstaking deliberation that critics often labelled rookie indecision, Mr. Obama is now preparing the American public for an intensified military effort in Afghanistan that promises to further divide Democrats over the human and financial costs of the war.

He revealed Tuesday that he will announce his decision on an expected troop surge in Afghanistan next week - immediately prompting a flurry of speculation about the scope of the plan to send thousands of reinforcements to buttress the 68,000 U.S. soldiers already there.

"It is my intention to finish the job," Mr. Obama said. "And I feel very confident that when the American people hear a clear rationale for what we're doing there and how we intend to achieve our goals, that they will be supportive."

According to various reports, Mr. Obama is expected to outline his refined Afghanistan strategy on Tuesday during a televised address from the Oval Office - his first since coming to power.

The President is expected to deploy somewhat fewer than the 40,000 additional troops requested by General Stanley McChrystal, the commander of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, but substantially more than the 10,000 reportedly advocated by Vice-President Joe Biden. CNN reported Tuesday that 34,000 more troops will be sent.

"He's got to have something in his address for everybody," Charles Kupchan, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, said in an interview. "He'll keep the Republicans happy by sending more troops, he'll keep the centrists satisfied by talking about finishing the job and he'll keep the left happy by talking about the exit strategy."

Mr. Obama gave the strongest indication yet that he is leaning toward a more aggressive strategy in Afghanistan, lamenting that under the Bush administration, "we did not have the resources or the strategy to get the job done." The President vowed U.S. forces would "dismantle and degrade" terrorist networks in Afghanistan so that "al-Qaeda and its extremist allies cannot operate effectively in those areas."

But Mr. Kupchan added that just as telling as the number of additional troops being sent will be Mr. Obama's decision on how and where they will be deployed. The question as to how many soldiers should be devoted to training Afghan forces, instead of fighting the Taliban, has divided administration officials.

"What the debate in the White House has been about is: 'How do you come up with a workable measure of stability in Afghanistan without aiming so high that the American mission overreaches?'" Mr. Kupchan added, "I would spend more time and energy and money building up a functioning Afghanistan [force] than I would in counterinsurgency in far-flung areas. You have to have somebody to hand off to."

Indeed, finding an "exit ramp" for the eventual withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan has been a key priority for Mr. Obama during the nine meetings he has held in recent weeks with his war council.

"I think that's smart after what happened in Iraq," said Katharine Floros, a political science professor at the University of Missouri. "Nobody, least of all Obama, wants Afghanistan to be Obama's Iraq."
Democrats in Congress have been increasingly vocal in their opposition to an enhanced military effort, particularly in light of the country's ballooning $12-trillion (U.S.) national debt. Some are even pressing Mr. Obama to levy a surtax on the wealthy to pay for the war. While the Pentagon has priced the surge at $500,000 per year for each additional soldier, the White House's own estimate puts the cost at twice that figure - or $40-billion for the full complement of 40,000 troops.

Cost has emerged as an important variable in any decision to send additional forces. The U.S. spent $223-billion in the first eight years of the Afghan war, but the costs are escalating rapidly and will continue to do so as the number of troops there increases.

The latest gathering of the war council in the White House's Situation Room on Monday night included not only the administration's leading defence and national security officials. Also present, according to photos released by the White House, was Peter Orszag, Mr. Obama's budget director - a sign to deficit-weary Americans that the number crunchers have a seat at the table.

But cost concerns are just one of the domestic hurdles Mr. Obama must address as he turns to selling Congress on his Afghanistan strategy. While the President does not need direct authorization from legislators to deploy more troops, he does need their consent to fund the war.

That has Mr. Obama walking a fine line between trying to mollify enough members of his own party, who are either lukewarm or outright opposed to sending more troops, and satisfying Republicans, who have backed Gen. McChrystal's request and accused the President of dithering.

Prof. Floros added that, while the Democratic majority in Congress will likely acquiesce to any future request for more money to fight the Afghan war, it will not come without conditions. They could include setting a date for withdrawal.

"It would be very unpopular for Congress to withdraw funding from troops in action," she said. "But it would not surprise me if Congress tries to use that power of the purse to limit how long the troops are going to be there."

Mr. Obama began the difficult task of rallying one of his toughest critics on Afghanistan when he met privately Tuesday with Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the House of Representatives, who has condemned the Afghan government led by President Hamid Karzai.

"How can we ask the American people to pay a big price in lives and limbs, and also in dollars, if we don't have a connection to a reliable [Afghan] partner?" Ms. Pelosi asked on National Public Radio last week.

Mr. Karzai's recent re-election was tarred by widespread voting irregularities, though the Afghan leader has since vowed to root out corruption within his government. Afghanistan's Attorney-General announced on Monday that his office is investigating two current and three former cabinet ministers for embezzlement and fraud.

Pointing to signs of advances in government integrity in Afghanistan will help Mr. Obama make his case to Congress that additional U.S. troops will not be propping up a corrupt regime. But he will need more than that to prove to Americans that Afghanistan, unlike Iraq, is the "good war."

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SPECIAL REPORT: Industry's Loss is J-schools' Gain

By Joe Strupp
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NEW YORK Journalism schools have long been an attractive option for newspaper veterans seeking to do something different or find a life after the daily-paper grind. But in the current state of massive job cuts and depleted newsroom budgets, J-schools are seeing a boom in applications, inquiries and often desperate pleas for jobs in the teaching sector.

With more editors and veteran reporters either taking buyouts or being cut from their jobs, those who run the top graduate and undergraduate programs reveal that interest in teaching is higher than ever, and not always from those who are dying to teach — but sometimes just dying for a job. "The answer is a big hearty 'yes,'" says Nicholas Lemann, dean of the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University, when asked if interest is on the rise. "My impression is that we are getting more of them across the transom. Every time we have a job posting, we are inundated."

Lemann has 35 full-timers and some 100 adjuncts. "We are seeing more inquiries from people who have left newsrooms or want to leave newsrooms," says Lemann. "The profession has been downsized and there is a particular sector that has been downsized the most, the top 20 or 25 metro newspapers, not the national newspapers. Those newsrooms are far smaller than they were five years ago."

Tom Fiedler, dean of the College of Communications at Boston University, estimates that the number of inquiries in the past nine months is triple what he received in the previous nine months. A former editor of The Miami Herald, Fiedler joined the college two years ago. "There has been a dramatic increase in the inquiries I get from people who are in journalism now interested in slots here," he says, adding that many want to be part-timers. "I have a lot of interest from working journalists to come in as a way to get something on a resume to make them able to stop in that direction."

At the USC Annenberg School of Journalism in Los Angeles, director Geneva Overholser cited a recent opening for an investigative reporting teaching post that drew 50 applicants. "There is a huge growth for applications for any position," says the former editor of The Los Angeles (Iowa) Register and Washington Post ombudsman. "Every week we get more phone calls and e-mails from people who are happy to work with us."

Robert Gunnison, a former San Francisco Chronicle reporter who has spent the past 10 years at the Graduate School of Journalism at the University of California at Berkeley, says, "In the past, it was freelancers looking for something on the side. Now it is much more people who are looking at cuts and being thrown out in the street. There are a lot of people out there."

Brian Brooks, associate dean at the University of Missouri School of Journalism, reports a noticeable increase in working editors and reporters who are just sick of the cutbacks and reduced resources. "Some of them have lost jobs, but some just don't like where the industry is headed and want a career change," says Brooks, a 35-year Missouri staffer. "And people who are on journalism faculties are not leaving — so there are not a lot of openings." Brooks claims the largest full-time journalism school faculty in the country, at 83; "In a typical year, we might have six openings," he says. "But we haven't had any this year. People aren't leaving, because [other] people aren't hiring."

Brooks also notes the diminished interest in newspapers among students, even with an increase in journalism classes. Enrollment has doubled in the past six years among graduate and undergraduate classes to 2,000, but with just 6% majoring in newspapers, down from 15% a year ago. Meanwhile, the number of newspaper vets who want to come and teach has risen sharply.

"It is a clearly buyers market," says Ted Gup, chair of the journalism department at Emerson College in Boston. "People of the highest caliber are being spliced out." But Gup, who has a staff of 15 full-timers and 22 part-timers, says the growing application group spurs worries that some are coming to academia because they have no other options. "I am not looking to run a refugee camp," he adds. "But I think we are pretty good at sorting out the folks for whom teaching is a default position. A lot of people who come into teaching keep a hand in journalism. I don't think colleges will become a place for dead wood."

Stephen Burgard, director of the journalism school at Northeastern University, estimates teaching inquiries are up 30% in just the past year for his department, which has just 13 faculty members, eight of whom are tenured. He finds more newspaper staffers cannot depend on their jobs for retirement. "The end of the cradle-to-grave newspaper career means people cannot stay in journalism until retirement," he says. "You have people in full stride of their career having to make choices about what they are going to do."

According to Burgard, "what is happening at a lot of journalism programs is that openings come up for very specialized positions," he says, citing new media as an expanding area. But he adds that few longtime newspaper people have the digital experience needed. "Everyone is looking at positioning their programs for the changing multimedia field and the economic viability of the new media — to develop skills."

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