The Best Walking Partner: Man vs. Dog

December 14, 2009  By TARA PARKER-POPE

Suzanne DeChillo/The New York Times A dog will never try to talk you out of going for a walk.

Is it better to walk a human or to walk a dog?

New research from the University of Missouri has found that people who walk dogs are more consistent about regular exercise and show more improvement in fitness than people who walk with a human companion. In a 12-week study of 54 older adults at an assisted living home, 35 people were assigned to a walking program for five days a week, while the remaining 19 served as a control group. Among the walkers, 23 selected a friend or spouse to serve as a regular walking partner along a trail laid out near the home. Another 12 participants took a bus daily to a local animal shelter where they were assigned a dog to walk.

To the surprise of the researchers, the dog walkers showed a big improvement in fitness, while the human walkers began making excuses to skip the workout. Walking speed among the dog walkers increased by 28 percent, compared with just a 4 percent increase among the human walkers.

“What happened was nothing short of remarkable,” said Rebecca A. Johnson, a nursing professor and director of the Research Center for Human Animal Interaction at the University of Missouri’s College of Veterinary Medicine. “The improvement in walking speed means their confidence in their walking ability had increased and their balance had increased. To have a 28 percent improvement in walking speed is mind boggling.”

Ms. Johnson said that because some people are afraid of dogs, the participants were given the choice of walking with a human or a dog as the companion. Ms. Johnson said the dog walkers were far more consistent in sticking with the program than those who were walking with humans.

“In the human walking group, they were regularly discouraging each other from walking,” she said. “Missouri is a hot state. We would hear them saying: ‘It’s hot today. I don’t want to walk, do you?’ ”
The response from participants in the dog-walking group — and their dog companions — was very different.

“When the people came to the animal shelter, they bounced off the bus and said, ‘Where’s my dog?’” Ms. Johnson said. “And the dogs never gave any discouragement from walking.”

Ms. Johnson said she suspects differences will show up in other areas, like depression and anxiety, although that data are still under review and the final study has not yet been published.

But there were also other subtle indicators of improvement among the dog-walking group. Many people in the dog-walking group stopped using canes and walkers. “They would say, ‘Now I’m physically fit enough to take my dog for a walk,’” Ms. Johnson said.
Trade-Offs When Mom's the Primary Breadwinner

By John J. Edwards III  December 14, 2009

The Mr. Mom scenario: much less unusual since the movie’s 1983 release. With nearly a third of American households having a sole or primary female breadwinner, the issues those families face are far from a niche matter. But how do the women, in particular, feel about occupying what’s still seen as an unusual role?

A recent study from the University of Missouri tries to answer that question. Rebecca Meisenbach, an assistant professor of communication, conducted close interviews and follow-ups with 15 women who were their families’ main earners and published her findings in the journal Sex Roles. Ms. Meisenbach identified six common elements, positive and negative, in the women’s experiences: “having control; valuing independence; feeling pressure and worry; valuing partner’s contributions; feeling guilt and resentment; and valuing career progress.”

The broad societal expectation that men are primary breadwinners and that women attend to the home sphere—even when they work outside the home—is where many of the negative feelings come in, Ms. Meisenbach found. Says a university release about her research: “These societal expectations and gender norms can leave the female breadwinner with feelings of worry, pressure, guilt and resentment.... For example, female breadwinners experience moments of guilt about care giving, pressure to perform at work and for their families, and occasional resentment at the demands of their multiple and atypical roles.”

On the brighter side, says the release: “The negative effects for female breadwinners are balanced with opportunities for control, independence and ambition. The study found that while some of the women did not want the control, they all did enjoy a sense of independence based on being the main source of income in a family. Most of these women also identify themselves as having strong ambition regarding career success and goal achievement.”

The research has brought a range of responses online and in the media, much of it focused on the finding that some female breadwinners criticize their male partners’ housekeeping and child-rearing skills or exert control over those aspects of their home life despite also being the main earner. An article in the U.K.’s Observer newspaper took this to mean that the concept of men not pulling their weight at home is a “myth,” which isn’t really a point the research makes. The Observer piece also initially erred in saying the project interviewed 15,000 women rather than 15. Although the Observer corrected the error, it still made its way around the Web, even in pieces critical of the Observer’s take (like this one at Babble’s Strollerderby blog).

As I’ve written about here before, my wife is the primary breadwinner in our family, and we’ve struggled at times to find a balance that doesn’t have her overwhelmed with responsibilities on the home front. We’re doing better these days at keeping her off the side of the scale that features “feelings of worry, pressure, guilt and resentment,” and with active attention from both of us, I’m hopeful that’ll continue.

Readers, are you in a female-breadwinner family, or do you know people who are? What issues have you or they faced, and how has the couple worked to overcome them? What have been some of the positive aspects for the woman in the relationship?
A woman working impacts all relationships

Published: Dec. 14, 2009

COLUMBIA, Mo., Dec. 14 (UPI) -- A woman becoming a breadwinner impacts family relationships, individual identities and organizational policies, a U.S. researcher says.

Dr. Rebecca Meisenbach of the University of Missouri in Columbia conducted in-depth interviews with 15 U.S. women ages 26-63 and asked them about their personal history and work-life expectations.

The women's work experiences developed in six common themes:

-- Opportunities for control, not all women wanted it, but many enjoyed this power.

-- Independence, which all women valued as part of their identities.

-- Pressure and worry.

-- Valuing their partner's contributions to the family as a way of helping him maintain his gender identity.

-- Guilt and resentment as a result of societal and personal expectations of themselves and their partners.

-- Ambition and a strong drive to achieve.

Meisenbach said that on an individual level, knowing these essential experiences of female breadwinners may help women create and manage their own identities.

However, organizations need to implement policies that recognize that both male and female employees may be the primary source of income for their households, Meisenbach adds.

The findings are published in the journal Sex Roles.

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Forsee didn’t deserve reprimand for letter

Monday, December 14, 2009

Editor, the Tribune: I am writing to publicly thank University of Missouri President Gary Forsee for writing Congress. I believe he not only has the right to express his opinion; he has the responsibility in his leadership position to do it. The article on Dec. 3 concerning his note gave me additional valuable information that furthers my opposition to the carbon tax.

I was amazed at U.S. Rep. Henry Waxman’s response. Waxman claimed the proposed bill would not apply to MU’s power plant, so that reduces Forsee’s numbers by a third.

So even though “the bill doesn’t apply,” MU’s cost will go up 70 percent, which is millions of dollars.

Later, U.S. Rep. Ike Skelton “reprimanded Forsee for writing the letter without understanding the legislation. ‘I am surprised you would not more thoroughly study the facts.’ ”

What facts? Where is there a clear, unambiguous source of information that would enable anyone to make an accurate forecast of the impact of the carbon tax?

If there is any confusion on this legislation, Waxman, Skelton and the rest of Congress are personally responsible for that confusion. Their duty and responsibility are to write bills that can at least be understood by intelligent, educated people in positions of responsibility who must cope with their bills.

Everyone should oppose the carbon tax. This bill is not even worthy of discussion until it can achieve a minimum level of being understandable.

Thanks again, Mr. Forsee. Your note and that article were very informative for me.

Richard D. Currall

2100 N. Trails West Ave.
COLUMN: Forsee right to question cap-and-trade idea

By J Karl Miller
December 15, 2009 | 12:01 a.m. CST

University of Missouri System President Gary Forsee's letter to federal lawmakers urging opposition to "Cap and Trade" legislation as a much too costly venture, has earned him a world of critics, few of whom are favorable or even constructive. Those in disagreement include organized (Coal Free Mizzou) and individual students, members of the faculty, the Sierra Club and the Kansas City Star.

The President and his opposition have one thing in common – the right to express their opinion; however, he alone is confronted with issues not faced by his dissenters — that of leadership and responsibility. He is responsible to the University — students and faculty —, the community, the Governor, the legislature and to taxpayers for the operation of the university system. And, in asking the legislature to oppose cap and trade, he has exercised that responsibility we expect from our leaders.

Those who oppose carbon generated energy have something in common also – exactly zero responsibility for the consequences of their opinions and recommendations. It is relatively easy to sit on the sidelines and demonize "Big Coal," "Big Oil" and "Wall Street" and equate profit with greed while advancing no solution other than vague references to "alternate energy sources." Thus far, not one "green" (wind, solar or biofuel) energy source has demonstrated cost effectiveness nor efficiency, while each poses measurable environmental consequences also.

For example, meteorologist Mark Johnson and Green Econometrics have placed the cost of solar energy at 35 times the cost per kilowatt hour of that of coal while wind power's cost estimate varies from more than 50 percent more to 7 times coal generated electricity (variations caused by subsidies and by intermittent nature of wind). When balanced against the fact that but 1.4 percent of global electricity demand is provided by
wind and 8 by solar energy (more than 80 percent of Missouri's electricity is coal-fired), there obviously is no economically feasible quick fix to a carbon-free MU.

Additionally, either unwittingly or by design, carbon dioxide is overdemonized. The percentage of CO2 in our atmosphere is approximately 0.04 percent of the Earth's atmosphere and is essential for photosynthesis in trees and other vegetation. The vast majority of the "greenhouse gases" are water vapor and clouds, which includes CO2 — it is difficult to keep a straight face while declaring a vital-to-all-that-is-green chemical compound, one that each of us emits in the process of exhaling, a dangerous pollutant.

Now, this in no way intimates that reducing the demand for and use of carbon-based energy sources is neither desirable nor necessary. No one in his or her right mind endorses pollution of air, land and sea — having served a tour of sea duty in Long Beach (Los Angeles County) in the smog-infested early 1960s, I can attest to the discomforts in breathing noxious fumes. But, lessening the demand for carbon energy will not be accomplished by well meaning but all too often illogical, uninformed or impractical protests and movements.

The notion that we have reached a point of no return, necessitating drastic measures which, while they may cause temporary higher costs and reduced services, are justified as a means to a glorious, carbon-free end, is devoid of logic or common sense. The costs of cap and trade will be passed on to the consumer. Anyone who believes the added cost of doing business will be absorbed by the provider is in need of a reality check. To remain in operation, businesses must pay employees, maintain equipment and inventory, provide for research and development and show a profit.

To anyone who believes the promise that government subsidies will defray the initially higher energy costs to individuals, one must ask the obvious: How does the government fund this "temporary" relief as carbon is phased out? The answer is simple — those monies come from you and I and all taxpaying citizens. Picking the pocket of citizen "A" to pay for the needs of citizens "B" and "C" is an illusionary feat practiced only by governments and is not available to those bound by budgetary constraints.

Consequently, President Forsee has demonstrated courage and foresight in recognizing and calling attention to the realities of cap and trade legislation. The impetus for cap and trade is largely driven by the alternative fuels industry which stands to lose money for itself and its investors unless governments raise carbon prices arbitrarily. These
industries owe their very existence to vast billions in subsidies, yet they remain unable to compete economically with carbon.

Although President Forsee tracks a reasoned and responsible course, that does not negate the obligation of honest disagreement: "Freedom is hammered out on the anvil of discussion, dissent and debate" (Hubert Humphrey). However, informed dissent requires realistic and objective alternatives – these are not yet apparent.

J. Karl Miller retired as a colonel in the Marine Corps. He is a Columbia resident and can be reached via e-mail at JKarUSMC@aol.com.
Autism center set for move to new facility

By Janese Heaviri  Monday, December 14, 2009

A center that assists families of children with autism is expected to move to a new home next year.

The Thompson Center for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders, which shares space at 300 Portland Ave. with a sleep diagnostic center and a paternity lab, is expected to move to 205 Portland by August.

The University of Missouri, which owns the center, bought the two-story building from the LeMone Family Limited Partnership and Daniel Boone Land Co. earlier this year.

Center Director Jim Poehling said acquisition costs were about $2.82 million, and another $2.3 million will be used for interior construction.

Funding primarily comes from a $5 million allocation earmarked by former Gov. Matt Blunt and released by Gov. Jay Nixon in February.

Built in 2006, the 27,000-square-foot building now is a shell, which allows the center to build the interior specifically to meet its needs. SFS Architecture of Kansas City designed the floor plans this year.

The lower level will house administrative offices, and the upper level will be clinical space. The building will be designed to provide specific areas for medical treatment, speech and language therapies, and behavioral services, said Janet Farmer, director of academic programs. Additionally, a family resource center will provide guidance to parents navigating medical services.

"It's just going to be really exciting," Farmer said. "These areas were specifically planned for these functions to meet the needs of our children, youth and families."

The new location also is next to Columbia Regional Hospital, where the university-owned Children’s Hospital is expected to relocate next year.

"It's been our dream to have an association with the Children’s Hospital." Poehling said. "This will be a destination spot for families needing all sorts of medical services, including autism and neurodevelopmental services."
A proposed federal earmark will allow the center to install upgraded audio and visual equipment in the new facility. Sen. Kit Bond, R-Mo., has allocated $750,000 to the center as part of the federal omnibus budget bill now on President Barack Obama's desk.

"We're currently working with five-year-old equipment we planned to move to the new building," Poehling said. "This will allow us to get state-of-the-art equipment."

To dedicate time and resources to the move, Thompson Center administrators have decided to cancel the annual Model Citizen Fashion Show in 2010. Held in March for the past three years, the show featured MU alumna and "Entertainment Tonight" correspondent Jann Carl and attracted some 700 attendees.

In past years, the show netted roughly $50,000 in profits. Poehling said.

"We're grateful to folks who supported it in the past," he said. "And we aren't eliminating the possibility of having it again in the future, but this will be a busy year for us. Our decision was based on the need to focus our energy on the new building."

Reach Janese Heavin at 573-815-1705 or e-mail jheavin@columbiatribune.com.
Funds marked for city transit, PedNet

Monday, December 14, 2009

A portion of the funding allocated to Missouri projects as part of the $1.1 trillion spending bill will land in Columbia.

Sen. Kit Bond announced that among $118 million in federal funds for Missouri projects, $1.5 million would be allocated to the city of Columbia and $750,000 to the University of Missouri's Thompson Center for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders.

The legislation that includes the funding is awaiting President Barack Obama's signature.

The city's PedNet Coalition will receive $500,000 for a project to "empower children in poverty" by helping them develop healthy habits early, according to information from Bond's office. Because of increases in the rates of childhood obesity, heart disease, diabetes and other health conditions, the project aims to "achieve measurable changes in children's physical activity and nutrition habits, which will improve health care, quality of life and reduce health care costs."

PedNet officials were not available to provide more details this morning.

The city of Columbia will receive $1 million for replacement of old transit vehicles to reduce operational costs such as maintenance and fuel expenses. Director of Public Works John Glascock said there are 15 buses that need replacement and that at least some of this funding would likely support that need. The funding will allow transit service to preserve current bus services.

City staff had not yet received information about the funding for these two projects and could not comment on when that money would come or exactly how it would be spent.

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MU e-mail slowed because of spam

By Molly Harbarger
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COLUMBIA — MU e-mail slowed Friday because of increased spam filtering, said Terry Robb, spokesperson for MU's Division of Information Technology.

Windows Outlook Live, which MU uses for student and staff e-mail, is run by Hotmail. Hotmail's "reputational score" decreased, meaning it let more spam mail through its filters than usual. Robb said people started reporting Monday morning that there was a delay between sending and receiving e-mails.

Campus technicians modified the spam filter on Friday, so intercampus e-mails should return to normal speeds on Monday, Robb said.