MU taking real steps away from coal

Transition won’t happen overnight.

BY BRADY DEATON

The nation meets 44 percent of its energy needs by burning coal. The University of Missouri and the state receive about 80 percent of their energy from this fossil fuel. Society has become increasingly aware of the deleterious effects of burning coal on human health and the natural environment. Recognizing these effects, MU has taken extraordinary steps for short-run, technical adjustments to reduce harmful effects and is developing and implementing longer-run modifications of its power plant to reduce and eliminate the need to burn coal to supply our energy needs. The university also is devoting resources to stimulate exploration of alternative energy sources to move society toward a more sustainable energy future.

I want to provide perspective on MU’s efforts to reduce dependence on coal as an energy source. The remarkable scope of energy use at MU makes this challenge formidable and requires ongoing assessment of cost and technological change. The MU power plant is responsible for providing utility service to more than 14 million square feet of facilities across more than 1,300 acres of land on the university’s main campus, which includes hospitals, a research reactor, numerous research facilities, academic buildings, residential halls, dining facilities and the athletic complex. MU administrators search continually for the most efficient, environmentally friendly ways to keep our campus running.

Given this high energy demand, how are we responding to the need to transition away from coal? I will begin with MU’s most recent step forward and then recount key actions that are under way and receiving wide recognition.

MU is considered a national leader in energy management. I signed The American College and University Presidents’ Climate Commitment on Jan. 15, 2009, committing MU to submit a greenhouse gas inventory of our campus by Jan. 15, 2010. We are on target to meet that deadline.

As part of the pact, MU also must develop a climate action implementation plan, which is due Jan. 15, 2011. To ensure we meet the deadline for this critical component, a sustainability coordinator was hired to spearhead, coordinate and provide oversight for the plan’s timely development. The plan must contain the following elements:

1. Set a target date for climate neutrality, a time when greenhouse gas emissions are balanced with renewable energy production.
2. Establish interim targets for goals and actions.
3. Identify actions to make climate neutrality and sustainability part of the campus curriculum and other educational experiences for all students.
4. Develop strategies to expand research and other efforts to achieve climate neutrality.
5. Ensure mechanisms are in place for tracking progress on goals and actions.

The entire MU community recognizes our responsibility to be good stewards of our environment, and we take that responsibility seriously, as our record will show.

Consider for a moment the significance of reduced energy use on campus. While our education and general use space has grown by 30 percent since 1980, with many new energy-intensive research facilities, our energy use has actually been reduced by 10 percent per square foot. We also have experienced a 12 percent decrease of greenhouse gas emissions based on square footage. This has been possible only through the work of our experts in campus facilities.

Since 1995, MU has won 14 international, national and state awards for energy management techniques. The most recent was the 2008 Missouri Waste Control Coalition’s Outstanding Achievement Award, based on our use of old tires to replace a portion of our coal as a fuel source. Rather than discard these used tires in landfills, they are shredded and burned. As a fuel source, they burn cleaner than coal, reducing emissions.

We are proud of the leadership role of our students, faculty and staff. Earlier this year, our student group, Sustain Mizzou, submitted a grant application to become part of a project that investigated challenges universities face to incorporate sustainability practices in their operations and curricula. As a result, we were visited by officials from the Rocky Mountain Institute (RMI). Located in Snowmass, Colo., the institute is dedicated to the responsible use of natural resources while encouraging sustainable practices. After their visit to our power plant, RMI officials commented that MU was a "rock star" among its peers.

In October, the Sustainable Endowments Institute gave MU an overall grade of "B-" but MU received an "A" in the area of "Climate Change and Energy," the highest (along with the University of Colorado) of all Big 12 universities.

While we continue to use coal at our plant, we have explored and been successful with using alternative fuels, including corn cobs, waste wood and switch grass. We are preparing to replace a coal-fired boiler with a special boiler that will have the ability to burn 100 percent biomass. MU’s power plant uses combined heat and power technology to produce steam and electricity for the campus. The efficiency of this process is nearly twice that of a conventional power plant.

By taking these actions, we are continuing our steps toward eliminating coal use on our campus. This will not happen overnight, but we realize, by taking these actions, we are setting the stage for minimal coal use in the future.

Even as we cope with the problems associated with burning coal, economic realities and new technologies will determine the exact timetable for eliminating coal use. There is no doubt we will succeed. Our plans are based on specific investments, a deep commitment to a cleaner and safer environment, knowledge of the damaging effects of coal, and the problems of greenhouse gas and other emissions that harm human and plant life.

As we continue our concerted efforts to achieve our energy and environmental goals, I ask you to join the MU community in open and informed discussions of this complex issue of national and international importance.

Brady Deaton is chancellor of the University of Missouri’s Columbia campus.
Remembering '09

For some, 2009 was the best of times. The money rolled in for Gary Pinkel, head football coach at the University of Missouri. Ditto for Mike Anderson, the head men's basketball coach.

Barbara Dixon, the former president of Truman State University in Kirksville, did pretty well, too. She performed only one task in her year as a Truman consultant and earned $215,000. Dixon wrote a report on ways the university could cut costs and save money.

And bonuses were paid in 2009 to many employees of the Missouri State Employees' Retirement System, even though its pension fund lost money. And for the lucky 228 professors on the MU campus, there were fatter pay envelopes as well.

But for thousands of others in Missouri, 2009 might have approached the worst of times. As the new year approached, the state’s unemployment rate hovered near 10 percent, with more than 280,000 people unemployed. One group estimated 65,000 people in the state lost health insurance in 2009 because of unemployment.

The Central Missouri Food Bank reported the troubled economy had put many people into “situational poverty,” with lost jobs or reduced work hours. The food pantry in Boone County experienced a 24 percent increase in the number of people served, from 7,900 in January to nearly 9,900 in October.

Maj. K. Kendall Mathews, regional coordinator for the Salvation Army, said community needs had increased 25 percent over the previous year.

And while everyone waited for the economic meltdown to end, state and local governments watched the continued erosion of revenues to pay for community services. As the year's end approached, Gov. Jay Nixon cut another $204 million from the state budget, bringing to $634 million the amount trimmed from the state's spending plan for the current fiscal year.

About 200 full-time and nearly 500 part-time state workers lost their jobs in the process, bringing to 1,700 the number of jobs lost during the current budget year.

Future budget cuts were expected to fall hard on Columbia and MU. Higher education spending must be cut by about $50 million in the coming fiscal year. Lagging city sales taxes might mean annual cuts of about $2.5 million for the city of Columbia’s budget starting in 2011. And Columbia Public Schools might face a budget gap of as much as $5 million in state funding.
Because of falling sales tax revenues, for a third year in a row Boone County employees will not receive a pay increase for 2010.

PIGS AND CHICKENS

Still, 2009 was not all bad news.

The swine flu epidemic did not hit Missouri as hard as health officials had feared. According to The Associated Press, the state recorded 11 of an estimated 10,000 U.S. deaths from the disease, also known as H1N1.

There was a bright spot, too, in figures from the Missouri Department of Transportation as 2009 preliminary statistics pointed to a continued decrease in highway fatalities. Deaths from traffic accidents fell to 960 in 2008 from 992 in 2007 (the latest year for which firm figures are available.)

The Boone County Courthouse expansion project was completed under budget, and 2010 will begin with the expansion of the government center.

Amanda Huhman and Libby Burk, a pair of Columbia Catholic middle schoolers, spearheaded an improbable — but ultimately successful — campaign for the Central Missouri Humane Society's animal shelter to win a "million dollar makeover" sponsored by Zootoo.com. But wait a minute: It's not $1 million but "up to a million dollars in goods and services" coordinated by Zootoo CEO Richard Thompson.

The project still hasn't gotten off the ground, with a contest deadline of November 2010. The Zootoo campaign focused attention on the local shelter, exposing deep administrative flaws. Alan Allert took over as interim director after Patty Forister resigned. A critical report to the Columbia City Council pointed to troubled operations and financial problems.

The council wrestled with other controversial issues in 2009, including whether to let residents raise chickens. On the thorny issue of whether surveillance cameras should be placed downtown, city officials chickened out and turned the topic over to voters to decide.

But the council had no trouble in placing a moratorium on new licenses for payday lenders and, after much ado, banned motorist harassment of travelers whether they be on foot, bicycle or wheelchair.

In Columbia Public Schools, achievement for the district slumped again this year, according to the federal No Child Left Behind program. The federal government placed the district on a "corrective action" plan, meaning it must submit a plan to improve. According to the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Columbia was among 79 of the 524 districts in Missouri that failed to meet adequate yearly progress goals for a third year.

But the state continued to honor the school district, accrediting the schools with distinction for the sixth year in a row this year.
WHAT'S IN THE WATER?

After Nixon, a Democrat, swept to an easy victory in 2008, he learned in 2009 that governing was not so simple. He fired Joe Bindbeutel, who was deputy director of the state Department of Natural Resources, after lapses were uncovered in the state’s reporting of high levels of bacteria at Lake of the Ozarks. Nixon also suspended his DNR director, Mark Templeton, over the same incident.

And Nixon lost the services of Linda Martinez, his director of the Department of Economic Development, who gave no explanation for her abrupt resignation.

Federal stimulus and budget stabilization funds helped keep Missouri government financially afloat during Nixon’s first year in office, but they weren't enough to enable him to sign into law the General Assembly’s appropriation to build a new Ellis Fischel Cancer Center at MU. Nixon also vetoed a bill that would have allowed motorcycle riders 21 and older to ride without a helmet. That measure was tacked onto an insurance bill sponsored by Sen. Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia.

State government was rocked by the resignations of three Democratic members of the legislature who pleaded guilty to crimes. State Sen. Jeff Smith, Rep. Steve Brown and Rep. Talibdin El-Amin, all from St. Louis, pleaded guilty, respectively, to obstruction of justice, the cover-up of a crime and soliciting and accepting a bribe.

And before the year was over, another scandal erupted when former House Speaker Rod Jetton, a Republican from Marble Hill, was charged with second-degree assault in Scott County, where he was accused of hitting and choking a woman during a sexual encounter. Jetton has pleaded not guilty.

UM President Gary Forsee faced his own budget-related challenges in 2009. Faculty and employees were concerned about changes in their pension plans that required them to contribute to what had been a retirement program that was entirely government-funded. University employees viewed the change as a salary reduction.

A still-pending deal between MU Health Care and the Cerner Corp. means 100 university information technology employees will be outsourced next week. The agreement, which was largely kept under wraps as it was developed, is designed to improve the retention of electronic medical records.

THE PASSING PARADE

In 2009, Missouri, Boone County and Columbia witnessed new arrivals and announced departures of many in key government and leadership positions as well as popular personalities.

Sen. Kit Bond, R-Mo., announced he would not seek a fifth term in the 2010 general election. Congressman Roy Blunt of southwest Missouri and state Sen. Chuck Purgason of Caulfield are
running for the GOP nomination to succeed Bond. Secretary of State Robin Carnahan is considered the likely Democratic nominee.

Another political race is unfolding in Columbia, as the city’s longest-serving mayor, Darwin Hindman, announced he would not seek re-election after serving a record five terms. Hindman, 76, leaves a legacy of parks and trails development as well as municipal expansion.

Paul Pepper’s 40-year career at university-owned KOMU-TV came to an end with the cancellation of “Pepper & Friends.” Despite complaints and petitions from fans, the station pulled the plug on the show because of budget constraints.

Among the new faces in key places in 2009:

PChris Belcher became the new superintendent of Columbia Public Schools. Belcher had been the superintendent in his hometown of Kearney in northwest Missouri.

PKen Burton was sworn in as the city’s new police chief. The Columbia Police Department is about twice the size of the force Burton led as chief in Haltom City, Texas, a Fort Worth suburb. PScott Olsen was finally selected as the new permanent chief of the Boone County Fire Protection District. Olsen, who had been interim chief for 11 months, succeeded Steve Paulsell, the long-serving chief who had been forced to resign.

PDianne Lynch, formerly the dean of communications at Ithaca College in New York, was inaugurated as the new president of Stephens College. Lynch replaced Wendy Libby, who ended her five years at Stephens to become president of Stetson University in Florida.

PR. Eric Staley, a fundraising professional, was named as the new executive director of the Missouri Theatre Center for the Arts, replacing David White III, who resigned in the wake of reports of subcontractors for a theater renovation project filing construction liens against the organization.

Two well-known public figures passed away during 2009: Warren E. Hearnes, a Democrat and the first two-term governor in the state’s history, and George W. Parker, a Columbia civic leader and a man who helped rebuild Missouri’s Republican Party. Both were 86.

**CRIME AND PUNISHMENT**

Violent crime and senseless murders plagued Mid-Missouri and Columbia in 2009. A child’s killing shocked the country.

Alyssa Bustamante, 15, was charged as an adult with the murder of 9-year-old Elizabeth Olten in St. Martins. Police said Bustamante plotted the murder, dug a grave in advance and then strangled, stabbed and cut the girl’s throat. Police said Bustamante wanted to know how it felt to kill someone.
In March, Columbia Water and Light Director Kraig Kahler was charged with third-degree domestic assault in connection with an attack on his wife, Karen Kahler. It was the defining chapter in an unfolding tragedy that ended in November when the bodies of Karen Kahler, 44, their two daughters, Emily, 18, and Lauren, 16, and Karen Kahler’s grandmother, Dorothy Wight, 89, were found in a home near Topeka, Kan.

Kraig Kahler, 46, who lost his job after he was charged with assaulting his wife, has been charged with capital murder in the four shooting deaths. Police believe Kahler stalked his wife through the Internet after she moved from the home of her abusive spouse and obtained a court order of protection.

The wheels of justice turned for Bill Clinch, Keyonda Lumpkin, Horace Johnson, Grady Dortch and Damon Williams.

Clinch was found guilty of first-degree murder in the shooting death of his former brother-in-law, Jeremy Bohannon, who was shot three times in the head in the Clark Lane McDonald’s parking lot in September 2007. Clinch was sentenced to life without parole.

Lumpkin was sentenced to 24 years in prison for her role in the murder of her 2-year-old son, Cortez Johnson, whose body was found to have severe burns on the buttocks and penis as well as deep bruises that indicated blows suffered as long as six months before his death.

Johnson was found guilty of second-degree murder in the death of Cortez. Johnson’s sentencing is set for Feb. 1.

Dortch was sentenced to life in prison without parole in the Douglass Park shooting death of Miles Heard on Election Day in 2008.

Williams, who lived in Ashland, received a life sentence for the June 2008 murder of Nathaniel Bentley during a home invasion.

The disappearance 33 years ago of Columbia waitress Becky Doisy was brought to the public’s attention with the arrest of Johnny Wright, who had been charged in 1976. Doisy disappeared at age 23 after witnesses reported seeing her with Wright. His attorney has said Wright is not connected to Doisy’s disappearance.

And in a bizarre fatal mishap, Jeremy Setzer, 24, was struck and killed by a Columbia Police Department patrol car driven by Officer Alan Mitchell. Setzer lay in the roadway on Clark Lane as Mitchell’s car approached at a 40-mile-per-hour clip in a 30-mph zone. A police report filed said Mitchell’s speed had “no effect on his ability to prevent the accident,” which took place during dark and rainy conditions. No explanation has been given why Setzer was lying in the road in the path of traffic.
Colleges must disclose student access, success rates

By: Editorial Board

The politics of college affordability are sure to heat up after the first of the year — the hotter the better if it helps capable students from lower-income families to overcome enormous barriers to higher education.

Federal student aid reform legislation is waiting in the on-deck circle in the U.S. Senate. It won't face partisan hold-ups because it will be rolled into a budget reconciliation package that is immune from filibuster, thus requiring not 60 votes but only a simple majority.

The Senate is poised to take an even more ambitious approach — providing generous financial support for colleges and universities that commit not just to opening their doors more widely, but to holding themselves accountable. To qualify for the new money, institutions would have to track data about student access and performance from high school to the post-collegiate workplace.

A fight is brewing over this accountability piece — especially among private colleges and universities. They are all too happy to accept billions of dollars in federal tuition aid. But they don't want to disclose data about the students they enroll and graduate, claiming it would interfere with their autonomy and the students' privacy.

More likely, they are embarrassed about huge gaps in the number of low-income and moderate-income students who enroll as compared with students from more well-off families, and similar gaps in the number who graduate. Data recently published about public universities by The Education Trust, a non-partisan advocacy group for students, show the institutions should be embarrassed.

The University of Missouri system is one of nearly two dozen state education systems working to close the gaps. These systems want to cut the low-income and graduation gaps in half by 2015.

Part of the commitment requires participating universities to collect and publicize data on access and completion rates. University of Missouri data from the 2005-2006 — the baseline year — show that high school graduates who receive Pell Grants (a measure of financial need) enroll at just 40 percent of the rate of their higher-income peers.

Low-income students who do enroll graduate at less than 50 percent of the rate of higher-income students. The gap with under-represented minorities is less pronounced but still significant.

At least the Missouri system has the courage to face the truth. Private colleges and universities — if they expect to gain federal financial support — also must come clean.

URL to article: http://www.stltoday.com/blogzone/the-platform/uncategorized/2009/12/colleges-must-disclose-student-access-success-rates/
MU president should retract his opposition to climate bill

Rachel Cleetus and Jimmy Adegoke

University of Missouri President Gary Forsee made headlines when he urged the state’s congressional delegation to either oppose a climate and energy bill or exempt his university from compliance. It turns out that the legislation would not apply to the university’s smaller, non-commercial coal plant, and even if it did, Forsee’s estimates overstated the cost.

News coverage of the story, however, ignored the central issues: why we need this bill, and why it is good for Missouri.

For years, we have been emitting too much carbon into the atmosphere by burning fossil fuels to power our cars, homes and businesses. Carbon traps heat and causes global warming. All major scientific institutions and professional societies worldwide have concluded that human activity is driving global warming.

Research by University of Missouri system professors supports this conclusion.

Midwest temperatures have already increased over the past 50 years, and a recent report by 13 federal agencies concluded that Missouri likely would experience 60 to 90 days every summer with temperatures above 100 degrees by the end of the century if we take no action to address global warming. Missouri could also expect longer-lasting heat waves and increasingly powerful storms and flooding.

Fortunately, we can avoid the worst of climate change by quickly transitioning to cleaner power. Last year, two-thirds of Missouri voters approved a state standard requiring utilities to obtain at least 15 percent of their electricity from renewable sources, such as wind and bioenergy, by 2021. Missouri already has three wind projects on line and a fourth in development.

To cut enough carbon emissions to avoid the worst of global warming, we need a national climate bill that caps emissions and offers incentives for businesses to invest in new clean technologies. The Environmental Protection Agency and the Energy Department’s Energy Information Administration analyzed the cost of the House-passed climate bill and found that the average annual cost per household would range from $80 to $111 between 2012 and 2030, a mere 22 to 30 cents per day. Meanwhile, the longer we delay reducing our carbon overload, the more expensive and difficult the problem will be to solve.

We know the bill would not regulate the university’s power plant, but even if it did, Forsee assumed an improbably high price for pollution permits. In fact, the initial annual cost to comply would be about half of what Forsee calculated, according to price projections by the EPA and EIA.

Additionally, Forsee’s assertion that the university’s energy prices would increase by 50 percent is inaccurate. The EPA estimated electricity rates would rise only 0.2 percent. The agency also projected that consumer monthly electricity bills could fall by 7 percent given the legislation’s provisions for energy efficiency investments.

Global warming is a serious threat to Missouri and the rest of the planet, and we’re close to enacting smart policies that would deploy the solutions. We need real leadership instead of backpedaling. Forsee should retract his opposition, and Missouri’s congressional delegation should quickly enact climate legislation.