COLUMBIA, Mo. — Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon has no plans to sit idly while lawmakers consider whether to preserve a tuition freeze deal he assembled before the state’s dire financial status was fully known.

"I'll do everything within my power — and I don't consider that power insubstantial — to make sure we live up to that deal," he said.

The agreement, which is subject to legislative approval, would freeze tuition at public campuses for the next academic year in exchange for no more than $50 million in cuts to state funding for higher education.

On Tuesday, the Senate Appropriations Committee endorsed a $65 million cut. Nixon says he's hopeful the lesser reduction will be restored by the full Senate or during negotiations with the House, which kept the tuition deal intact in its proposed budget.

He reiterated his call to equalize state scholarships for students at private colleges who are eligible to receive more money than their public school counterparts. Nixon has also suggested eliminating such scholarships, which would save the state $50 million.

Nixon's campus appearance was intended as a public update on his efforts to "right-size and refocus" state government through cuts of nearly $126 million and the elimination of 1,000 state jobs announced in March. He offered similar updates Tuesday at the University of Missouri-Kansas City and later Wednesday at Washington University in St. Louis.

The emergency cuts were needed to plug an expected $500 million shortfall in the 2011 budget released in January, Nixon said.

But when it came time for audience questions, the only topic was the tuition freeze.
Chancellor Brady Deaton said he's optimistic that Nixon will deliver on his commitment to keeping tuition flat at the state's four-year colleges and universities for a second consecutive year.

"His words today were encouraging," Deaton said. "We know that everyone is living within the realities of the situation we're in, but we are very hopeful."

Senate President Pro Tem Charlie Shields, R-St. Joseph, was less hopeful.

"I just don't know if we can hold to that original promise," he said. "We're very reluctant to take one section of the budget, wall it off and say it's untouchable."

Like the Senate committee members who rejected the tuition freeze agreement Tuesday, Shields cited the state's worsening financial outlook compared to the fiscal climate when the deal was announced a few months ago. Lawmakers face a May 7 deadline to pass a final version of the budget.

The uncertainty could complicate the four-campus University of Missouri system's hopes to set 2010-11 tuition rates at next week's Board of Curators meeting in Rolla.

The curators typically approve tuition and fees for the coming academic year in April. The board doesn't meet again until June, although members can schedule special sessions if needed.

If the tuition deal falls apart, universities still would be bound by a 2007 law that limits tuition increases to the rate of inflation, with a little extra for institutions where tuition already is below average.

For the 2010-2011 school year, the tuition cap would be slightly less than 3 percent, though institutions could seek a waiver from state higher education officials to charge more.
Gov. Nixon presents ideas to downsize government, talks about state budget cuts

by Jessica Machetta on April 7, 2010

in Politics & Government

Gov. Nixon today presented ideas to “right-size and refocus” state government with business students, faculty and executives gathered at the University of Missouri-Columbia.

He talked about consolidating space and services, combining agencies, trimming state travel and eliminating state jobs.

“Let me give you a concrete example,” Nixon says. “We’re in the process of terminating our lease on an 11,000-square-foot Animal Health Lab in Jeff City. You know how many employees were rattling around in that 11,000 square-foot space? Ten. The heating bill alone was close to $23,000 a year. After we consolidate that lab with our new, and much more compact State Health Lab, we’ll save taxpayers $157,000 a year.”

Nixon gave another example using the state’s 114 separate Family Support Division offices, all of which do the same thing. He says the state will consolidate those offices, also to save taxpayer money.

Combining departments is another plan: Elementary and Secondary Education and Higher Education; Highway Patrol and Water Patrol.

Nixon also recommends modernizing pension and health care benefits for state employees, both of which have bipartisan support from the legislature, he says.

Tax credits, jobs growth and infrastructure were other topics Nixon touched on during his address.

Nixon met with reporters following the address and answered questions regarding the address as well as the state budget process.

AUDIO: Press conference with Nixon, reporters [Mp3, 17:08 min.]

Nixon also traveled to Washington University in St. Louis to address business leaders and students there.
Nixon outlines some budget priorities

By Terry Ganey

Wednesday, April 7, 2010


A Republican from Columbia, Schaefer is the vice chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, which for the past week has been whittling away at Nixon’s spending plan, which is about $500 million out of balance. The committee has cut nearly $15 million more from the state higher education budget and continues to slice away services for people who need psychiatric services and substance abuse treatment.

But Schaefer said Nixon has not been open and transparent about what he wants the committee to trim.

“We are down there in open hearing deciding on what to fund or not,” Schaefer said. “The governor should be transparent about what he wants to do. He should not be straddling the fence but he should be leading in public about what he wants done.”

Linda Luebbering, Nixon’s budget director, has released a list of “potential reductions” for the Senate committee to consider. But in an appearance Wednesday afternoon in Columbia, Nixon himself said “that wasn’t a list of recommended cuts.”

Nevertheless, Nixon insisted he was cooperating with Sen. Rob Mayer, R-Dexter and chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee.

“We have been constantly daily working with Sen. Mayer and others to provide them ideas and counsel and have been present and working throughout this entire process,” Nixon said. Asked for three specific, big-number items he would recommend, the governor said:

-- Keep funding for K-12 schools at the 2010 levels.

-- Equalize needs-based scholarship payments to students of private and public schools.

-- Reduce the number of tax credits, which cost the state $448 million in 2009.

Nixon targeted the low-income housing tax credit and wondered whether it was necessary to build rent-capped apartment units that cost the state $350,000 each.
“We can’t, in a world where we are forced because of budget challenges to make the kind of cuts we are having to talk about here and to take off the table things like historic tax credits,” Nixon said. “It’s $180 million a year.”

Nixon said he would continue to push for an agreement between the state and higher education institutions in which public universities would freeze tuition in return for a $50 million cut in state funding. The Senate committee increased the size of the reduction to $65 million, but Nixon said that wasn’t the last word on the matter.

“We ought to honor that agreement,” Nixon said. “It’s still in process.”

Nixon also said he supported ideas that changed the retirement systems for future state workers so that they contribute to their own retirement program. Currently those enrolled in the Missouri State Employees Retirement System do not contribute to their own pensions.

Before the legislature adjourns May 14, the governor also said he hoped it would approve meaningful ethics reform, a strengthening of laws against those accused of driving while intoxicated, and a requirement that insurance companies cover treatment for autism.

Reach Terry Ganey at 573-815-1708 or e-mail tganey@columbiatribune.com.
MU officials still planning for tuition freeze

By Ben Wieder
April 7, 2010 | 9:16 p.m. CDT

JEFFERSON CITY — Speaking in Columbia one day after a Senate committee proposed new cuts to higher education, Gov. Jay Nixon affirmed his support for a tuition deal reached with Missouri's public colleges in November.

"I'll do everything within my power to make sure that we uphold that deal," Nixon said.

Next week, the UM System Board of Curators will set next year's tuition for its four campuses, and MU Chancellor Brady Deaton said MU will recommend that the curators stick to the plan to freeze in-state undergraduate tuition.

"We're honoring that and feel good about it," Deaton said.

The plan would cut the budget for higher education next year by roughly 5 percent, which would translate to about $50 million.

On Tuesday, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved a further cut of $15 million beyond the originally agreed upon reduction.

The committee hopes to finish the budget Thursday, said Vice Chairman Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia. It would then need to be approved by the Senate and a conference between the House and Senate before going to Nixon for his approval. The House previously upheld the tuition deal.

MU Budget Director Tim Rooney said the university would have opportunities to increase in-state tuition next year if the tuition deal falls through but the timing of the legislative process could present some difficulties.
"There are certain deadlines we have to meet," he said.

The legislature must complete its budget by May 7, which Rooney said would likely be too late to adjust tuition for the summer session, which begins June 7. After next week's meeting, the Board of Curators is not scheduled to meet again until three days after the start of the summer session.

Nixon said his staff has worked closely with Senate Appropriations Chairman Rob Mayer, R-Dexter, who proposed the further cut to education despite Nixon's recommendation that it be upheld.

"You only give so much guidance to any senator," Nixon said.

A document released by State Budget Director Linda Luebbering shows proposed cuts discussed between her office and Mayer, but Nixon said these were not recommendations.

Schaefer was critical of Nixon for not being more public about his recommendations for cutting next year's budget.

"Behind closed doors, slipping suggestions to the chairman, he maintains the right to be critical of cuts that are made in the Senate," Schaefer said.

Earlier, Nixon defended his role in the process.

"I've been incredibly open," he said.

Nixon said he doesn't think legislators will have any problem finishing the budget before their deadline, despite his urging that they cut nearly half a billion dollars from his original budget recommendation, which he released in January.

He described Missouri's economic woes as a "small, relatively small, bump."

Nixon has withheld more than $1 billion from the current budget in several rounds, as recently as March 11, but he said he doesn't anticipate any further cuts for the remainder of the fiscal year, which ends June 30.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Columbia, Stephens students to protest proposed Access, Bright Flight cuts

NO MU Mention

By Kelly Brdicka
April 8, 2010 | 12:01 a.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — Students at Columbia and Stephens colleges plan to write letters to Gov. Jay Nixon Thursday protesting his proposed budget cuts, which would decrease state scholarship funding for private college and university students.

Columbia College senior Michelle Arnold is scheduled to give a testimonial at the event. Arnold, 39, is a mother of three who said she wouldn't be able to continue attending school if her Access Missouri grant was reduced. Still, she plans to graduate in December and doesn't think any cuts will be implemented before then.

"I'm speaking more for future generations because I'm living first hand what it's like to be on grants and scholarships and loans," she said.

Arnold currently receives $2,200 per semester from the Access Missouri program. She thinks the proposed cuts are an especially poor idea in the current economy.

"Why put more people out on the streets looking for jobs?" she said.

The event at Columbia College will take place from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and from 4:30 to 5:15 p.m. Thursday in the Atkins-Holman Student Commons. Students will send their letters to Nixon with a signed banner and also send letters to key legislators. Columbia College President Gerald Brouder will give an opening address.

Joanne Tedesco, spokeswoman for the college, said the event is a "team effort" organized by many divisions of Columbia College.
"We're all still waiting with bated breath on what's going to happen," she said of the proposal.

Stephens College will hold an event from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Thursday at Stamper Commons, according to a news release.

If passed, private college and university students receiving state scholarships from Access Missouri and Bright Flight programs would lose some or all of that funding, according to a previous Missourian report.

Currently, a public university student can receive up to $2,150 through Access Missouri and a private college or university student can receive up to $4,600. Nixon's proposition would set a maximum grant of $2,850 for all students attending any four-year institution in the state, according to a previous Missourian report.
JEFFERSON CITY — Proposals to consolidate parts of Missouri's executive branch took a step forward in the Senate but stagnated in the House during two committee hearings Wednesday.

In the Senate, the General Laws committee passed two pieces of legislation, one to implement an audit of all departments to find wasteful resources and another to consolidate the Elementary and Secondary Education and Higher Education departments. However, a separate proposal in the House to merge the state highway and water patrols was met with significant opposition.

The Senate committee, by a 5-0 vote, approved a constitutional amendment that, if passed as is, would abolish all but one of the state departments. But its sponsor said that's not the desired outcome. Senate Speaker Pro Tem Charlie Shields, R-St. Joseph, called it a "shell bill" that will be significantly altered. This shell bill could be an avenue, he said, for combining the two education departments, a move that has been pushed by Gov. Jay Nixon.

Shields gave the Senate another means to consolidate Wednesday with a separate constitutional amendment that would modify the state Board of Education so it covers all public schooling in the state, including higher education.

"We also believe you may have to have two separate amendments at the same time, and they'll both have to pass," Shields said of the education consolidation. "But it's April, and we do have time to put them together, but we want to get the vehicles moving and work on the details as the month goes on."
Shields said the education consolidation would save millions of dollars, and streamlining departments would increase efficiency and quality of education.

"The reason to do it is to create a better higher education system," Shields said. "Right now DESE (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education) is a very strong department; higher education is a weak department."

By another 5-0 vote, the committee approved a Shields-sponsored bill which would require the state commissioner of the Office of Administration to issue a report by the end of the year analyzing programs in every executive department that can be cut or consolidated. Three people speaking on behalf of alcohol manufacturers and distributors testified they feared the bill would be used to combine the Missouri Division of Alcohol and Tobacco Control with the Department of Revenue.

Shields said he was not sure what the bill would be used for. He said he had merely thought about moving the liquor board but not yet moved to act on that notion.

"I've been here 20 years, and I've never before had groups testify against a thought in my head," said Shields, who served in the House from 1991 to 2002 before moving to the Senate. "The bill doesn't say anything. I haven't executed my thoughts and already they're against it."

Senate General Laws Committee Chairman Jack Goodman, R-Mt. Vernon, acknowledged that, with five weeks remaining in the session and a likely contentious budget debate slated to begin next week, it will not be easy to pass these bills. But he added that, with a budget shortfall in the hundreds of millions, any measure that can save money could still make it to Nixon's desk by the middle of May before the session ends.

"It's very possible to get this done in five weeks," Goodman said. "Unless we hear that this is really bad policy, we have to take a long look at any cost-cutting measure we can."

In the House Public Safety Committee, a plan that would combine the highway and water patrols was faced with stern opposition.
Currently, both patrols fall under the jurisdiction of the Department of Public Safety. Under the proposed legislation, the water patrol would become a subsidiary of the highway patrol.

The bill's sponsor, Rep. Jeff Roorda, D-Barnhart, touted the consolidation of the two patrols as a cost-saving measure. According to testimony by Public Safety Department spokeswoman Andrea Spillars, the measure could save the state as much as $3 million annually.

"This is about efficiency," said Spillars, who spoke in support of the bill.

But former Missouri Water Patrol Colonel Rad Talbert said the move was a "knee-jerk reaction" to the state's budgetary woes, which have left lawmakers scrambling for solutions.

Talbert said the plan, which would assign troopers to the highway and water patrols interchangeably, could be dangerous and costly. Supplemental highway patrol training for water patrol officers would demand as much as $180,000, and even then, he said, lives would still be at risk.

"To put an officer in a boat that drives so differently than a car is looking for a disaster," Talbert said.

The committee's chair, Rep. Mark Bruns, R-Jefferson City, said the committee could vote on the bill next week.

Back in the Senate, Shields said the proposed consolidation for the highway and water patrols doesn't appear as likely to garner support nearly as much as his proposal to combine the education departments.
Missouri puts 'parenting corners' in state prisons

COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) — Inmates in Missouri state prisons will soon have access to more information about preserving their parenting responsibilities from behind bars.

The University of Missouri's ParentLink program plans to add 23 "parenting corners" in state prisons to help inmates preserve and strengthen the parent-child bond. Federal statistics show that children of incarcerated parents are more likely to struggle in school and later go to prison themselves.

The parenting corners will be located in prison visiting rooms. Inmates at the Northeast Correctional Center in Bowling Green will build the structures.
Sen. Bond speaks at MU about importance of biotechnology

By Victoria Guida
April 8, 2010 | 12:01 a.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — Interstate 70 could be the biotech alley of the future if U.S. Sen. Kit Bond has his way.

Bond, a Republican, spoke Wednesday morning at the sixth annual Soybean Biotechnology Symposium at MU. He told an audience of about 50 scientists and students that mapping the corn and soybean genome could help solve the world's starvation problems.

"Advances here will continue to affect the entire world," Bond said.

Biotechnology could also be a great economic boon, not just for the I-70 corridor but for all of Missouri, he said, because he thinks bioengineered crops can revolutionize agriculture.

"They have higher yields, are more resistant to disease and increase farmers' chances of harvesting a successful crop," Bond said.

Rodney Geisert, director of MU's department of animal science, said the crops are engineered to be resistant to bugs and weeds, so farmers don't have to spray pesticides or herbicides. They're also engineered to be hardy, and that's good for crop yields, Geisert said.

Bond said scientists need to fight against the fear-mongering about biotechnology.

"You don't have time to continue to listen to the naysayers," Bond said.
The comment was an allusion to the controversy over genetically engineered crops, not only in the scientific community. Some of the concerns are highlighted in the Oscar-nominated film, "Food, Inc."

Robert Kremer, a Columbia-based microbiologist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's agricultural research service, said 95 percent of soybeans are genetically modified.

Some crops are not modified to be resistant to disease, he said, and other modifications may actually make them more susceptible to disease, which could be toxic to the humans that eat them. Other problems have also arisen.

"One good example of this: With many of these herbicide-resistant crops, there are many herbicide-resistant weeds that are developing, which is a big problem," Kremer said. "You have to come back and either use more herbicide or a different herbicide to deal with that."

More research in this area is necessary, Kremer said.

"These are things that have not really been looked into to a great enough extent before we went to large-scale production of all these crops," he said. "We're backing up now (and) taking a look now after everything is already out there in the field."

The soybean symposium went from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Wednesday.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Marshall University names MU official as dean of health professions

By The Associated Press
April 7, 2010 | 7:15 p.m. CDT

HUNTINGTON, W.Va. — Marshall University has named a University of Missouri official as dean of its College of Health Professions.

Michael W. Prewitt will begin work at Marshall on July 1.

Prewitt has been with the University of Missouri since 1979. He currently is associate vice provost at the school’s Columbia campus.

Marshall Provost Gayle Ormiston announced Prewitt’s appointment Wednesday.