Former MU police officer under investigation in child pornography incident

By Nicole Lebsack
May 3, 2010 | 3:49 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — A former MU police officer who resigned following child pornography claims is being investigated by the Mid-Missouri Internet Crimes Task Force.

Nathan Roberts resigned about a month ago after he was connected to a thumb drive containing pornographic images of children.

Another officer found the thumb drive in a computer in one of the police cars and turned it over to a supervisor, MU Police Chief Jack Watring said.

“We did an internal investigation, and when we confronted the officer with the information, he resigned,” Watring said.

Watring said he also called Boone County Sheriff Dwayne Carey to request that the Internet Crimes Task Force investigate the case.

All information in the case has been turned over to the task force, which focuses on crimes committed using computers and the Internet.

Task force officials said they could not comment on the case because it is ongoing.
Missouri House approves spinal cord funding measure

By Michael Bushnell
May 3, 2010 | 8:41 p.m. CDT

JEFFERSON CITY — An amendment that would prohibit embryonic stem-cell research from being funded by University of Missouri System grants was narrowly approved by the Missouri House on Monday.

The amendment was attached in a bill which would increase five-fold the amount of money UM Curators can grant for research on spinal cord injuries, from $50,000 to $250,000.

Before the full House overwhelmingly voted to raise available grants, Rep. Therese Sander, R-Moberly, was narrowly able to add on an amendment that would prohibit any funding recipient from using money on embryonic stem-cell research, which she said "kills children."

The 77-73 vote split party lines, with a number of mostly rural Democrats supporting the amendment. Many Republicans voted no, including bill sponsor Rep. Steve Hobbs, R-Mexico, and Speaker Ron Richard, R-Joplin. One of the supportive Democrats, Rep. Rachel Bringer of Palmyra, said it would clearly redefine acceptable norms for UM-funded research.

"Tremendous numbers of Missourians are very concerned about what medical research we do," Bringer said. "We have to make sure we set limits for the moral values of our state."

Hobbs said he feared the "superfluous" amendment would make the state less attractive to researchers and said it was puzzling that Sander would amend something that is already prohibited or that could at least be stopped in the appropriations process.
"I think there's a lot of us trying to figure out what (Sander) was doing," Hobbs said. "I know I still am."

Rep. Chris Kelly, D-Columbia, said the amendment does nothing that isn't already in state law other than to "pander" to hard-line social conservatives.

"This creates the impression that we, in this state, are out of our minds," Kelly said. "There's no reason to approve this but to play to the most extreme instincts of some of our citizens."

While Hobbs opposed the amendment, he said he didn't think it would be enough to hamper the main effects of the bill, which passed 150-3. Hobbs said the bill would be a major economic boon to research facilities, namely in Columbia. The region's representatives spoke strongly in favor of the bill, saying it is a boon for MU researchers.

Hobbs said increasing the grant money was critical to attracting private researchers to work with public universities across the state, including the campuses in Rolla, Kansas City and St. Louis.

Hobbs said he was more concerned about the fact the bill needs to be reconciled with the Senate-passed version, which doesn't have an amendment similar to Sander's. The Senate and the House must hold a conference committee next to work out a compromise on such differences between their versions of the bill.

"There is still a lot more discussing left to do," Hobbs said, adding that he will speak Tuesday with Senate sponsor Bill Stouffer, R-Napton. "What the final bill will look like, I don't know. But I know that today was a great step forward."
MU faculty salaries rank below average

MU ranked seventh for salaries among other Big 12 schools.

By Jared Grafman

Published May 4, 2010

MU ranked seventh in faculty salaries and ninth for compensation of all ranks of professors, compared to other Big 12 schools in the past year, according to the American Association of University Professors report.


The information on MU's low salaries is not news to Provost Brian Foster or Betsy Rodriguez, UM system vice president of Human Resources.

"MU faculty salaries are well below their peers," Rodriguez said. "MU ranks near the bottom of the public AAU universities. I don't know why they're ranked seventh out of the Big 12 schools in the AAUP report, but there are various ways to reach the conclusions depending on what is included in the data."

According to the AAUP report, full professors at the University of Texas at Austin have salaries at approximately $133,300, compared to full professors at MU, which have salaries reaching approximately $111,000.

"We consider faculty salaries to be substantially low compared to the rest of the market," Rodriguez said. "I think the main problem is that historically the annual salary increases have been about half the increase of the cost of living. This has been over a 10 year period."

Low MU salaries pose an additional obstacle to hiring and retaining faculty members.

"It's a challenge," Foster said. "This isn't news that MU salaries aren't competitive. It's something we've known for a long time, and it has received a lot of publicity."

There have been several efforts by MU administration to raise faculty salaries, but they have yielded little success.

"A couple years ago we began a program called Compete Missouri to try and raise faculty salaries, but economic factors made the program move to the back burners," Foster said. "Since then, we've tried other means to raise MU faculty salaries and compensation."
The poor economy is one obstacle to the UM system's ability to raise faculty salaries.

"There are a variety reasons we haven't been able to keep up with the market, and clearly funding is one of those reasons," Rodriguez said.

Foster said MU tries to attract faculty members through various means.

"We are trying to hire and retain faculty members through development projects, reallocating resources and other methods," he said. "But in the end it's a pretty hard thing to accomplish: raising salaries."

The findings of the AAUP report are not surprising to MU or the UM system. MU's rank among other universities is not expected to vary greatly in upcoming years either.

This can affect a potential faculty member's decision to join or stay with the MU faculty.

"It's an issue for both retention and hiring faculty members," Foster said. "We don't want to offer salaries that create inversions and equities. What we can sell is the quality of the university and the quality of Columbia. Both are great places to live and work."
MSA to support live tiger conservation with plaques

The plaques would label the tigers 'official Mizzou Tigers.'

By Travis Cornejo

Published May 4, 2010

MU has moved one step closer to having live tigers to call its own.

Missouri Students Association President Tim Noce said, depending on negotiations, MU sponsoring tigers at nearby zoos could become a possibility.

Noce said he’s been in contact with zoos in St. Louis, Kansas City and the Dickerson Park Zoo.

"We've been looking at this for awhile and we've finally gotten in contact with the right people," Noce said.

Noce said the negotiations with the zoos are largely monetary. The costs will be low, and it would possibly cover the cost of putting up a plaque.

"There would be a plaque on the tigers' lair that says 'These are the official Mizzou Tigers sponsored by the University of Missouri (or MSA),'" Noce said.

Students and MU alumni would be able to go to zoos in St. Louis, Kansas City or Springfield and the official “Mizzou Tigers.”

"We are helping out the zoo, and it would be a really good asset to the conservation efforts that each zoo does," Noce said. "It would also help out Mizzou by giving it a live mascot at each of these places."

Noce also said it would be a priceless form of advertisement.

"It is also a really good promotional tool for the zoos as well," Noce said. "We can provide them with a form of advertising because the majority of our students are from St. Louis, Kansas City or Springfield."

The deal could be a price promotional tool for both ends -- for conservation and for MU in general, Noce said.
"Each zoo has a breeding program for this rare and endangered species of tigers," Noce said. "A lot of what they do is the conservation effort and that is what we can help promote from a campus standpoint. The more people we can bring them, it helps with the conservation effort of the tiger and the knowledge of why tigers are endangered and why they need help."

Tigers for Tigers President Stacey Winkeler, who spoke out against Noce's original proposal to buy a live tiger for football games, said she's in favor of the MSA president's new idea.

"In my opinion, the idea for MU to adopt tigers at a zoo is a much better alternative than the earlier proposed plan of MU buying a tiger and housing it near campus," Winkeler said. "I feel this option has a much better potential to reach a broader audience and is a more appropriate means to achieving the ultimate goal of saving tigers from extinction."

MSA is working with the athletics department and University Affairs because they know how to promote the school in a good way, Noce said.

Earlier in the semester, Noce asked sophomore Christian Hulen to assist him with issues related to MU adopting a live tiger.

Hulen said the issue has been on the backburner and no new problems have arisen.

No timeline has been set in place for MU adopting tigers at Missouri zoos.

"I just do what Tim asks of me," Hulen said. "If it happens, it happens."

Hulen said he met with Noce on Monday about adopting tigers, and discussions will move forward over the summer and in the fall semester.
MU reactor to lower uranium grade

The conversion could take up to three years.

By Mary Novokhovsky

Published May 4, 2010

The MU Research Reactor will be converting from operating primarily on highly-enriched uranium to low-enriched uranium.

MU spokesman Christian Basi said the timeline for conversion could be anywhere from 18 months to three years.

Basi said the university's research reactor is one of a handful in the nation yet to switch over. The conversion process works slowly because fuel has to be specifically designed to meet the demands of the reactor.

"Fuel must pass a test and then be certified," Basi said. "Following that certification, we have to receive a change in operating license, and then we can begin converting."

Though the federal government has requested the switch for a number of years, fuel testing of low-enriched uranium for research reactors is ongoing at the Idaho National Laboratory.

Basi said the low-enriched uranium testing in Idaho could prove to be a match for MU, according to the results of simulated computer tests. Ultimately, all decisions regarding the low enriched uranium will be made in Idaho.

Basi said it's important to understand the reactor is responsible for the production of radiopharmaceuticals, many of which compose the ingredients for cancer fighting drugs so the certified fuel must be carefully chosen.

"What we have to make sure is that the fuel that is certified not only supports the research that we do, but that it is of a quality that will maintain the effectiveness of our drugs," Basi said. "Thousands of cancer patients are relying on the reactor each month."

According to the MURR website, the reactor has been in operation since 1966 under UM system President Elmer Ellis, with an initial functioning of five megawatts. After 1974, the reactor began operating at 10 megawatts, which continues to be its capacity. The reactor has a pool capable of absorbing all the heat from the reactor core without the aid of forced convection.
"As of mid-2009 there were 250 operating research reactors, one under construction, 248 shut down and 170 decommissioned," the World Nuclear Association website states. "Two thirds of the operating ones were more than 30 years old."
In last Friday's political column, my contemporary, Clay Carter addressed the Faculty Council's recent approval of a policy that would extend partner benefits to same-sex couples. He stated he doesn't "disapprove of same-sex benefits," but said the cost to either Missourians or students is too high.

I believe the cost of ignoring such a glaring inequality is much too high. I believe Faculty Council came to the right decision, in the right manner, though the proposal was shot down by the UM system Board of Curators in April.

Carter's column suggests Faculty Council passed the policy with no consideration for how to fund the measure. However, The Maneater, the Columbia Daily Tribune and Mizzou Weekly reported on the costs and suggested solutions to this problem.

Leah Cohn, the chairwoman of the UM System Faculty Council's diversity committee, told Mizzou Weekly the estimated total cost increase of expanding benefits would be 1 to 3 percent.

This translates into a $2.2 to $3 million increase in annual costs to the UM system. Relative to the current employee benefit budget, this isn't a huge number. I understand the UM system is in a tough spot financially, but this is a drop in the bucket compared to a lot of UM system expenditures.

Any time a change in employee benefits or student services is suggested, the money has to come from somewhere. Carter is correct on that point. However, I don't believe this particular measure will end up costing the UM system much more money. Faculty Council likely passed it because the cost is so low.

The real issue I take with Carter's column is it completely ignores the possibility that extending benefits to same-sex partners is the ethical thing to do. The main reason this action was taken was to right a wrong in Missouri.

Although our state laws don't recognize gay and lesbian couples, the UM system can do its part to help legitimize those partnerships. Because the UM system employs so many people in this state, the impact of such a decision is a huge win for those fighting for equal rights.
Those who oppose extending benefits to same-sex partners know it's becoming socially unacceptable to judge people based on their sexuality (and rightfully so). Unfortunately, they then turn to more "acceptable" forms of contention.

This is a huge problem on the gay-rights front. People can say they don't care if interracial couples or gay people get married, but what's the fiscal impact?

Detractors try to assign "non-discriminatory" reasons to halt legislation that promotes equality. These people aren't necessarily bigots, but they fail to recognize the larger issues are freedom and egalitarianism. Even though it might end up costing us a little money, I believe that preserving those American ideals is of the utmost importance.

When talking about gay rights and equal benefits, I've always said this is the most important civil rights issue of our generation. I am not exaggerating when I say small policy changes like the UM system adoption of same-sex benefits are what make a larger difference. Although cost and implementation are obviously necessary discussions to have, we can't let slight inconveniences keep us from doing what is right.