JEFFERSON CITY • Parents of Missouri college students should prepare to feel a pinch in their wallets next year.

That was the message delivered from Gov. Jay Nixon to higher education leaders at a summit meeting in the capital city on Tuesday as he and his budget director outlined grim news.

"Missouri's budget will face serious challenges," Nixon told leaders from state colleges, universities and community colleges.

After his speech, Nixon told reporters that the deal he had with higher education leaders to avoid tuition increases each of the last two years would not likely continue when students hit campuses a year from now.

"At this particular juncture, it's going to be very difficult sustaining that goal," the Democratic governor said.

Later, budget director Linda Luebbering offered the specifics:

Higher education can expect budget cuts in the 2012 budget year on top of the 5 percent that was cut this year, and the $50 million in scholarship money cut from state programs isn't likely to come back, either.

Luebbering said the state faces a likely $450 million budget gap because of slow revenue growth and the lack of federal budget stabilization money that helped balance the books over the last two years. Also, Luebbering said it's possible that a "double dip" in the nation's recession could make matters even worse.

"When you look at what's going on in Europe, when you look at our own housing market, and when you look at the reluctance of people to part with their money, the potential for a 'double dip' is not off the table," Luebbering said.

To prepare for continued difficult budget times, Nixon outlined four things he wanted the state's higher education leaders to do:

• Enroll and retain more students.
• Review programs and curriculum and look for possible cuts.

• Collaborate with other colleges and universities in the state on business and academic matters.

• Develop a sustainable funding model.

It’s that funding — or lack thereof — that concerns University of Missouri President Gary Forsee. During the budget discussion, he asked Luebbering whether the state was considering any alternative funding sources or tax increases.

"I would say that is highly unlikely," Luebbering said.

Instead, she said, Nixon continues to try to find savings from the state’s various tax credit programs, which the governor has described as growing out of control. Despite criticism from some business leaders, Nixon has targeted the approximate $600 million in potential yearly outlay in tax credits for possible budget savings.

Forsee suggested that Nixon and lawmakers should consider tax increases.

"There ought to be a balanced discussion about what higher education has been through in the past 10 years," Forsee said, adding that the state’s overall support for higher education is still below 2001 levels.

For the current fiscal year, the state is spending $822 million in general revenue money on higher education, about 11 percent of the state’s total general revenue budget. Some of that money, however, comes from federal budget stabilization funds that won’t be available next year, contributing to the dire predictions. In 2001, higher education spending from general revenue was $925 million.

For two years running, the governor and Legislature have cut a deal with public colleges and universities, sparing them from deep cuts in exchange for an agreement to hold tuition steady. University officials have recently said the deal has stretched them to capacity, forcing them to deal with a 5 percent drop in state funding even as costs rise and tuition is stagnant.

Higher education suffered an additional blow earlier this summer when Nixon said he was forced to trim $50 million from the Access Missouri Scholarship, the state’s largest source of scholarship money for needy students. The cut will slash individual awards by about half, a reduction that some college officials say could place college out of reach for some students.

Forsee noted that Kansas raised taxes last year to try to avert damaging budget cuts. The Kansas Legislature raised the state’s sales tax by 1 cent.

The Missouri Legislature — which, like Kansas, is controlled by Republicans — has made clear that tax increases will not be considered.
Nixon pitches goal for colleges

By JANISE SILVEY
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JEFFERSON CITY — Gov. Jay Nixon outlined a lofty goal yesterday: He wants to increase the percentage of Missourians with college degrees from 37 percent to 60 percent even as colleges and universities brace for more budget cuts.

That's going to require efficiencies in the state's network of higher education, Nixon told about 150 college leaders during a higher education summit at the Governor's Office Building yesterday.

Mainly, colleges and universities are going to have to better collaborate, he said. Missouri has more than 150 public and private colleges, many of which offer similar academic programs. Nixon did not suggest closing any school — an idea that surfaced in a Missouri Department of Higher Education letter last year — but he did call on institutions to better collaborate to make sure they’re not unnecessarily offering duplicate degrees. Additionally, what is taught in class needs to match the skill set students will need in a future job market, he said.

Public colleges and universities saw about a $5 million decrease in funding this year and can expect more cuts in fiscal 2011, which starts next summer. Linda Luebbering, state budget director, anticipates a state budget shortfall of as much as $500 million.

Nixon said it's too early to say whether he'll strike a tuition deal with colleges again next year. Over the past two years, he's protected higher education from major cuts in exchange for a freeze on in-state undergraduate tuition.

"It's difficult to continue that for the long haul," Nixon said. Even if a deal can't be reached, he said, "We're going to continue to keep college affordability a priority."

It has to be if Nixon is going to reach his 60 percent goal, which mirrors a national agenda. To get to that number by 2025, 461,886 more Missourians are going to have to obtain degrees, said Dewayne Matthews, vice president for policy at the Indianapolis-based Lumina Foundation for Education, which also shares the 60 percent goal. And they can't all be traditional college students; Missouri needs to better educate returning veterans, displaced workers and adults who started but didn't finish college, he said.

Matthews outlined some grim statistics. The percentage of college-educated adults in the U.S. has remained flat at about 40 percent for the past four decades while the percent of college-educated adults in nine other countries has skyrocketed. High-skill and low-skill jobs have increased while the number of jobs requiring mid-level skills has decreased, meaning there are fewer opportunities to "get a foot in the door" and move up the ladder. And most jobs lost during this recession, Matthews said, aren't coming back.
“Job recovery is dependent on our ability to retool, rethink and re-educate,” he said.

One way colleges can do that is by redesigning their courses. Carol Twigg, president of the National Center for Academic Transformation, told college leaders they could save money and improve educational quality by redesigning courses using technology. For instance, all sections of a general education class could be redesigned to provide half of the class virtually, increasing the number of students in one class and reducing sections and the number of instructors.
Move-in day arrives at MU

Freshmen bring lots to campus.

Bob Herzberger, left, and Max Geppert work Wednesday morning on arranging their room in Hudson Hall on the University of Missouri campus. Thousands of students are moving into residential halls this week. The first day of classes is Monday.

By Janese Silvey

Wednesday, August 18, 2010
Angel Herzberger surveyed the pile of boxes stacked in the hallway waiting to be moved into her son's second-floor room at Hudson Hall. “I don’t know how we’re going to fit all of this,” she said. “I think we’re going to end up taking some stuff home.”

Indeed, Bob Herzberger, a freshman planning to study business at the University of Missouri, and his roommate, Max Geppert, brought everything they thought they would need to be comfy. There was a futon, a mini-fridge, a microwave, an Xbox. Oh, and an area rug because “we’ve got to make it like home,” Angel Herzberger said.

Thousands of students are moving into residential halls on the MU campus this week, with most arriving this morning. The first day of classes is Monday.

Although numbers fluctuate — some students just show up without warning; others cancel at the last minute — about 7,000 students are living in campus housing this year, some 5,400 of whom are freshmen, said Frankie Minor, director of Residential Life.

An uptick in students wanting to live in residential halls this fall prompted Residential Life to offer $1,000 incentives to students to buyout their housing contracts this summer. Additionally, Minor said Mark Twain residential hall, originally expected to close at the end of the semester for renovations, will remain open until next year. MU also is renting Prunty Hall at Stephens College to meet the housing demand.

Although traffic along Rollins was slow this morning as safety officers waved parents in the right direction, move-in has gone relatively smoothly so far, Minor said. The cooler temperatures help.

“It’s going pretty well,” he said. “We couldn’t have asked for a better day. The rain held off yesterday until the afternoon, and today is overcast, which is actually much better for people’s patience and comfort.”

Volunteers from churches and campus organizations are lending a hand, too, offering to take loads of belongings up to rooms for students and families.

Down the female hallway on the second floor of Hudson, Jenna Fischer of St. Louis and Michelle Kingsbury of Kansas City were busy unpacking their belongings this morning. “Like, my house,” Fischer said when asked what she brought with her.

Herzberger and Geppert are from the Chicago area, where Herzberger’s closet is bigger than his new digs, his mom said. Still, Geppert seemed happy with the room as he and his dad, Greg, rearranged his loft bed to make room for a futon.

“It’s awesome,” he said. Dad agreed — he doesn’t remember his dorm room being nearly as nice.

Angel Herzberger, who sported a Mizzou Mom T-shirt, said she is thrilled her son is on campus, even though she is sad to see him leave.
"I’m scared to leave him here," she said. "He’ll always be my baby. We’re six hours away, it won’t be easy to just jump in a car and see him."

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Symposium participants debate ways to fight pollution in Lake of the Ozarks

By KAREN DILLON and JASON NOBLE

OSAGE BEACH, Mo. | To fix the sewer problems at the Lake of the Ozarks, one type of wastewater system will not fit all, experts said Wednesday at a water quality symposium.

Individual septic tanks, wastewater systems for apartment complexes or small groups of homes, central sewer systems and other technologies will be needed, one expert said.

"It is going to be a matrix," said Randall Miles, a University of Missouri associate professor who specializes in wastewater treatment science.

It also will be expensive, although no one knows just how much, officials acknowledged.

The two-day symposium, organized by the Missouri attorney general’s office, covered topics including the science of water testing and what other states are doing to fix their sewage problems.

Water quality has become a front-burner issue in recent months, both at the lake and 40 miles north in Jefferson City.

Gov. Jay Nixon’s administration was embroiled in a scandal concerning E. coli contamination at the lake last year that sparked a shake-up in the state’s Department of Natural Resources and a comprehensive review of water and sewage issues.

Nixon, a Democrat, opened the symposium with a pledge to translate its findings into public policy.

“The issue of water quality here at the lake is vital to our state,” Nixon said. “Our task is to preserve and enhance this tremendous resource for generations to come.”

This year, Attorney General Chris Koster has 30 criminal cases against businesses with sewers that have leaked into the lake.

That number “is unprecedented,” Koster told the more than 130 people attending Wednesday.
Koster’s goal is to present a white paper based on expert testimony and public comment later this year. The white paper could be used as the basis of legislation in the 2011 session.

There was talk about one solution in particular: a new, single entity responsible for coordinating and managing wastewater across the four counties in which the lake is located.

A unified, regional district could set standards and manage wastewater more efficiently than the current patchwork of county and municipal governments, said Donna Swall, executive director of the nonprofit Lake of the Ozarks Watershed Alliance.

Sen. Kurt Schaefer, a Columbia Republican and vice chairman of the Senate appropriations committee, also advocated creating a regional sewer district that would encompass all types of sewer systems and have taxing authority.

But Mayor Penny Lyons of Osage Beach said a regional district would be very expensive and logistically difficult because of the lake’s vast size and the rolling topography of the region.

Lyons added that it would be difficult to pass a sales tax to fund the project, because many residents don’t want it.

In his comments Nixon was careful not to endorse or reject any possible solutions but cited a large regional wastewater district as a possible subject for lawmakers.

“The size of the lake and the multiple counties involved present some issues that may require legislative help,” Nixon said. “That’s one possible outcome.”

One source of sewage is thought to be thousands of old septic tanks that have not been maintained or inspected.

Miles with MU said the state of Iowa had passed new legislation that made it mandatory to inspect septic tanks prior to the transfer of a deed of a home. If the tank is leaking, the owner must fix it before the house is sold.

The Iowa legislation caught several people’s interest. Koster wondered if it could be applied to the four lake counties.