MU workers’ premiums will increase
Official: ‘Timing is really terrible.’

By JAN ESE SILVEY

After two years of frozen salaries, University of Missouri employees can expect to see their take-home pay decrease next year.

The university’s medical insurance premiums are going up 13 percent starting in January, and employees will be on the hook for 27 percent of that increase. That amounts to an extra $40 a month for employees on family plans and about $14 extra for single employees.

“The timing is really terrible, and we certainly recognize that, and we certainly recognize the impact particularly on employees who have family coverage,” Betsy Rodriguez, vice president of human resources for the UM System, said this morning. “But unfortunately, we’re stuck in the same situation as all other employers. The costs are simply going up.”

Although some of the increase can be attributed to a normal rise in medical costs, employees who don’t take care of themselves are to blame for part of the premium increase. More employees are either needing health care or needing more expensive care, especially for chronic illnesses that could be prevented or at least better controlled with a healthy lifestyle, Rodriguez said. In a recent benefits survey, one-third of 7,000 faculty and staff members reported that they are failing when it comes to healthy living.

“There are diseases in which early detection and treatment can help to minimize the long-term, high-dollar costs,” Rodriguez said in a letter being sent to faculty and staff. “In the coming months, we will look at ways to promote wellness programs to reduce claim costs by encouraging healthy behaviors, preventative care for early detection of diseases and proper treatment for existing conditions through medication and compliance and healthier lifestyles.”

Rodriguez told the Tribune the system will be focusing on wellness education and providing more health screenings on campuses in the coming months.

Also accounting for some of the health care premium increases are new state and federal laws.

The new national health care law allows parents to insure adult children up to age 26 and expands the definition of a dependent child. Rodriguez said she’s not sure how many university families will take advantage of that change. Additionally, new state mandates require coverage for treatment of autism for children up to age 19.

The university maintains a self-funded plan, which means premiums are driven by the actual costs of claims, Rodriguez said in the letter to employees. The university has been able to use reserve funds to minimize increased costs but has “reached a point where a larger increase in premium is necessary to keep coverage levels the same and not cut benefits.”
That means employees won't pay more out-of-pocket in co-pays or see any decrease in coverage, Rodriguez said.

The health care increase is not related to a pending change in future employees' retirement plans. The system's Board of Curators is expected to meet Nov. 1 to discuss details of a potential defined contributions plan that would replace the defined benefits plan that current employees and retirees enjoy. UM spokeswoman Jennifer Hollingshead said the meeting would be conducted from remote locations over Telepresence. A time has not been set, but she expects the meeting to last most of the day.

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Expect tuition increase at Mizzou campuses
9/28/2010
6:50 am

COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) - Students at the four-campus University of Missouri system can expect a tuition increase in 2011 for the first time in three years.

The Columbia Missourian reported Monday that university system President Gary Forsee called an increase inevitable during a Board of Curators meeting last week.

State law limits tuition increases to the annual inflation rate.

But the state Department of Higher Education can waive that limitation at the curators' request.

Forsee called it premature to predict the size of the increases for 2011 until Gov. Jay Nixon submits a proposed state budget for the coming fiscal year.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Basketball, golf events kick off Celebrate Ability Week at MU

By Kelsey McQuade
September 27, 2010 | 8:21 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — In celebration of the 20th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, MU is hosting Celebrate Ability Week, which started Monday.

On Monday there was a Tiger Wheelchair Basketball open house and an adaptive golf demonstration. This gave students a chance to simulate adaptive golf and play basketball from a wheelchair.

Dany Baker, a consultant for adaptive golf and a golf instructor, led the demonstrations. A focus of the clinic was the SoloRider, which is a golf cart made for people with disabilities. Students were encouraged to take swings from the cart, where the seat was on an angle and they had to strap themselves in so only their toes touched the ground.

Baker said it's important for golf courses to provide carts that are accessible for people with disabilities.

"People can do activities out of their chair, but it's not the same if you don't have a cart," Baker said.

Baker became involved in this event because of his friend Jerry Hitzhusen, an associate professor in the department of parks, recreation and tourism at MU.

Hitzhusen was one of the founders of the wheelchair basketball team. He played basketball at MU and has played golf most of his life.

"I'm an advocate, period," Hitzhusen said. "At the university I worked hard on the Americans with Disabilities Act. That's why (people with disabilities) have seating at the football stadium now."
When more members of the basketball team arrived with their game wheelchairs, people were invited to sit in them and experience the game of basketball in a different light. The team offered guidance on how to operate the wheelchairs and engaged in pickup games with the participants.

Troy Balthazor, an ADA specialist and professor in the department of parks, recreation and tourism, is a chairman of the weeklong event. He said it took about a year to plan.

"The main thing is that people notice the word 'ability' in the title," he said. "Disability is the one minority segment of the population that anyone can enter at any time."

The rest of the week will include forums, seminars, movies, demonstrations and a reception.

*Missourian reporter Amrita Jayakumar contributed to this report.*
Lawyers ponder picketing case

By Tim Carpenter

Updated September 28, 2010 at 12:03am

LAWRENCE - Two law professors expressed optimism Monday night that the U.S. Supreme Court would lean on the pending funeral picketing case involving the fundamentalist Topeka-based Westboro Baptist Church to clarify First Amendment law.

And both indicated they expected an opinion leaving intact state regulations on funeral protests inspired by Pastor Fred W. Phelps Sr. and his family. In addition, their look into a crystal ball suggested a majority of justices were likely to conclude the Constitution remained a blanket protecting the right to individuals to speak out in public - despite the unpopular nature of the Phelps' approach.

Stephen McAllister, professor of law at The University of Kansas, and Christina Wells, professor of law at the University of Missouri, offered insights on the case to more than 300 people attending a forum at KU's Dole Institute of Politics.

The Supreme Court scheduled oral arguments next week for a case pushed into the spotlight after a Maryland jury awarded $10.9 million to the father of a U.S. Marine who died in Iraq. The Phelpses lost in district court when jurors concluded members' funeral picketing and commentary about Albert Snyder's late son, Lance Cpl. Matthew Snyder, was an invasion of privacy and inflicted intentional emotional distress.

McAllister said the justices could use Snyder v. Phelps as an opportunity to fine-tune "time, place and manner" limits imposed by more than 40 states on people engaging in the protest at a funeral. The court is unlikely to issue a sweeping strike against picketing boundaries, he said.

At the same time, Wells said, the high court could better define circumstances in which plaintiffs would be justified in bringing lawsuits on privacy and distress grounds.

Wells said television pundits Glenn Beck, Jon Stewart, Rush Limbaugh, Stephen Colbert and Bill O'Reilly should be closely following the case because it is their business to intentionally evoke outrage by challenging actions of others on national broadcasts.

"If I was a TV personality, I would be very worried about the outcome of this case," she said.
The Topeka church members contend God kills military troops in Afghanistan and Iraq as punishment for tolerance of homosexuality in the United States.

Phelps and members of the congregation picketed Snyder's funeral in 2006. They held up anti-gay signs and published an essay criticizing how the Marine's parents raised their son. Snyder sued in 2007. A judge cut the award to $5 million, but an appellate court reversed the lower court in 2008 by finding the Phelpses' speech protected by the First Amendment.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

MU recruits students with disabilities to work at election polls

By Tony Flesor
September 27, 2010 | 6:27 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — The Truman School's Institute for Public Policy is working to include more students with disabilities in the voting process.

The institute is working with the MU Office of Disability Services and the Boone County Clerk's Office to recruit students with disabilities to work at polling places in the November election, according to a news release from the MU News Bureau.

This initiative is funded by a $20,000 grant from the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, which focuses on students with disabilities.

The goal is to encourage everyone to vote and make sure that everyone is included, said Emily Johnson, coordinator for the Institute for Public Policy.

The institute's goal is to recruit 15 to 20 students for the November election. They had seven students with disabilities working at polling locations in the April and August elections.

A booth will be set up on Wednesday on Lowry Mall as a part of Celebrate Ability Week in order to recruit students.