Forsee answers questions at MU town hall

By Janese Silvey

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University of Missouri System President Gary Forsee fielded questions from MU faculty and staff about a possible change in retirement benefits, frozen salaries and tech transfer policies during his visit to campus Wednesday morning.

The town hall meeting fell two days after the UM Board of Curators met to delve into a benefits discussion, but Forsee stressed today’s meeting was routine and not just about that issue.

Still, it was clear that a possible switch from a defined benefits plan to a defined contributions plan for new hires is on the minds of a lot of employees.

Forsee several times had to clarify that any benefits change would only affect future employees and that the benefits guaranteed to faculty and staff today would remain intact. He reiterated why the discussion is happening — a volatile market in recent years makes it risky for the university to take on new liability — and warned that doing nothing will just prolong hard choices. If the plan remains intact for new hires, for instance, it could require employee to contribute more of their own salaries in order to keep the plan fully funded.

The benefits discussion is happening at the same time employees are seeing their health insurance costs increase. Health costs are expected to go up after the end of the year, prompting one MU staff member to question why the system is willing to freeze employees’ salaries but not their out-of-pocket expenses. The man also pointed to the fact costs of parking passes on campus have increased.

Forsee said he’s still trying to find a way to increase salaries next fiscal year, which starts July 1. Even though the university is facing a state funding cut, Forsee said keeping salaries frozen for a third year in a row isn’t acceptable. He also vowed to take the idea of keeping campus expenses down back to chancellors.

Budget woes will postpone any action on domestic partner benefits, though. Faculty Councils at MU and the St. Louis and Kansas City campuses have each petitioned curators to expand employee benefits to partners of gay and lesbian employees. Advocates have argued that doing so would be cost neutral, “but that’s not the case,” Forsee said.
After the meeting, Forsee told reporters he supports providing domestic partner benefits as part of an overall mission to promote diversity on campus.

One faculty member used the town hall forum to air his battle with the university system.

Galen Suppes, a chemical engineering professor, said Forsee’s economic development agenda isn’t going to work so long as the university refuses to return inventions back to researchers if it’s not going to commercialize them. Suppes and the university are tangled in a legal battle over research he sought federal patents for himself after the university’s Technology Transfer Office failed to pursue commercialization.

Forsee acknowledged there are snags in the tech transfer process and said he would take Suppes’ concerns to heart.

Suppes also used the public forum to highlight the fact that Forsee has eight vice presidents, even though Forsee countered he cut several vice president positions two years ago.

Still, Suppes said, “the president only has one.”
UM President Forsee’s town hall meeting raises concerns about diversity

By Josh Barone

November 3, 2010 | 6:21 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — A lack of diversity in the UM System Board of Curators could prevent the system from receiving grants, said MU’s director of development for foundation relations.

The concern arose during a town hall meeting with UM President Gary Forsee in Jesse Auditorium. Although he intended to discuss possible changes to employee benefits, Forsee said the meeting was more to engage with the attendees.

“Sometimes there is an agenda, an announcement to talk about, but that is not the case today,” Forsee told the audience.

After his introduction, he opened the floor for questions, but only a few in the room spoke up.

“Back row’s awfully quiet,” Forsee joked.

But then Elizabeth Cogswell, MU director of development for foundation relations, brought up the curators’ lack of diversity. The board, which serves as the UM System’s governing body, has nine members — eight men and one woman, Chairwoman Judith Haggard. All members are white.

Cogswell’s work involves interacting with private foundations, such as the Ford Foundation, that provide the university with money for research. The school also receives grants from federal organizations, such as the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health.

Certain types of grant proposals require information about an institution related to diversity, MU Chief Diversity Officer Roger Worthington said in an interview.
Worthington added the caveat that diversity is just one of many factors determining whether a university should receive grants, which amount “to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars every year.”

But that doesn’t diminish the importance of diversity, he said.

“Diversity as a whole is an issue when it comes to securing grants for research and other activities for the institution,” Worthington said. “Funding organizations and even accrediting bodies require that we meet certain standards in order to compete for funding and receive accreditation.”

The work produced through grant funding contributes to Missouri’s overall economic growth, he said.

During the meeting, Forsee outlined university objectives based on a challenge from Gov. Jay Nixon, one of which was for UM to foster state economic development. That mission could be jeopardized if the university misses opportunities for receiving grants, Worthington said.

“If it’s difficult to attain those funds because of a lack of diversity, that has a negative impact on our ability to fulfill that economic development objective of the university,” he said.

As a possible solution, Cogswell suggested adding additional members to the board to increase diversity, but state law mandates that the board may only consist of one member for each congressional district. Additionally, it must balance opinions from the two major political parties, a requirement that Worthington said complicates the issue.

The terms for three of the board’s members will expire January 2011, opening a new opportunity for diversity. The question of who would fill those places is out of the UM System’s hands, though, as the governor is responsible for appointing new curators.

The UM System’s power doesn’t extend beyond offering suggestions and identifying qualities of an ideal candidate, Forsee said, but he assured the audience he would “personally be delivering this message to the governor within the next two weeks.”

“The board ought to reflect the diversity of our state and the diversity of our institution,” Forsee said. “The governor fully understands that and will be highly interested. But that ultimately is his responsibility.”
More low-producing MU degrees to be eliminated, merged

By Walker Moskop
November 3, 2010 | 8:00 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — MU will reduce its academic inventory by at least seven more low-producing degrees.

In a letter sent to the Missouri Department of Higher Education Monday, Chancellor Brady Deaton said a minimum of seven programs will be added to five that are already targeted for elimination. The seven degree programs were not identified in the letter.

The programs will be discontinued, merged with other existing degree programs, or combined into new degree programs, he said.

In an initial report sent to the state last week, Deaton originally identified 34 low-producing programs up for reconfiguration in addition to the five programs slated for removal. The reconfigured programs could be combined with other programs or realigned to preserve their content.

In Monday’s updated report, 28 programs remained on the list for potential change.

MU spokesman Christian Basi said Wednesday the university has identified several possible combinations of those 28 programs that would result in seven fewer degrees.

But he emphasized that the list was preliminary and more discussion would occur before final decisions were made.

“The process is still evolving and has a long way to go,” Basi said.

Deaton said the 28 programs merit more intensive review. They have “subject matter and other critical characteristics of importance” that need to be sustained, he said.
Many of them have historically had small numbers of faculty and students and may have lost "critical mass" due to the hiring freeze implemented two years ago, he said.

In an interview Monday, MU Provost Brian Foster said the hiring freeze allowed the university to achieve substantial savings. The goal of program reconfiguration wasn't to produce further savings through cuts, he said, but to find ways to bolster smaller departments.

In his letter Monday, Deaton said some degrees may be combined with programs outside of the "low-producing" list. "These mergers will be based on programs with complementary subject matter, methods, or other commonalities," he said.

Deaton said MU expects reconfigurations to help expand enrollment.

He also said several programs originally listed as low-producing are no longer part of the discussion. New data shows they produce enough graduates to surpass the state's criteria for the low-producing threshold.

The following programs have been removed from the original list of programs to be reconfigured:

- Soil, environmental, and atmospheric Science — doctoral degree
- Architectural studies — master's degree
- Microbiology — master's degree
- Physiology — master's degree
- Rural sociology — master's and doctoral degrees

Fourteen master's degrees won't be touched because they're part of high producing doctoral programs, Deaton said. Continuing them requires no extra cost.

He said a progress report will be provided to the state by Dec. 31.
MedZou enters contest to win diagnostic services

By Ayla Kremen
November 3, 2010 | 6:05 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — Throughout the month of November, MedZou is reaching out to the community for votes.

The clinic, which works solely with uninsured patients, has been entered in the Pepsi Refresh Project this month to win $50,000 worth of diagnostic services.

John Morrison, the clinic’s finance director, said the clinic hopes to use the money to buy several specific procedures for current patients as well as some more commonly needed procedures like basic X-rays.

There are several ways to vote in the contest. You can either go to the Pepsi Refresh Project website and vote online, or you can text "103787" to "73774".

Each user can vote once a day for 10 different ideas, and voting is open until Nov. 30.

Winners will be announced Dec. 1.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Medical diagnostics often not available to uninsured

MU Mention on Pg. 2

By Ayla Kremen
November 3, 2010 | 4:07 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — For Debra Howenstine, the lack of diagnostic care for uninsured patients is nothing new.

"I could tell you story after story about people who haven't been able to get health care," said Howenstine, medical director of the Columbia/Boone County Department of Public Health and Human Services.

One of her patients had a large pelvic mass that was continuing to grow. The patient needed to get an ultrasound to determine whether the growth was benign or malignant but couldn't afford the $300 procedure.

For many of the estimated 18,000 residents of Boone County without health insurance, crucial diagnostic screenings and preventative care are out of reach.

An X-ray can cost up to hundreds of dollars and a colonoscopy runs at about $3,000 for someone without insurance compared to $25 or $50 for those with insurance.

The cost of such procedures, Howenstine said, often makes diagnostic tests "beyond the realm of possibility" for uninsured patients. "We constantly have patients that need diagnostic studies," she said.

Howenstine said there is a system in place to provide diagnostic studies for the uninsured, but cost remains a barrier.

Through the system, uninsured patients can get a discounted rate on diagnostic procedures. However, these discounts still do not offset the cost.
Even with discount prices, Howenstine said these procedures are "still very often out of reach of patients."

And in many cases diagnostic services and necessary follow-up treatment are crucial to saving lives, said Kim Bailey, senior health policy analyst for FamiliesUSA, a nonprofit health care advocacy organization.

According to a study by the organization, there were an estimated 23,400 deaths of 25- to 64-year-olds because of a lack of health care coverage in 2009 alone. Since 1995 the number of Americans that have died prematurely because of they lack medical insurance coverage totals more than 294,000.

In Missouri the organization estimates that around 5,000 people have died because of a lack of coverage since 1995.

"What really happens is that people who don't have health insurance don't get care at the time that they really need it," Bailey said.

The uninsured have a 25 percent higher risk of premature death than those who have health insurance, Bailey said.

**Clinics like MedZou and the Family Health Center are able to provide free or low cost outpatient services for uninsured patients but are unable to provide diagnostic services such as colonoscopies, cardiac stress tests or imaging studies, which are often critical in devising a strategic treatment plan.**

**John Morrison, the financial director for MedZou, said there is a tremendous need for diagnostic services for MedZou patients.**

A need so critical that the clinic entered a contest through the Pepsi Refresh Project to win a $50,000 grant to spend solely on diagnostic tests.

The group with the most online votes wins the grant. Voting for the contest began Monday and ends on Nov. 30. To vote, go [Pepsi Refresh Project](http://www.pepsi.com/refresh) and search for MedZou.

"We have patients at MedZou that we're pretty sure have a chronic condition or disease that we can't afford the diagnostic test for," he said. "Through this grant we're going to use all $50,000 to buy as many diagnostic services as we possibly can to treat these high risk
patients because we don’t know, but we suspect that they have something pretty wrong with them.”

Morrison also said diagnostic services are key to treating these at-risk patients.

He said: “The problem with these types of illnesses is that they’re really insidious. You don’t really know you have it until you get to the point where you have to go to the ER. When you start having problems, it’s usually too late.”

When patients can’t afford diagnostics, we “try to put our heads together and see what we can do,” said Alicia Ludden, community outreach director for the clinic.

Gloria Crull, executive director of the Family Health Center, said that working with underserved patients puts an extra strain on doctors, who oftentimes have to devise alternative methods of treating these patients.

“With low income patients, you’re dealing with a whole different ball game,” she said. "You have to be pretty inventive as a physician."

For example, Howenstine said that once she was treating a patient with chronic diabetes who could not afford a blood sugar meter. So in order to treat the patient, Howenstine had to come up with a different, nontraditional way to help the patient manage her diabetes.

“When you’re working with uninsured patients, there’s not just one system that works,” she said. "As a provider, you end up developing systems to manage care that you wouldn’t use otherwise.”

MedZou was initially created in 2008 to serve uninsured patients who were on the waiting list to be seen at the Family Health Center. At that time the waiting list for uninsured patients was six months, Howenstine said.

The MedZou clinic serves the most underserved of the uninsured in Columbia — most of MedZou’s patients have been referred by the federally qualified Family Health Center because they cannot afford to pay the minimum $20 co-pay required for a visit.

The clinic at 800 N. Providence Road in the Community Resource Center, which is open only from 5 to 9 p.m. Thursdays, has seen more than 400 individual patients since 2008.
Under federal health-care reform, which will be fully implemented in 2014, an estimated 32 million Americans will be able to purchase health insurance. Even after the new legislation is enacted, there will still be an estimated 23 million Americans without health insurance.

Bailey said that despite this, the new act is "a huge step forward and a vitally important step forward."

One of the biggest improvements, she said, is that newly insured people will have coverage and won't have to pay for co-pays for preventative screenings, which will allow more people access to care.

"For a family that's on a fixed income, even paying a $10 co-pay can be a huge barrier," she said.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Work continues on the MU Power Plant chimneys

By Brad Racino
November 3, 2010 1:41 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA -- Workers ascended the 320-foot chimney at the MU Power Plant this week to continue repairs to the crumbling structure.

"It's a long-term project," said MU Campus Facilities spokeswoman Karlan Seville. "The smokestacks will have a protective coating put over the top of them to keep any concrete from scalding or cracking off or falling."

The $3.8 million project, scheduled for completion in late 2011, has been under way since March, closing portions of Stewart Road since October.

The two-year project also entails replacing and converting a new biomass boiler, which will mainly use waste wood chips and other renewable energy sources.
Missouri, Kansas feel GOP’s high tide

By DAVE HELLING and STEVE KRASKE

MU MENTION PAGE 2

Republicans and Democrats in Kansas and Missouri saw red almost everywhere they looked Wednesday.

The exact shade differed — soft pink in the areas just outside of Kansas City and St. Louis; cherry red in mid-sized communities; a deep crimson in rural areas near the centers of both states.

But the outcome was the same: An off-year “wave” election has put government firmly in the grasp of conservative Republicans, while leaving most Democrats grasping at straws.

“They’re bankrupt,” said Ronnie Metsker, Johnson County GOP chairman, referring to Democrats in Kansas.

Democrats — and even some Republicans — wouldn’t go quite that far. They blamed unemployment and the economy, which they said pushed independents into the Republican column, while leaving their own base discouraged and unmotivated.

While they’re also hurting in Missouri, Democrats aren’t completely out of the picture. They still control the governor’s office, three of nine U.S. House seats and a U.S. Senate seat; excellent places, they contend, to stage a comeback.

But Democrats in both states clearly have a long way to go to recover.

Republicans, for now, are in the driver’s seat.

Missouri

Consider these raw numbers: Republicans now hold six of nine congressional seats, 26 of 34 state Senate seats, and more members in the state House — 106 — than the party has ever held before.
On Election Day, Republican Roy Blunt blew away the notion that Senate races in Missouri tend to be nail-biters. His nearly 14 point triumph over Democrat Robin Carnahan was the largest win in an open-seat race since Republican John Ashcroft whipped Democrat Alan Wheat in 1994 by 60-36 percent.

The size of Blunt's victory tarnished the once-proud image of the Carnahans, who rank as the state's best-known Democratic family. It marked the family's second consecutive defeat in a Senate race, with Jean Carnahan losing the first in 2002.

In St. Louis, Democratic incumbent U.S. Rep. Russ Carnahan barely squeaked by Republican Ed Martin 49-47 percent in the 3rd Congressional District, which ranks as one of the most Democratic in the state. Barack Obama crushed John McCain in the 3rd District by 60-39 percent in 2008.

"There may be Carnahan fatigue in Missouri," concluded Democratic consultant Steve Glorioso. "Mel (Carnahan) was a great governor, but that legacy is losing its staying power."

Most political experts said Missouri clearly was trending red. And, they said, the changing political landscape is a natural byproduct of the Show Me State turning more conservative along with a host of Southern states that, like Missouri, were once reliably Democratic.

But political observers noted that it would be a mistake to conclude that any red tones are necessarily permanent. The party won the governor's office with Jay Nixon two years ago in a 19-point landslide over Republican Kenny Hulshof.

Also, four years ago Democrat Claire McCaskill defeated Jim Talent for a Senate seat. Democrats still hold the attorney general's office and state treasurer while Robin Carnahan remains secretary of state.

"It would be premature to say Missouri is irretrievably red," said GOP consultant John Hlaneck.

Both 2006 and 2008 were strong Democratic years. On Tuesday, the pendulum swung back.

"For most statewide contests in more normal years, Democrats still have to believe they can field competitive candidates," said University of Missouri political scientist Peverill Squire. "The trend clearly does seem to be going in the Republicans' favor."

Democrats were quick to point out that as bleak as things appear for them now, they can shift again quickly. An improving economy, with President Barack Obama at the helm, may offer the best hope of brighter prospects. They said Nixon has weathered the economic storm with strong approval numbers in polls and has demonstrated that Democrats can still play well in rural Missouri.

But McCaskill's prospects may be a different story. She faces a 2012 re-election fight, carrying a reputation as an Obama ally. Nearly six in 10 voters in Missouri on Tuesday said they disapproved of the president's job performance.
"I think McCaskill probably has been nervous for a long time," Squire said.

Missouri Democratic Party Chairman Craig Hosmer described election night as "brutal" and "as bad as it could get." He blamed a historical trend of Democrats typically underperforming in midterm elections. Congressional Democrats, he said, moved too slowly after Obama took office to begin to establish an agenda.

Hosmer said Republicans didn't poke holes so much in Democratic ideas. Instead, the GOP tethered Democrats to one personality — House Speaker Nancy Pelosi — and rode Pelosi's image as liberal and elitist.

Republicans, Hosmer said, have to deliver quickly. "With power comes responsibility," he noted.

There's another truism in politics that gives Democrats hope for the 2012 elections.

"Two years is forever in the political world," said Jackson County Democratic Chairman Steve Bough. "Two years ago, I was giddy, dancing around, planning parties in D.C. Now, here I am with Band-Aids all over my butt."
GOP makes big move in Missouri

SPRINGFIELD, Mo. • The morning after a Senate victory that exceeded even his expectations, Republican Roy Blunt was focused on one number that helped turn Missouri’s electoral map red.

The senator-elect and his family and friends were gathered for a victory breakfast after Blunt defeated Democrat Robin Carnahan by a surprising 14 percentage points. While unexpected — the Blunt campaign was expecting to win by six to eight points — it wasn’t the margin of victory that caught the seven-term congressman’s attention. It was where he won, which was nearly everywhere.

“We won 112 of 114 counties,” he said, as he shook hands with staff members who put in 20 months of work.

A look at the map of the Show-Me State tells the story. Except for the tiny patches of blue in St. Louis County, and the cities of St. Louis and Kansas City, the rest of the state was awash in red.

Even in Phelps County — home base for the Carnahan political dynasty — Blunt won with more than 60 percent of the vote.

And in most of the counties, the race wasn’t even close, a result that propelled not just Blunt, but other Republicans to the sort of sweep that in many ways was historic:

• Republican Tom Schweich, a candidate for the first time, defeated incumbent Susan Montee in the race for state auditor.

• Republican Vicky Hartzler defeated 17-term congressional incumbent Ike Skelton, one of the most powerful national Democrats to lose a race in a year in which the GOP took over control of the House of Representatives.

• Republicans established a record majority in the Missouri House, increasing their control to 106 seats. To get to that number, the GOP — under the leadership of incoming speaker of the House Steve Tilley of Perryville — knocked off 10 Democratic incumbents.
Two state Senate Democratic incumbents from rural districts — Wes Shoemeyer and Frank Barnitz — lost in races that were targeted by Republicans early on.

Billy Long, who will replace Blunt as the congressman from the 7th District, put it simply: "It's a good night to be a Republican."

So how did it happen?

Some Republicans pointed to the national wave of voter resentment directed at President Barack Obama. Even in the auditor's race and local legislative contests, candidates tried to tie their Democrat opponents to the president.

Tilley, selected Wednesday as the new House speaker, said Republican enthusiasm trickled down from the top, with even retiring U.S. Sen. Christopher "Kit" Bond — whom Blunt will replace — busy on the stump.

"I had Kit Bond's help, all the congressional delegation, I had Lieutenant Governor Kinder going all over the state for me," Tilley said. "So I think that's the important thing — teamwork."

Another factor might be that some of the Republicans rode the coattails of Blunt.

Early in the morning of Election Day, Blunt and his campaign staff looked at the numbers being flashed on the big screen in their election "war room," and it was clear that this was not going to be a normal election.

Gathered from data culled from some 1,000 volunteers at precincts across the state, the Blunt strategy targeted Republican voters in key districts across the state, including the 4th congressional district, where Hartzler maintained a lead all night against Skelton.

In the last days of a campaign in which the Blunt camp was confident of victory, the top-ticket Republican spent time on the road with both Hartzler and Schweich, urging GOP voters to put all three into office.

The results were even better than they expected. Republicans made inroads in places that have long been considered solid Democratic territory.

In the state Senate, Ladue Republican John Lamping, an investment adviser, defeated Democratic St. Louis County Councilwoman Barbara Fraser despite never having run for office. The 24th District, which stretches from Maplewood to Creve Coeur, is currently represented by term-limited state Sen. Joan Bray, a liberal Democrat.

In the 3rd Congressional district — which runs from Ste. Genevieve to St. Louis — incumbent Democratic U.S. Rep. Russ Carnahan, Robin's brother, narrowly avoided an upset in a seat held for years by former presidential aspirant Richard Gephardt.
Jefferson County's local races offered further examples of a GOP uprising. Republicans swept the Jefferson County Council races, picking up six of the seven seats. The county has been largely a Democratic stronghold since at least the 1950s.

Ken Waller, a former county treasurer and Tea Party movement supporter, narrowly won the county executive seat over Randy Holman, a Democrat who has been the county's assessor since 1994.

Still, it's too soon to write an obituary for the Democratic Party in Missouri. Even with Tuesday's losses, Democrats will control four of the six statewide offices, including attorney general and governor. And Democratic St. Louis County Executive Charlie A. Dooley defeated a strong bid by Republican lawyer Bill Corrigan by a healthy margin.

Statewide, less obvious factors may have also played a role in the state GOP's dominance, said Marvin Overby, professor of political science at the University of Missouri-Columbia.

No Democrat challenged freshman U.S. Rep. Blaine Luetkemeyer, R-St. Elizabeth, for his mid-Missouri seat, which, Overby said, may have brought down turnout in Columbia, the largest Democratic voting bloc between Kansas City and St. Louis.

Had Robin Carnahan run a stronger campaign, Overby said, it might have coaxed a few more Democrats to the polls, improving the party's chances in other races, if only slightly.

"Carnahan was not particularly competitive as the race moved on," Overby said. "If you would have had a different cast of characters taking center stage, I think you would have seen much stronger Democratic support."

Prior to Carnahan's concession speech Tuesday night, St. Louis Board of Aldermen President Lewis Reed, a Democrat, addressed the candidate's supporters. He offered a frank assessment of the challenges facing the party.

"It's very hard to change the direction of the nation," Reed said. "That's what we were up against."
WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The Republican tide in the U.S. mid-term elections increased the pressure to cut government spending at the same time it swept into office candidates from ethanol-loving regions.

Ethanol incentives worth $6 billion expire on December 31. Proponents aim for a renewal of the tax breaks during the post-election session of Congress later this month.

Following are scenarios of congressional action on biofuels supports including ethanol:

LAME DUCK SESSION IS FIRST, BEST HOPE

Ethanol backers say the surest path to growth in their recession-battered industry is congressional renewal this year of incentives worth $6 billion a year. "It remains an uphill battle," said Bob Dinneen, head of Renewable Fuels Association, a trade group.

First goal is a one-year extension of ethanol's excise tax credit and a tariff on imported ethanol, possibly at lower rates. There are suggestions to cut the tax credit, now 45 cents a gallon, by one-fourth or even by one-half.

A short-term extension would be the springboard to reform of ethanol supports in 2011. Reforms could convert excise tax credit into a producer credit, double the market for corn-based ethanol, and encourage retailers to install "blender" pumps and automakers to build millions of cars and trucks that can burn fuel that is up to 85 percent ethanol.

At issue are the ethanol credit, the import tariff of 54 cents a gallon and small-producer credit of 10 cents a gallon. An extension could rise on an omnibus tax or spending bill.

"What happens this year is very important," said Pat Westhoff at a University of Missouri think tank because it will color action in 2011 and 2012, potentially critical years.

Ethanol has many backers but also a large circle of critics -- livestock producers, foodmakers, environmentalists and deficit hawks.

ODDS WORSEN IN 2011, INDUSTRY FEARS LOSS IN SALES
MU's Suicide Prevention Week follows incidents at Rutgers, Texas

By Matthew Dixon
November 3, 2010 | 6:03 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — MU is staging its first Suicide Prevention Week to call attention to an issue that may not be widespread on campus but still affects college students here and nationwide.

The event, which will run Nov. 6-12, follows media attention on a few high-profile cases on college campuses, including incidents at the University of Texas and at Rutgers University.

Suicide is often referred to as the second leading cause of death among all college students in the nation, according to the Suicide Prevention Resource Center in Newton, Mass. A 2009 study by the MU Wellness Resource Center found that 15.6 percent of students at MU thought about suicide during the past year.

Prevention week has been partially organized by Kelly Sheline, the suicide prevention graduate assistant at the wellness center. She said MU has provided some services but nothing reaching the entire student body.

“There have been kind of a few awareness events but really none that generated any press or attention and certainly not anything that a lot of students attended,” Sheline said. “There was never a better time to make suicide prevention a part of the conversation at MU.”

The week has five separate events, which are listed in detail on the MU student involvement website.

“I’d say that the goal of the whole week is to raise awareness about the problem of college suicide since most people are not aware that it is such a huge issue, and also to encourage those who may be suffering from mental health issues or suicidal thoughts to really seek help,” Sheline said.