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UM leaders happy with session's outcome

University's budget picture improves.

By **JANESE SILVEY**

Although the **University of Missouri System** is taking a budget hit this coming fiscal year, administrators are, in general, pleased with the way things turned out over the legislative session.

The system was expecting a 7 percent cut to higher education, the reduction Gov. Jay Nixon proposed in the budget he unveiled in January.

Lawmakers, though, passed a budget that cut funding to colleges and universities by 5.45 percent.

In a statement, system interim President Steve Owens expressed thanks to legislators for minimizing that reduction.

"We understand the difficult budget choices faced by the legislature and appreciate those members who recognize that investing in public higher education is a benefit to us all," he said. "The additional \$12 million allocated to the state's 13 four-year institutions enables the University of Missouri to increase financial aid for its students and lower the average net cost of attendance for Missouri families."

Additional financial aid comes at a good time: The UM Board of Curators increased tuition and fees at MU by an average of 5.8 percent this coming school year.

Although the reduction was less than expected, Owens warned it "still leaves the university with a serious budget gap, which will necessitate a careful examination of how we maintain a quality educational experience at our four campuses."

Lawmakers did not move forward a bond plan that would have helped fund capital improvements on college campuses. The bill, proposed by Rep. Chris Kelly, D-Columbia, sought to ask voters for an \$800 million bond issue for higher education construction projects, as well as upgrades to state parks and offices.

With more than \$1 billion in delayed renovation and repair work on the system's four campuses, administrators still hope the state will come up with a stable funding stream for those types of projects, said system spokeswoman Jennifer Hollingshead.

"Such an initiative would permit our public universities to address long-standing facility needs that have been neglected for many years," she said. "It would support our ability to provide students with quality education programs and modern facilities and equipment needed to be competitive in the workplace while also creating jobs and stimulating economic activity throughout the state."

Kelly had said he didn't expect the bond issue to pass this year but hoped the bill helped educate lawmakers on the need for the bond issue in hopes of seeing it on a statewide ballot in 2012.

Legislators this session also fixed a Board of Curators makeup dilemma that cropped up after Missouri lost a congressional district after the 2010 census. The Missouri Constitution requires the board to have nine members, but a state law says the board can have no more than one member from each congressional district, which won't work when the state drops to eight congressional districts in 2013.

Under the new law, which Nixon signed last week, curators must represent each congressional district, but no more than two from a single district.

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Lawmakers stay relevant

Area legislators play large roles.

By **RUDI KELLER**

JEFFERSON CITY — Last Monday, state Rep. Chris Kelly called a proposal to eliminate a tax credit used by lower-income senior residents “the gag factor.”

But on Friday, after a week of negotiation in which the Columbia Democrat had an important role, Kelly was ready to swallow the proposal, which was included in a major economic development bill. “I hated it,” he said, but he voted for the measure when it was on the House floor in the final hour of this year’s session.

Kelly was one of 25 Democrats to support the bill, while 15 Republicans bucked their leadership to oppose it.

That vote summed up Kelly’s session. He put himself in the center of action on several major issues — as part of the conference committees that wrote the final version of the budget and the economic development bill — and passed more bills than many Republican lawmakers. Despite being in one of the smallest Democratic House contingents in history, Kelly is one of three Democrats to lead a House committee.

Columbia is used to having lawmakers who thrust themselves into the struggles on big issues. Republican Sen. Kurt Schaefer is chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee. Schaefer’s role, combined with Kelly’s role in House spending, has given Columbia more influence on the budget than at any time since 1992. At that time, Kelly chaired the House Budget Committee and then-Sen. Roger Wilson was chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee.

One tangible result this year is that Schaefer was able to soften Gov. Jay Nixon’s cuts to higher education, giving the University of Missouri \$5.4 million more than Nixon’s budget proposed.

And although Columbia’s two other lawmakers, Reps. Mary Still and Stephen Webber, did not pass any bills, both played roles that challenged majority Republicans on policies they see as hurting the poor and middle class.

“A lot of times we — Mary Still and myself — tried to be a voice for Missourians that aren’t being represented,” Webber said. “The folks on minimum wage can’t afford a lobbyist, and we try to be a voice for them.”

Still believes she had a good year because the House debated the issue of high-cost payday loans, an issue she has championed since taking office in 2009. Her constant criticism of the industry became

impossible to ignore, and industry supporters sought to make minor changes without imposing any significant regulatory burdens on the lenders.

Evidence that Still's effort was having an effect came in February, when House Speaker Steve Tilley, R-Perryville, accused Still of being the roadblock to moderate changes. "Mary is not the easiest person to work with on either side of the aisle," Tilley said to the St. Louis Post-Dispatch editorial board. "She's had no luck getting anything achieved."

That was an unusual thing to say about a member of the minority party in the House. The House passed a bill on payday lending without debating the changes Still wanted to make. The bill was blocked in a Senate committee.

Still took the rare step of testifying against the bill before the Senate committee. "I have a platform, and I think I have used it," Still said.

When it comes to local issues, communication within the delegation helps everyone stay abreast of items sought by area institutions, Schaefer said. "We meet frequently at the beginning of the session to talk about priorities for the University of Missouri, Boone County and the city."

Schaefer said he talked most with Kelly because of their joint work on the budget. Kelly has made his influence felt partly because of his friendship with Tilley, cultivated over the past two years while Tilley was majority leader. Part of it is because he knows the legislative history and has detailed technical knowledge of state government, Schaefer said.

"Partisan politics in that aspect are irrelevant," Schaefer said. "It is the relevance in the process that is important, and Chris Kelly has probably made himself the most relevant Democrat in the House."

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Jobs await many University of Missouri graduates

By **JANESE SILVEY**

Every year about this time, news reports come out about the thousands of new college graduates who are leaving school with lots of debt but no job.

This isn't one of those stories.

Plenty of University of Missouri graduates found jobs before graduating this weekend, and some landed pretty sweet gigs.

Take Justin Myers, who picked up bachelor's degrees in both journalism and electrical and computer engineering. He's heading to Arlington, Va., to become a Web developer for PBS' "NewsHour."

"Mainly, I'll be developing Web and mobile news applications," he said. Through various applications, the goal is to "help viewers and readers explore what all is going on beyond the story, beyond the written piece."

That's not to say Myers didn't face a post-graduation dilemma. He also got accepted to graduate school at Columbia University in New York. Deciding between the two offers was nerve-racking, he said, but ultimately he decided to take the job.

"It's the kind of work I was looking for," Myers said. Plus, his girlfriend works nearby in Washington, D.C. "You can't get better than that."

Fellow journalism major Chris Spurlock landed a job at the Huffington Post in New York, where he'll serve as an infographic design editor.

Spurlock snagged the job after creating a visual résumé that became an Internet hit. It first appeared on the J-School Buzz website, a project out of the Missouri School of Journalism, then was picked up by the Huffington Post's higher education blog and circulated online from there.

While the résumé wasn't 100 percent original, Spurlock acknowledged, it was unique enough to grab the attention of employers, including a traffic trends editor from the Huffington Post.

Having a job lined up in mid-March took a huge weight off his shoulders.

"It's been an absolute blessing for me to realize I'm graduating from a great journalism school with a job lined up — which is what I planned on going into journalism school but quickly realized that may not be a reality in this economy," he said. "It's tough to look around and see really talented students, and you want them to be as lucky as you are. I wish everyone was in the same situation as me."

Spurlock joked that someday he'll call his autobiography "I got lucky at the right time."

Harrison Smith also is counting his blessings. He starts work today as a respiratory therapist at University Hospital and Women's and Children's Hospital. "I'm definitely very blessed to have a job lined up," said Smith, who graduated from the School of Health Professions on Saturday.

As a student technician, he worked alongside respiratory therapists and is excited to join the team. "They're so smart and nice and willing to share their knowledge," he said of his new co-workers. "I really want to learn as much as I can."

Quite a few recent School of Health Professions graduates also have respiratory therapy jobs, including several who are heading to Children's Mercy in Kansas City, said spokeswoman Cheri Ghan.

Manasa Vedula doesn't have a job yet, but she has guts. She's moving to New York in hopes of becoming an actress. Vedula — who earned a bachelor's degree but focused on theater during college, too — plans to find an evening shift somewhere to keep her daytimes free for auditions.

"It's not exactly a career path that assures something will happen immediately, but I guess my excitement is overpowering the nervousness," she said. "Of course, I'm nervous moving to a city where I don't have very many friends. I'm going from having a support group to moving somewhere I don't have quite as many personal connections. That's the most nerve-racking."

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Columbia Business Times

CBT News Review

MU mention page 2

By CBT Staff

Columbia city officials and Missouri Department of Transportation representatives will respond to public questions and comments about plans to modify Stadium Boulevard and several intersecting streets at a hearing 4 to 6:30 p.m. May 24 at the Activity and Recreation Center, 1701 W. Ash St. During the next three years, MoDOT plans to widen Stadium Boulevard to six lanes separated by a median, change the intersection of Stadium Boulevard and I-70 into a diverging diamond interchange, widen and add bicycle lanes to Fairview Road and add traffic lights at the intersections of Bernadette Drive and Hutchens Drive and Bernadette Drive and Knipp Street.

The Missouri Department of Transportation has presented a new, five-year construction program to the Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission that will cut its average \$1.2 billion yearly budget in half. To cope with this funding challenge, MoDOT is cutting internal costs and directing all available resources to taking care of existing roads and bridges. The commission will review public comments and the final transportation program before considering it for approval July 13. *(See column on Page 9).*

Columbia ranks 23rd among small-sized cities in Newgeography.com's survey of Best Cities for Job Growth 2011. Rankings are based on recent and long-term job growth all of the metropolitan statistical areas for which the Bureau of Labor Statistics reports monthly employment data. Killeen-Temple-Fort Hood, Texas, ranks No. 1 on the list of 243 cities.

The City Council on May 2 approved a continued halt in design work on the proposed Short Street parking garage. Council members are concerned about spending money on the garage design without assurance that a hotel would be built near the site by Regency Hotel redeveloper Dave Parmley, who is pursuing a DoubleTree hotel franchise. Assistant City Manager Tony St. Romaine said it's likely that DoubleTree will be the franchise and that Parmley should know before the end of the month.

The Council authorized an \$80.5 million water and light bond for water and electric system improvements. Wells Fargo won the bid with the lowest average real interest rate of about 4.38 percent, Finance Director John Blattel said. The city has 30 years to pay off the bond, and approximately \$49.5 million will be used to purchase the outstanding shares of the Columbia Energy Center, which was approved by voters on April 5.

Increases in student enrollments and decreases in state and federal funding are creating a gap that the Columbia School Board addressed at its May 9 meeting. In his presentation about the future of the school district's budget, Superintendent Chris Belcher suggested that the board attempt to develop additional revenue sources such as the property tax rather than reorganize existing programs to fit the district's current budget. The district is growing at a rate of about 1.5 to 2 percent each year, and the state has cut or withheld \$5.6 million from the district's budget in the past two years.

Design Metals was fined \$7,000 by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration following the death of one of its employees who fell through the roof of the IBM Service Center building on LeMone Industrial Boulevard last May. OSHA manager Barbara Theriot told the Columbia Tribune that the subcontractor was cited for not ensuring workers weren't having trouble with their safety harnesses during construction work.

Gov. Jay Nixon withdrew Craig Van Matre's nomination to the University of Missouri Board of Curators. A state senator blocked the nomination, and Nixon could now appoint the Columbia attorney to the open seat after the General Assembly adjourns. Van Matre told the Tribune he had not been told whether Nixon would do so.

The May 9 issue of Forbes features a profile on Stan Kroenke. The magazine said the Columbia resident and owner of THF Realty "may very well be the biggest sports mogul in the world. Stan who? Kroenke, a 63-year-old mustached billionaire (worth \$2.6 billion) is as obsessed with sports as he is with staying out of the headlines and ducking reporters." The magazine reports that Kroenke's latest purchase is a controlling stake in England's legendary Arsenal soccer team.

The North Village Arts District plans to hold a farmers market each Sunday beginning in late June, reports the Missourian. The market will feature works from area artists in addition to locally grown fruits and vegetables. Pending City Council approval, the market will be located in the parking lot of the city-owned Wabash Station on 10th Street and will run through November.

Columbia Regional Airport has a brief survey that will help it plan for future additional air service in mid-Missouri. The online survey is available until May 27 at www.surveymonkey.com/s/QHCG9FN.

Ten of the state's public universities announced they have initiated an eight-week feasibility study to determine the projected benefits of participating in a statewide strategic procurement shared services program led by the University of Missouri System. The program would leverage the contracts the UM System already has in place to other institutions that result in supply and processing cost efficiencies that could ultimately result in significant cost savings.

The Missouri Catholic Conference has met with representatives of the life science industry and lawmakers to develop an alternative way for the General Assembly to move forward with the funding of life science research projects while ensuring that any such funding respects the interests of pro-life citizens of Missouri. The conference's proposed addition to the Missouri Science and Innovation Reinvestment Act would require the Missouri Technology Corporation to annually report to the Missouri General Assembly whether any funds distributed by the MTC are funding embryonic stem cell research or somatic cell nuclear transfer (human cloning).