Nixon considers asking 5 universities for loans

BY VIRGINIA YOUNG vyoung@post-dispatch.com | Posted: Friday, December 16, 2011 12:10 am

JEFFERSON CITY • Gov. Jay Nixon is asking five state universities to consider lending the state more than $100 million next year to help balance the state's budget, a proposal that is drawing fire from key legislators unhappy with both its secrecy and its impact.

Nixon's proposal, which his budget director termed preliminary, calls for the University of Missouri to chip in $63 million and four other schools to come up with lesser amounts, for a total of $107 million. The money would come from their reserve funds.

The state would roll the money into the $850 million higher education budget that covers operating expenses at all of Missouri's four-year institutions and community colleges. The goal: to avoid a cut that could otherwise equal at least 13 percent across the board.

Universities making the interest-free loans would look to be repaid over a seven-year period with money diverted from the state's college loan authority, known as the Missouri Higher Education Loan Authority, or MOHELA. But the Legislature would have to sign off on that idea.

House Budget Committee Chairman Ryan Silvey, R-Kansas City, called the plan ridiculous. "The governor is looking for this scheme that avoids making tough decisions on cuts," he said. "Rather than balance the state's budget, he wants to dream up new revenue sources which happen to be interest-free loans from our universities."

Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, said the universities would have no guarantee that they would get their money back.

"If the proposal is a Bernie Madoff-type Ponzi scheme to make it look like something's being funded that isn't really being funded, that's not acceptable," Schaefer said.

In addition to the loans, Nixon also is floating a proposal to cut state funding for college scholarships in half and tell each university to make up the difference, according to the two budget chairmen.

The governor hasn't detailed his plans publicly. His budget director, Linda Luebbering, provided basic information about the loan proposal Thursday evening after word began circulating around the Capitol.
The state is facing a $750 million budget hole next fiscal year, mainly because of the end of federal stimulus funds and a reduction in the federal government's share of the tab for Missouri's Medicaid program.

"It's going to be a challenging year, and we are looking at lots of options," Luebbering said. "This is just one concept we're thinking about."

She said the priority for higher education leaders has been to preserve their base funding as much as possible. If their base is cut, she said, it's hard to restore it in future years. Schools then could end up dipping into reserves anyway — without any hope of repayment from the state.

Under one set of numbers, which Luebbering said was not 'set in stone," the University of Missouri would lend the state $63 million and Missouri State University in Springfield would offer about $13 million.

Three other schools — Central Missouri State University in Warrensburg, Truman State University in Kirksville and Southeast Missouri State University in Cape Girardeau — would each kick in roughly $10 million.

Luebbering said legislators and the public hadn't been told of the plan because "we weren't really far enough along in the process." Nixon will present his budget for the fiscal year that begins July 1 during his State of the State speech in January. Legislators have until early May to adopt a budget.

But that explanation didn't mollify the chairmen of the House and Senate budget committees. They noted that this isn't the first time Nixon has tried to cut a budget deal in secret with higher education, leaving the Legislature to rubber-stamp it.

"These unilateral edicts — take this deal by Tuesday night or you're going to suffer some sort of wrath — that's just not reasonable," Schaefer said. "That's not how state government or higher education should be conducted."

Schaefer said he heard of the plan Wednesday, asked the governor's staff for a briefing — and received it — on Thursday. Thus, he was one of the few with firsthand details.

"There really isn't anything written down," Schaefer said. "There's just kind of a general proposal of what the governor wants to do."

Schaefer said he was willing to be part of a public discussion to see whether an acceptable loan could be worked out. But he said he saw many flaws in the plan as it stands now.

For example, MU "has taken great pains to find efficiencies," said Schaefer, who represents the flagship campus of the University of Missouri. "They're being asked to put $63 million on the table to shore up other institutions which arguably haven't taken any steps toward efficiencies."
Also, using reserve funds could hurt the university's bonding capacity and improperly divert funds that came from private donors or tuition payments, he said.

Truman State University President Troy D. Paino said his office has been in discussions with Nixon's office to talk about budget trimming ideas, including borrowing from campus reserves.

"To describe it as a proposal is overstating it," Paino said of the reserves loan. He said he would have to take anything formally offered from Nixon to Truman's Board of Governors, and it's too early to do that.

He declined to comment on the campus reserves plan, saying it's just one of several "creative ideas" that are expected to come out in the next few weeks.

University of Missouri system spokesman Jennifer Hollingshead said the president's office had no comment regarding Nixon's plan.

Will Shaffner, director of business development and governmental relations for MOHELA, also declined to comment about the proposal Thursday.

The loan authority has already been asked twice before to shell out money for higher education. In 2006, former Gov. Matt Blunt viewed MOHELA's loan assets as a funding source for investing in higher education building projects. The plan ultimately approved by the Legislature in 2007 called for taking $350 million from MOHELA to support the so-called Lewis and Clark Initiative.

But the loan authority's ability to make good on those payments has been dampened amid the economic downturn.

During last year's state budget struggles, MOHELA agreed to contribute $30 million to the state's Access Missouri college scholarship fund. Doing so helped offset deep cuts to the program.

*Doug Moore and Matthew Franck of the Post-Dispatch contributed to this report.*
Nixon seeks to borrow from campus reserves

By Rudi Keller and Janese Silvey

Gov. Jay Nixon wants to tap campus reserve funds at five state universities to help plug a state deficit estimated at up to $500 million.

The proposal, according to several sources, asks the schools, including the University of Missouri, to lend the state approximately $107 million. The money would be used to cover a 15 percent cut in state taxpayer support in the budget that begins July 1, with the five schools being paid back over seven years through payments to the state by the Missouri Higher Education Loan Authority.

Nixon spokesman Scott Holste declined to comment on specifics. “We are still in the budget-planning process,” he said in an email.

Along with UM, the schools being asked to approve the proposal are the University of Central Missouri, Southeast Missouri State University, Missouri State University and Truman State University. Nixon’s staff has been pitching the proposal this week and pushing for quick decisions. Nixon must present a budget to state lawmakers in about six weeks.

The plan already is coming under fire from lawmakers, who have not been consulted on details. Higher education leaders reached today said they are considering the idea but have made no commitments.

Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, said if a plan is worked out through negotiations between Nixon’s office, the universities and lawmakers, something that works could be produced. As originally presented, however, the plan is dead, he said.

“If this deal is a Bernie Madoff-type Ponzi scheme, it is unacceptable,” Schaefer said.

Other area lawmakers were skeptical. “Incredibly, the administration is coming up with one of these complicated schemes that require lots of legislative cooperation, and they have talked to no one,” said state Rep. Chris Kelly, D-Columbia.

Rep. Mary Still, D-Columbia, said she is willing to listen to plans for stabilizing higher education funding but added: “I don’t like the idea of robbing Peter to pay Paul.”

And Sen. Jason Crowell, R-Cape Girardeau, said he opposes participation by Southeast Missouri State, which is in his district.
“Exactly when did university presidents become Jay Nixon’s payday loan officers?” he asked.

In each year since he took office in 2009, Nixon has attempted to cut a deal with colleges and universities before presenting a budget. In the first year, it was stable funding in exchange for no tuition increases. For the 2011 budget year, the deal was no tuition hikes if budget cuts were limited to 5 percent.

Last year, no specific deal was struck as Nixon cut 7 percent more, but he punished schools through withholdings for tuition increases that exceeded inflation. The UM System lost $4.5 million as a result.

As the largest state university, UM’s participation in the proposal is vital to its success. UM’s vice president of finance, Nikki Krawitz, declined to comment. Members of the Board of Curators were aware of the proposal but said they had not seen details.

“I want to bring it before the total board and hash it out in a public session so that it’s transparent to everybody,” said David Bradley, who takes over as chairman next month. “We need to understand the total ramification on the university system. On the face of it, it looks like it would be difficult.”

The public should know reserves are important for maintaining the system’s credit rating, he said. “It’s not just a pile of cash sitting there in a piggybank somewhere.”

Curators Chairman Warren Erdman said he wouldn’t offer an opinion until he sees a formal proposal. “That said, I would have to take a very hard look at that before something of that significance could be considered,” he added.

Chuck Ambrose, president of the University of Central Missouri, said he is listening to the plan. “Everybody is talking about a ‘cliff year’ for higher education. If we don’t do something, we will be walking very close to the edge.”

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Hey, here’s an idea. How about you loan me lots of money from your savings account so I can buy other people Christmas presents? Don’t worry — I’ll pay it back over seven years, interest-free, from money I’ve previously committed to a car payment and donations to my favorite charity.

That’s pretty much what Gov. Jay Nixon is asking university leaders right now.

As Rudi Keller and I reported today, Nixon is asking five state universities, including the UM System, to dig into their reserves and lend the state $107 million to patch an expected 15 percent cut to higher education.

In other words, UM, Truman and the three other schools would help fund all public two- and four-year colleges in the coming year.

The money would supposedly be repaid — interest-free — over seven years from the Missouri Higher Education Loan Authority. You might remember, MOHELA has been allocating money to the state to pay for needs-based Access Missouri scholarships. And before that, a state law was passed that was supposed to use MOHELA funds to help campuses improve outdated academic buildings.

University reserves, by the way, affect UM’s credit rating, include privately donated funds and are mostly in interest-bearing accounts.

The conversations have been informal and, apparently, top secret. Even Commissioner of Higher Education David Russell said he’s only heard rumors. But apparently college administrators are listening — even though they don’t want to talk about it.
Nikki Krawitz, UM’s VP of finance, would not return several e-mails seeking information and instead had a spokeswoman tell me they wouldn’t be commenting. She also ignored questions about how large UM’s reserve funds are.

Truman President Troy Paino also declined to comment, saying he’s not at liberty to talk and that discussions are too preliminary.

Two curators acknowledged they were familiar with the idea but said they don’t yet have details.

Lending money from university reserves to the state would be a “major change in how we undertake the financing of the university, and we have a fiduciary duty to protect the university system,” said David Bradley, who takes the helm as board chair next month. “Reserves are important for credit ratings, and we have a lot of designation for those, various commitments. It’s not just a pile of cash sitting there in a piggybank somewhere.”

Chairman Warren Erdman said he wouldn’t offer an opinion until he sees a formal proposal.

“It’s important that the board and university administrators listen to people, and so I don’t want to prematurely cast judgment when I haven’t seen formal details,” he said. “That said, I would have to take a very hard look at that before something of that significance could be considered.”

Sen. Jason Crowell — whose district in Cape Girardeau includes proposed participant Southeast Missouri State — questioned: “Exactly when did university presidents become Jay Nixon’s payday loan officers?”

Except, of course, payday loan companies get their money back with hefty interest charges.

If I were a university administrator (so thankful I’m not) I’d be pretty cautious with OK this idea, even if Nixon wields a retaliatory budget knife (don’t do what he wants and he’s known to withhold money).

The proposal comes on the heels of his other plan to base increases in state funding to universities on performance measures.

Would the two somehow become entangled, forcing the five universities to meet performance measurements before getting their money back?

It’s a valid question. When it comes to state funding, lawmakers play a lot of shell games.

So, how ‘bout that Christmas loan?
Missouri Chancellor Brady Deaton spent much of August trying to keep the Big 12 Conference intact, but when it appeared that Oklahoma and three other schools could leave for the Pac-12 just days after pledging allegiance to the Big 12, he changed his mind. That set in motion a two-month process that ended with Missouri becoming the 14th member of the Southeastern Conference. Deaton and Missouri Athletic Director Mike Alden met with a small group of reporters Wednesday to answer questions about their reasons for leaving the Big 12 and what lies ahead in the SEC.

By Joe Walljasper

While the Missouri football team played its season opener on the field below, Chancellor Brady Deaton huddled with Athletic Director Mike Alden. On what is normally a day of hope and promise, the mood was grim.
Missouri Chancellor Brady Deaton and Athletic Director Mike Alden explain the reasons MU left the Big 12 Wednesday during a meeting with reporters in Jesse Hall. The process began on Sept. 2 and ended Nov. 6 when the school officially joined the SEC.

"We're saying, 'What in God's name are we going to do?'" Deaton recalled.

The day before, Sept. 2, Oklahoma President David Boren had announced that OU wouldn't be "a wallflower" in conference realignment. It was widely suspected that the Sooners were going to bolt the Big 12 for the Pac-12 and take Oklahoma State with them. That would spur Texas to leave, with Texas Tech in tow, creating a Pac-16 super conference and killing the beleaguered Big 12.

It was confusing for Deaton, who at that point was the chairman of the Big 12 board of directors and described himself as "gung-ho" about the league. Less than a week before, he and Boren flew to College Station, Texas, and worked together to make one last attempt to convince Texas A&M President R. Bowen Loftin to reconsider defecting to the Southeastern Conference. That effort failed, but a few days later, the CEOs of the nine remaining Big 12 schools gathered and reaffirmed their commitment to restock the league and make a go of it.

Now, Missouri faced the prospect of rejoining the so-called "Forgotten Five," the schools that were nearly left homeless during the first Big 12 exodus in the summer of 2010.

"We had some people, I know, that said maybe the Mountain West is the best we can do," Deaton said. "I'm not saying anything negative about the Mountain West, but it wasn't anything that we were aspiring to. What became clear to us at that point is we've got to carefully examine what the future is for the University of Missouri. Does it lie with trying to repopulate the Big 12? Does it lie with trying to join a different conference as a group or individually or in some combination? All those were possible.

"It was only then, really, even though we had a sense nationally what was happening with conferences, it was only then that we really started doing hard groundwork saying what's possible for the University of Missouri at that point. And we were deeply concerned about the future of our athletic program."
What happened, of course, was that the Pac-12 decided against expansion and Missouri decided against staying in the Big 12. On Nov. 6, it was announced that MU would become the 14th member of the SEC.

The major players behind the decision hadn’t done interviews on the topic until yesterday, when Deaton and Alden set aside an hour to discuss the move with four reporters.

In reconstructing the timeline, the date Sept. 2, referred to as “the defining moment for our chancellor” by football Coach Gary Pinkel, was the point Missouri actively sought a new home. Deaton said he knew from talking to colleagues in the Big Ten, which had spurned MU the year before, that it had no interest in expanding. So Deaton’s focus was on the SEC, which had an odd number of schools after adding Texas A&M. Alden said he began making informal calls to athletic directors in the SEC, gauging the league’s interest in MU.

"After Sept. 2, Sept. 3, certainly that’s where you might be calling around saying, ‘Look, do you ever think there might be an opportunity in case this all blows up in the Big 12?’ " Alden said.

Missouri’s behind-the-scenes intentions became public on Sept. 22. That was the night dueling press conferences at Oklahoma and Missouri yielded very different perspectives on the future of the Big 12. Three days earlier, the Pac-12 decided against absorbing the Big 12 quartet. Texas’ unwillingness to give up the Longhorn Network — its $300 million gift from ESPN — reportedly killed that deal. After the Big 12 CEOs held a conference call in which they voted to fire Commissioner Dan Beebe and replace him on an interim basis with Chuck Neinas, news conferences were scheduled by Boren and Deaton.

Boren’s started 15 minutes before Deaton’s. Some viewed that as an OU power play, but yesterday Deaton called it a harmless coincidence. Boren said the Big 12’s leaders had committed to granting their media rights to the conference for a period of six years, which meant any school that left would forfeit the millions of dollars it earned in TV revenue over that period. Boren referred to the granting of rights as “handcuffs” that would keep the league together.

When Deaton addressed reporters — interrupted briefly by a glitch that caused Boren’s press conference to blare through the speaker phone in MU’s Jesse Hall conference room — he said Missouri had agreed to no such thing.

Two weeks later, Deaton and Alden met with the University of Missouri Board of Curators in St. Louis to discuss the matter. After more than four hours behind closed doors — during which time the media teleconference number was discovered by fans who took over and chanted “S-E-C, S-E-C” — the curators granted Deaton authority to explore a new conference affiliation.

Deaton resigned as chairman of the Big 12’s board of directors.

It was then that Deaton contacted Florida President Bernie Machen, a longtime friend and one of the SEC’s power brokers.

“He made a point of emphasizing that no decision can be made until it’s voted on by the members of the SEC, and they can only vote if there’s an application in front of them,” Deaton said. “There was never a promise made beyond that. Yet, in talking to him and others, we had a
sense that we were viewed as a very favorable candidate and we were a university that they were very pleased to consider. We knew that because of the academic strengths of the University of Missouri.”

Deaton said Missouri’s membership in the Association of American Universities was a plus. Surely, MU’s status as the flagship university in a state of 6 million didn’t hurt as the SEC considered the value of the school in future television contracts.

Meanwhile, the Big 12 started making the reforms that Missouri wanted. The television revenue would be split evenly, as opposed to the old way where the schools that appeared on TV the most got a bigger share. The Longhorn Network would not show high school football content.

At that point, it was too late.

“For us, the question was, ‘Do we continue to struggle, do we continue to try to be the good citizens that we think we have been all along, knowing that in spite of our absolute best efforts, four institutions or more are willing to fly off and try something different?’” Deaton said. “It was clear, we thought, that it was going to happen again when the next opportunity arose.”

MU’s stated reason for leaving the Big 12 was, in a word, “instability.” That reason did not fly with Neinas, who, in an interview with Sports Illustrated, called it “so much poppycock.” Some observers have noted that Missouri was the first school to destabilize the conference when it flirted with the Big Ten. That round of realignment led to the departure of Nebraska and Colorado in 2010.

“I smile, because there was so much going on the previous year that to pinpoint any given institution and say they contributed to the instability is a stretch,” said Deaton, when asked to respond to the idea that Missouri created the mess it wanted to flee. “There were two institutions that ended up leaving the Big 12, of course, and you’d have to look at those institutions, and you’d have to look at the reasons that led them to that.”

Texas always was a blessing and curse for the Big 12. As the richest athletic department in the nation, and one of the most competitively successful, it gave the conference greater stature and more TV revenue than it could have dreamed of without the Longhorns. The tradeoff was that Texas’ refusal to compromise retarded the growth of the league and contributed to its demise. A string of essentially powerless commissioners couldn’t convince Texas to sacrifice for the greater good. An opportunity to pool Tier 3 media rights and start a conference television network was rejected, and the more forward-thinking Big Ten and Pac-12 blew past the Big 12 in TV revenue. Bitterness toward Texas played a role in the departure of Nebraska and Texas A&M.

The Big 12 will continue as a 10-team league with the additions of TCU and West Virginia, although the Mountaineers are entangled in a lawsuit with the Big East that could prevent them from leaving that conference for three years. Regardless of that outcome, Deaton said Missouri will join the SEC in July as a member of the Eastern Division.
"We made an application to the SEC after having phone calls of assurance from the Big 12 commissioner and chair of the board that it was OK to do that from their standpoint," Deaton said. "We then, later on, got a call that said, 'Oh, well, you know, we're not sure because of this, that and the other because West Virginia might have difficulty.' I said to them, 'Look, you set things in motion. We set things in motion. We're continuing down this pathway.'"

Back fresh from SEC athletic director meetings in Birmingham, Ala., Alden said the league finalized its 14-team football schedules for next year and will release them next week. Implicit in that is the knowledge that the 14 schools planning to be in the SEC now will be the same 14 schools in September. That isn't a certainty in the volatile Big 12, in spite of the loyalty oaths and "handcuffs" required of its members.

As an illustration of the chaos, Alden recalled returning from a vacation to Lake Tahoe in mid-August and getting an emergency phone call from the Big 12 office. This was when Texas A&M was first making overtures to the SEC. Alden said he was asked to immediately fly to Dallas for a meeting in which all the schools again would declare loyalty to the Big 12.

"Everybody gets on planes and we all fly to Dallas, Texas, and met at the DFW Hyatt," he said. "I remember this exactly. I go schlepping in there. We get into a room, and we're all together. ... Then you've got a couple of schools that say, 'Ah, I don't know about that. I don't know.' It's like, 'What? I thought we were all together here.'"

Presumably, those worries are over. Schools don't leave the SEC. Missouri is leaving behind a lot of history, though. For example, it has shared a conference with Kansas for more than 100 years and animosity with the Jayhawks for even longer than that. The Border War is ending at the behest of KU.

That's the price Missouri is willing to pay for a secure future.

"It was not a sudden, knee-jerk decision," Deaton said. "It was not an emotional decision. It was very much, and I have said this before, a case of the head overruling in some cases the heart. We loved the traditions of the Big 12. We love our colleagues in other universities and great friendships, and fans are comfortable traveling to various venues. We understand that.

"You give that up, because you're looking 50 to 100 years down the road. You've got to make the kind of decisions that will lead to strong foundations for this university. We felt that allied with the Southeastern Conference."

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Tim Wolfe

The new UM president

By Henry J. Waters III

When curators picked Tim Wolfe to become the 23rd president of the University of Missouri System, they did their level best to clone his predecessor, Gary Forsee.

Forsee was the first UM president to come from private industry, not academia. Minions on campus were skeptical, clinging to the traditional view university presidents must have career experience on campus. But UM curators noticed a need for non-academic skills — fundraising and political liaison — and then-curators’ president Don Walsworth spent a good deal of time promoting the idea of a president from industry. Forsee became available, and the rest is history.

Faculty came to like Forsee’s leadership. When time came to hire his successor, the trail was laid. This year’s board of curators considered a huge number of potential appointees from on and off campus. They had an energetic discussion about the relative merits of private industry and campus experience. The more they talked, the more their inclination tilted toward the Forsee mold, and Tim Wolfe seems to fit.

A primary advantage of a private industry background, often stated here earlier, is the near certainty a good private business CEO will be good at delegating. In a higher education setting, this means he or she will more likely leave academic affairs to chancellors, provosts, deans and faculty.

A wizard from campus might be more likely to wield a heavy hand from the president’s office over second-tier academic managers, creating more high-level tension within ranks, a phenomenon we have seen at UM in the past.

A person from private industry brings a more diverse range of experience and might have an advantage dealing with state lawmakers and others in the political realm. The private industry guy is also an “outsider” who legislators believe might be trusted to keep reins on the university, not a gum-dipped academic who knows only “university speak.”

Above all, of course, success depends on the personality and skill of the presidential person. As Sen. Kurt Schaefer says, the president is the face of the university in dealings with legislators. With his appealing background extending all the way back to days as a Tribune paper boy, an
athlete at Rock Bridge High School, a graduate of the MU business school and careers in
management at several big companies, the affable new president already makes a good first
impression. His parents were MU professors, and he “has a passion” for higher education.

If Tim Wolfe’s term as university president mirrors Forsee’s, he will further embed the job
description emerging as the favorite hereabouts.

Meanwhile, Interim President Steve Owens will continue the good work he has been turning in.
Wolfe does not assume office until February, by which time next year’s university budget and
the state legislative session will be largely under way. Wolfe wants to spend time between now
and then getting acquainted on the campuses and in Jefferson City.

We have every reason to be encouraged about the coming tenure of the 23rd UM president. He
grew up in the shadow of the Columns and knows his way around the wider world. He has an
easy, confident air. Though ultimate success can’t be predicted quite yet, the curators seem to
have done their most important job very well.

HJW III
UM curators defend secrecy in president search

By Janese Silvey

The chairman of the University of Missouri System’s Board of Curators isn’t apologizing for the secretive search process used to tap Tim Wolfe as the next system president.

“For me, the whole thing was protecting the confidence of those candidates who spent all that time with us and who trusted us,” Warren Erdman said.

Erdman announced Wolfe’s selection Tuesday at MU — the first time most people heard his name. Since then, some have criticized the 11-month process for being too secretive.

Throughout the process, Erdman said confidentiality was necessary because candidates didn’t want their employers to find out they were looking for another job. Wolfe, however, has been unemployed for months after losing his job as president of Novell Americas, an infrastructure software provider.

“We weren’t protecting Tim; we were protecting all candidates who came through our process who were not selected,” Erdman said, noting three of the four finalists interviewed by the board did have current employment.

“Disclosing anybody other than him would have been very problematic, and to keep everybody but Wolfe “a secret creates another set of problems,” Columbia Curator Craig Van Matre said. “I don’t think anybody was poorly served by the process.”

Among the four finalists, Van Matre said, was a candidate currently in academic management, a woman and a minority candidate.

Charles Davis, an associate journalism professor and critic of the process, wonders whether those candidates were seriously considered or rather were token minorities that let curators tout a diverse pool of finalists.

“We have to take that on faith,” Davis said when given the descriptions of finalists. “We have no idea who they were, what quality or caliber” they were. “An open process would have put even more pressure on the search process to result in a well-rounded, diverse, multicultural field of candidates. When you’re going to have to bring those people in front of the public, there’s less tokenism.”

And an open process, Davis argues, likely would have yielded the same result.
“There are positions all over the country — including at Missouri State” University — “where people apply publicly for public jobs, and the process is transparent,” he said. “I just think you get a more vibrant and dynamic search process that results in better candidates. I’m thrilled with the results of the search, but I still dislike the search process. Is there any reason why Wolfe would not have gone through a public process?”

Joan Gabel, dean of MU’s Trulaske College of Business, nominated Wolfe for the job after Erdman asked her for input this summer. She met Wolfe when he participated in a business school program last year, shortly after Gabel came to Missouri. She then asked for his input on how the college can better prepare students, and he provided in-depth feedback, prompting her to appoint him to her strategic development board.

Gabel has high hopes for him, saying Wolfe’s experience in leading resource-challenged businesses will help him guide the university through difficult budget times.

“I’m thrilled,” she said. “I think the system is in very good hands.”

Reach Janese Silvey at 573-815-1705 or e-mail jsilvey@columbiatribune.com.
Welcome home, Tim. As the 23rd president of the UM System, you’ve inherited one of the wackiest families in the country.

You’re in charge of four campuses that need constant love and attention. As a parent yourself, you have to understand the scope of what it takes to lead this growing family through tough times.

First, you need to get to know your kids — who they are and what they need from you:

- MU: As the jock, the oldest sibling and the Association of American Universities honors student, MU is the system leader. It’s the starting quarterback and perpetual homecoming royalty. It’s doing just fine, improving even, but to keep growing and stay competitive it needs more money and more resources — being the biggest and best comes at a big financial investment.

- Missouri University of Science and Technology: The nerd of the family is quickly becoming one of the most popular nerds in the state, and other, even smarter, nerds are flocking to it. Missouri S&T started a science club in your basement (aka Rolla) that’s become so popular it’s going to need a bigger space before it has to start turning away students. If the state can’t give Missouri S&T the allowance it needs, you’ll need to help fill the funding gap with new revenues so it can grow its campus housing, facilities and faculty — all to expand enrollment.

- Universities of Missouri-Kansas City and St. Louis: Just like your own twins, Madison and Tyler, UMSL and UMKC have really grown up in the past few years. On opposite sides of the state, they serve similar types of students in similar urban regions and have become major forces in their respective cities. They’re praised for their arts, and they
crank out educated graduates who more often than not stay to become educated employees in the two biggest cities in the state.

It's easy to see that each of the campuses has different needs, but, Mr. President, you have to consider that your job is to do better for the whole. At the risk of oversimplifying:

Times are tough, and as the leader of four growing universities, you need to be able to be the breadwinner in this system. The state support that the system has always counted on is back down to the levels it was at a decade ago.

Now that you're back in Missouri, you need to get plugged into Jefferson City. Having a relationship with Gov. Jay Nixon, his office and the state's legislators will be key in convincing them that your four campuses deserve more money than they're getting.

UMKC Chancellor Leo Morton had it right when he said Tuesday that you need to market higher education to the state. Show legislators and the governor that funding higher education is truly in the best interest of the state's lagging economy. Show them that the more money your campuses get, the more they can grow and the more they can help drive the economy in their cities.

More importantly, more state support would alleviate the pressure already being put on students, alumni and donors to make up the growing funding gap.

You need to learn the in's and out's of working within and above the four campuses. Being the president means you'll need to work with each campus individually. But don't play favorites. It's just as important to see the system as a whole.

As a business executive, you've learned to cater to the customer while watching your bottom line and boosting revenues.

But the students, faculty, staff, administrators, alumni, donors and all of us who are so ingrained in the UM System aren't customers — we're much more than that.

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Missouri researchers to study online voting

ALAN SCHER ZAGIER | Posted: Thursday, December 15, 2011 1:27 pm

Civic-minded soldiers stationed across the world could one day obtain absentee ballots from their laptops or mobile phones as part of a new federal research effort to increase participation among overseas troops and other voters who are out of the country during elections.

A team of Missouri researchers trained in technology, cyber-security and elections management will use a $740,000 Department of Defense grant to explore Internet-based and mobile phone voting applications.

The project initially will focus on speeding the delivery of overseas ballots, Boone County Clerk Wendy Noren said at a Thursday press conference announcing the collaboration. Noren emphasized that voters won't actually cast ballots online, but researchers will study ways to surmount the security obstacles to online voting.

"The time it takes to deliver ballots and have ballots returned is unacceptable," she said. "This has been a long, ongoing problem by military and overseas voters."

More than 350,000 ballots nationwide from overseas voters in the 2008 presidential election were rejected due to delivery, return, registration or counting errors, Noren said. Nearly 300,000 of those unaccepted ballots involved late submission or other return failures.

The larger number of rejected ballots represents more than 30 percent of all absentee ballots cast in the 2008 election.

Noren and her collaborators hope that Congress' passage of the Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment (MOVE) Act in 2009 will allow voting systems to catch up with 21st Century technology.

"It has been a particularly frustrating situation for members of the military and overseas citizens who know there is a path out there to get access to their ballots that was not available," Noren said.
The project will expand upon a Boone County pilot effort in 2010 in which more than 90 percent of the county's eligible overseas absentee had electronic access to their ballot six weeks before the election.

The collaboration includes the Missouri secretary of state, Noren's office and the University of Missouri. Researchers will be enlisted from the Reynolds Journalism Institute, the Truman School of Public Affairs and the College of Engineering's computer science and information technology department.

The Department of Defense and election offices have explored online voting for troops for more than a decade, with mixed results.

In 2000, Arizona experimented with online voting in its Democratic Party presidential primary, followed by Michigan four years later. Several counties in West Virginia adopted online voting for overseas troops in 2010.

But later in 2010, the District of Columbia scrapped its plans for Internet-based voting after a group of University of Michigan computer scientists hacked the website to have it play the school's fight song.

Noren called the university's involvement critical to both improving the technology as well as increasing public confidence. The university has agreed to provide local election officials in Missouri with free access to its research applications through 2018. The researchers plan to use open-source, public domain software for added transparency.

"We need to advance the body of knowledge in this area," she said. "We cannot rely on vendors who are trying to meet the need who don't have research and development (experience)."

Bill Harrison, director of the university's Center for High Assurance Computing, offered a similar assessment of the research team's role.

"We take a long view of the development of technology," he said. "So we can ask questions and perform research that really can't be done outside of academia. You can't rely on a vendor who has to produce a certain amount of profit every six months. You can't expect someone in that situation to consider fundamental problems in building secure systems."
Effort aims to improve overseas voting

Ballot delivery has been challenging.

By Jodie Jackson Jr.

A $740,000 grant from the Department of Defense will bring together the Boone County Clerk’s Office, Secretary of State Robin Carnahan and University of Missouri researchers to find a way for military and overseas voters to have their votes counted.

“We’ve got to have the brain power of the country’s leading research university,” Noren said today at a news conference at the Boone County Government Center.

Previous studies have found that more than 30 percent of the nation’s military and overseas voters had difficulty voting in the 2008 presidential election and, in some cases, did not have their votes counted. Noren said the traditional voting methods available at the time required weeks or months for voters to submit applications, receive their ballots and return them.

“The time it takes to have ballots returned and counted is unacceptable,” Noren said.

The grant from the Department of Defense Federal Voting Assistance Program will fund research and development of a system to help those voters properly vote and be counted.

The clerk’s office, secretary of state and university all will play a role in the grant project. The university’s primary objective is to design, develop and implement an online application and ballot delivery system.

The project also will seek to create a system that is affordable to even small jurisdictions.

The grant will allow for the development of online and mobile applications for ballot delivery. Noren pointed out the project will not address Internet voting.

“We’re not there yet,” she said. “I may never live to see the day when we do all this electronically. But it will never happen unless we bring in this type of organization.”

William Harrison, director of MU’s Center for High Assurance Computing, called the grant project “a great opportunity for Missouri students.” Jim Thompson, dean of MU’s College of Engineering, said the project was an ideal fit for the university’s “hard problem-solving capabilities” as a research institution.
In her application for the grant, Noren proposed to collaborate with researchers from MU’s College of Engineering, the Reynolds Journalism Institute and the Truman School of Public Administration to research and develop outreach, education and online systems.

Rather than trying a new method of overseas ballot delivery during an election, Noren said it was better to seek help from MU researchers.

“It’s the role of the scientist to get it wrong until you get it right. You can’t do it wrong until you get it right in an election,” she said.

Noren said she cast her first ballot in 1972 at a foreign post office in Germany.

“I know very clearly the problems faced by these voters,” she said. “You have people driving 800 miles in the backwoods of Burma to get to a consulate. The problems people face overseas are just amazing.”

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COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Boone County clerk awarded grant to improve voting system for overseas Americans

By James Ayello
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COLUMBIA — Boone County Clerk Wendy Noren described the reports she gets from overseas American citizens trying to vote in Missouri elections as "horror stories."

In a press conference at the Roger B. Wilson Boone County Government Center on Thursday morning, she announced she was awarded a $740,000 federal grant to collaborate with MU and the Missouri secretary of state to develop a new voting system that utilizes the Internet and mobile technology for overseas voters to eliminate some of their problems.

According to a press release, studies have found that more than 30 percent of the nation’s military and overseas voters had difficulty voting in the 2008 presidential election. Noren said 366,102 overseas ballots nationwide failed to be counted in 2008.

Noren said in some previous elections, absentee ballots were still coming in more than five days after the election had concluded.

"We hear stories about people driving 800 miles or having to bribe foreign officials to let them vote," Noren said. "The problems people face overseas are just amazing."

She described the traditional voting method in use today as having many major issues. She said at times, it takes weeks or months for voters to receive, fill out and send back ballots.

Other major obstacles include the distance from where voting stations were located, as well as the inability to deliver ballots to certain places, such as submarines.

Noren will collaborate with the secretary of state as well as researchers from MU's College of Engineering and Reynolds Journalism Institute.