

Rep. Kelly: Nixon's college funding plan seems unlikely

By Janese Silvey

Thursday, December 22, 2011

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An idea that would have had five public universities floating the state a loan next year likely isn't going anywhere, a state lawmaker said.

"I think that it's going away, but I don't think it's gone yet," Rep. Chris Kelly, D-Columbia, said, basing his observation on conversations with various sources. Borrowing money from some universities to fund higher education "carries tremendous political liability" for Gov. Jay Nixon, he said.

Nixon proposed the state borrow \$106 million from the University of Missouri System and four other universities' reserve funds to dodge a cut in higher education funding next year. The state is expected to face a \$700 million shortfall in fiscal year 2013, which starts next summer.

The proposal would have required lawmakers to change state statute and redirect funds from the Missouri Higher Education Loan Authority to pay back the schools, interest-free, over seven years.

The plan met quick criticism from lawmakers who weren't involved in the discussions. Since it became public last week, Sen. Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia and chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, said he has yet to hear from Nixon.

"If the governor wants to sit down and talk about it, I'd be happy to do that, but to date, that hasn't happened," he said. "I don't think the proposal as it was given to the schools appeared to me to be an acceptable deal, but that doesn't mean we can't use that as a starting point for discussions."

Nixon's spokesman did not respond to Tribune messages.

Nikki Krawitz, UM's vice president of finance and administration, wouldn't comment on Nixon's proposal. But she was quick to correct any notion that the system can simply tap into a stash of saved cash.

"We don't have reserves in the same sense the state has a rainy-day fund," she said, referring to the state's emergency account.

There are hundreds — if not thousands — of department accounts across the four UM campuses that have balances totaling some \$425 million, Krawitz said. Those funds are unrestricted general operating dollars and don't include auxiliary services, such as bookstores, that make money or grants or gifts restricted for certain purposes.

The balances accumulate over time in a number of ways. In some cases, donors give money to a specific school but don't designate how it has to be spent. In other situations, a new grant award starts paying part of a faculty member's salary, freeing up general revenue. Spending those dollars is tricky, Krawitz said, because they aren't reoccurring revenue but rather are one-time funds.

Often, department chairs save to entice a top-notch researcher to campus later, Krawitz said. That hire typically requires a pool of funds for one-time costs such as moving expenses, setting up new labs and providing equipment.

It's important department managers maintain control of their budgets, including any unused balances, Krawitz said. If system administrators were instead to sweep up savings at the end of a budget year for a centralized account, department heads would be more tempted to spend the money. "We want them to be frugal," she said.

Having those balances also contributes to UM's credit rating, which is AA+, the second-highest rating. The ratio of savings to debt affects the credit rating, so smaller balances could trigger a downgrade.

Lower credit ratings come with higher fees attached to borrowing. UM has taken advantage of its credit status in recent years to issue low-cost bonds for academic building projects that the state is supposed to fund but has not.

Krawitz also stressed that alumni and supporters giving money to the university don't want to see those dollars replace state funding.

"Donors use their resources to provide that margin of excellence," she said. "They don't want to pay to turn the lights on; they want to pay to attract top faculty and top students."

Video: Plasma Torch Toothbrush Successfully Used In Human Mouth

By [Dan Nosowitz](#) Posted 12.22.2011 at 3:14 pm [9 Comments](#)



Plasma Brush at University of Missouri

Attentive followers of dentistry developments that we are, we've been following the story of the [plasma brush](#) for awhile now. And it seems like it's making some serious progress: human clinical trials are supposed to begin in early 2012, and there's also a video (below) of the World's Bravest Dentist shooting a plasma beam into his own mouth.

Some background, for anyone who doesn't subscribe to *Dentistry Illustrated Weekly*: the plasma brush isn't a toothbrush, but actually a tool dentists are hoping to use for two primary situations. The first is breaking up plaque; the plasma torch, though it's no hotter than room temperature, is excellent at breaking the bonds that adhere plaque to a tooth. The second is as a sort of primer for filling cavities.

There are certain kinds of cavities, [according to Hao Li](#), associate professor of mechanical and aerospace engineering in the University of Missouri College of Engineering, that need to be refilled every five or seven years using current technology--and they can only be refilled a few times before having to be pulled. The plasma brush can prime a cavity for filling in sort of the same way pavers create those divots in roads before filling them in with new asphalt: it provides more surface area for the filling to stick to, and the research team claims plasma-assisted fillings could be 60% stronger than traditional fillings.

Human clinical trials are due to begin early next year at the University of Tennessee at Memphis, with the team hoping the tool could be approved by the FDA and available to dentists by 2013.



Bills aim to bolster college degree rates

By Janese Silvey

Thursday, December 22, 2011

A pair of bills prefiled in the House and Senate aims to boost the number of Missourians with college degrees by tightening up remediation and statewide transfer policies.

“What we’re trying to do is make it more efficient for kids to get out of school, not easier,” said Rep. Mike Thomson, R-Maryville, chairman of the House’s higher education committee.

Missouri has joined a national effort to increase the number of people with college degrees. About 37 percent of Missourians have a post-secondary degree, and the goal is to increase that to 60 percent by 2025.

The legislation, in part, aims to revise remedial courses now offered to students who aren’t prepared for college-level classes. A 2011 report from the Missouri Department of Higher Education indicated 36 percent of incoming students in fall 2010 needed some sort of remediation.

Thomson said having to take layers of remedial courses causes some students to drop out and suggested schools instead embed tutoring and support systems within college courses.

“In some cases, colleges are using remedial courses as moneymakers,” he said.

Moberly Area Community College has developmental classes aimed to get students up to speed on a subject before they get to college-level courses. MACC President Evelyn Jorgenson rejected the notion the classes are a way to make money, pointing out that students who fail and have to retake college algebra also would be paying more tuition.

“Students don’t want to take developmental courses; they do it because they have to,” she said. “It’s the only way to be successful at the next level.”

MACC is open to suggestions on improving remediation, though, she said. Already, the college is revising its math remediation in a way that will allow students to more quickly move through the coursework.

The University of Missouri has one remediation course, intermediate algebra, said Ted Tarkow, associate dean of the College of Arts & Science. In other subjects, students who

aren't prepared are encouraged to take advantage of campus resources such as the writing lab or tutoring services.

The proposed bills would ensure that some 25 general education courses are transferable between all public colleges. There also is a provision that would allow students to transfer credits back from a university to a community college to get a degree. For instance, a student who took 50 credit hours at MACC, then transferred to MU and took 20 additional hours before dropping out would be allowed to transfer the MU credits back for an associate degree from MACC.

It would be a lot of paperwork, Jorgenson said, "but the advantage is for the students. As long as it is for students' benefit, we want to do that."



Ex-Missouri women's soccer player sues school, coach over unfulfilled scholarship

ALAN SCHER ZAGIER Associated Press

First Posted: December 23, 2011 - 5:01 am

COLUMBIA, Mo. — A former University of Missouri soccer player is suing the school and the women's soccer coach over what she calls an unmet promise of a full four-year scholarship.

Sophomore Ann Alexandra Charlebois (shar-leh-BWAH') sued coach Brian Blitz and the university's governing board Dec. 5 in Boone County Circuit Court. The lawsuit says Charlebois agreed to attend Missouri only after Blitz vowed to provide more than \$106,000 in support through 2015.

Charlebois received a 50 percent partial scholarship as a freshman. Her attorney says she was kicked off the team in September after complaining about receiving a similar amount of financial aid this year.

The Columbia Daily Tribune first reported the lawsuit Wednesday.

Blitz has declined to comment.



Coming to terms with term limits

By Jo Mannies, Beacon political reporter

Posted 10:00 am Thu., 12.22.11

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Missouri Senate President Pro Tem Rob Mayer and House Speaker Steve Tilley met over dinner a few days ago to discuss the particulars for the next legislative session that begins Jan. 4.

After the acrimony during the General Assembly's generally unproductive special session this fall, the two Republicans are seeking to forge a new alliance based on their common future.

Thanks to term limits, the next session will be each man's last.

As Mayer put it, the dinner highlighted that the two — despite any differences — share the same vision as each contemplates his departure. Each wants to leave a respected legacy.

"We specifically talked about working together and getting some accomplishments early on," he said.

Their hoped-for successes center on business-related proposals — many sought by the Missouri Chamber of Commerce — that the two Republicans believe can help the state's economy. Many had been debated in earlier sessions but had failed to pass.

Tilley and Mayer's concerns don't involve their own political futures -- at least, in the short term.

Neither man plans to run for another office in 2012. Tilley dropped out of a contest for lieutenant governor because of his pending divorce. Earlier this year, Mayer, a lawyer, was considered a possible candidate for Missouri attorney general. He says that's no longer the case and emphasizes that he will not run for any statewide office in 2012.

Issues and careers aside, Tilley said that for any public official, term limits "provide a sense of urgency. You can't put things off."

Left unspoken was another obvious truth for Mayer and Tilley: With term limits, both men will see their clout wane as the 2012 session progresses and legislators begin looking toward a new set of leaders who will take over both chambers in 2013.

Term limit wave has crested

Like it or not, term limits have transformed Missouri's legislative process ever since the limits — generally eight years each in the House and Senate — went into effect in 1993. (Partial terms of less than two years don't count).

Missouri voters overwhelmingly approved term limits for the General Assembly and for Congress in 1992. A key provision delayed implementation for congressional offices until at least half of the 50 states approved such limits. The courts later ruled that a federal constitutional amendment would be required to limit the terms of members of Congress, in effect killing off state efforts to curb congressional tenure.

As for state legislative term limits, only three states had instituted them when Missouri and 10 other states followed through in 1992 -- the largest bloc of what had been expected to be a wave of similar votes in other states.

But the drive for term limits soon dropped off dramatically. According to the Conference of State Legislatures, seven additional states have approved term limits since 1992 — but the last was in 2000. And six states have repealed their limits, mostly through the courts, where judges said the restrictions violated their state constitutions.

The upshot? Missouri now is among only 15 states with limits.

Most of those states have the same limit of eight years in each chamber. But nine states simply mandate that the limit applies to consecutive terms, so that a politician could sit out a term and then come back — starting anew with a clean slate.

Missouri is among only six states that apply the limits to a legislator's lifetime, the conference says.

Because it took eight years for Missouri's term limits to kick in, it wasn't until 2002 that Missouri saw dozens of legislative veterans swept out -- 73 of the House's 163 members and 12 of the 34 members of the Senate.

Since then, Missouri has seen periodic smaller legislative purges, with 2010 among the larger ones.

The state House and Senate will see smaller groups of departing classes in 2012 — about two dozen in the House and nine in the Senate.

pros and cons

Those leaving include Mayer and Tilley, who have called the legislative shots in their respective chambers for the last two years.

Although their political views may be similar, the two appear to have different assessments of term limits — stances that also reflect the contrasting views of the limits for the last two decades.

Tilley contends that term limits have generally been good for the state. "It's good not to have career politicians," he said.

Mayer sees a mixed bag. Term limits "bring in new ideas," he said. But Mayer also blames term limits for creating heightened partisanship, since legislators aren't around long enough to forge relationships.

Mayer recalls with nostalgia his early days in the state House, before the 2002 purge, when "there was a lot of respect for each other." Current legislators tend to be more competitive and combative as they jockey for influence and other elective posts, he said.

Tilley observed that the legacy of Missouri's General Assembly, before term limits, is hardly exemplary. He cited the indictment of the state's longest-serving House speaker, Democrat Bob Griffin, who was convicted of federal corruption charges in 1998. (The sentence was commuted in 2001 by President Bill Clinton.)

Tilley added that one needed only to look at Congress to see how the lack of term limits can cause problems. "They stay up there for a generation and forget what it's like to be a real person," he said.

Mayer and Tilley do agree that perhaps Missouri's limits should be longer — say, 12 years in each chamber — to give legislators more time to use their expertise, which both say takes several years to develop.

For More information

The [Missouri House's assessment](#) of term limits

The [Missouri Senate's assessment](#)

A new study by David Valentine, a research associate professor in the Truman School of Public Affairs at the University of Missouri, examined the last 10 years since term limits really kicked. He concluded that in Missouri's case, "term limits have had a negative effect on the institutional knowledge of legislators."

"Term limits have caused a dramatic decrease in the amount of legislative experience in the last 10 years," Valentine said in a statement.

"It takes most new legislators about four years to learn the intricacies of the legislative process, the social organization of the House and Senate, the details of government, broader issues, and how to balance everything with the needs of their districts and the expectations of their party. By the time they gain this knowledge, they only have a relatively short time to utilize their knowledge before their term limit expires. In addition, the absence of experienced legislators precludes learning from more experienced peers."

[Click here](#) to view Valentine's study.

But Tilley contends that the limits overall have forced legislators to focus on their jobs and the bills they want to see approved.

Tilley said his concern about a smooth transition is why he pressed for last session's vote by the Republican caucus to select a speaker-in-waiting — House Majority Leader Tim Jones, R-Eureka — so that Jones can spend the next session working closely with Tilley. The aim is for a smoother takeover than what Tilley says he experienced when he succeeded fellow Republican Rod Jetton.

Still, Tilley rejected the criticism that term limits have shifted more power to the lobbyists who roam the state Capitol's halls. Many of those lobbyists are former legislators, such as former state Sens. Franc

Flotron, R-Creve Coeur, and Mike Gibbons, R-Kirkwood.

The speaker maintained that last session's fracas over an anti-Boeing resolution passed by the House, for example, was being unfairly tied to legislators' reliance on lobbyists. Tilley noted that Boeing employees were among the legislators voting for the resolution without being aware that the measure, which did not mention the aircraft giant, was a jab at its products.

Both sides agree that term limits has prompted many Missouri legislators to focus — soon after taking office — on their next political move. House members, for example, often jump at running at an open state Senate seat or some other elective office.

Earlier this year, two members of the Missouri House — Republican Sally Faith and Democrat Jake Zimmerman — left office after winning elections for other elective posts that, by the way, don't have term limits. Faith is now the mayor of St. Charles, and Zimmerman is St. Louis County's first elected assessor in 60 years.

Little appetite for change

For more than a decade, each session, a few legislators have unsuccessfully sought to eliminate Missouri's term limits or make significant changes. The most frequent proposals would lengthen the limit to 12 years in each chamber or change it so that a legislator could serve a total of 16 years without dictating how much could be served in either chamber.

State Rep. Jamilah Nasheed, (left) D-St. Louis, is among the current advocates for change. This session, she hopes to resurrect her effort to persuade the General Assembly to ask voters to extend the per-chamber limit to 12 years.

"Longer terms would shift the power away from lobbyists and special interests and back into the hands of the men and women who were elected by the people to serve," Nasheed said in a [commentary](#) earlier this month in the Post-Dispatch.

"Term limits have created a legislative revolving door that ushers out politicians who have served their constituents ably ... The resulting talent drain has shifted the knowledge and power away from lawmakers and into the hands of lobbyists who sometimes have agendas that do not coincide with what is best for the public."

Nasheed, by the way, is considering a bid for the state Senate in 2012 instead of seeking a fourth — and final — term in the state House. But her plans are influenced less by term limits than by the legislative redistricting, required after the 2010 Census, that is putting Nasheed in a new district with a fellow Democratic House member.

Despite frequent complaints, the General Assembly so far has been reluctant to change term limits — beyond a tweak in 2002 (and by a statewide vote) that allowed people first elected to partial terms to serve full terms that might result in them serving up to 10 years in either chamber.

Those on both sides say the biggest deterrent to change is the 1992 vote, when about three-quarters of Missouri voters backed limits. Numerous statewide polls over the years have found little drop in voter support.

In fact, state Sen. Brad Lager, (right) R-Savannah, plans to introduce a bill this coming session to impose term limits on four statewide offices: lieutenant governor, attorney general, auditor and secretary of state. Of statewide offices, only the governor and state treasurer are now subject to term limits.

Lager said in an interview that he supports term limits and believes that all state officials in Missouri should be subject to them. Lager is running for lieutenant governor, challenging incumbent Republican Peter Kinder, who is seeking a third term.

Meanwhile, state Sen. Kevin Engler, R-Farmington, exemplifies another consequence of Missouri's term limits. Engler can't seek re-election in 2012 because he is completing his maximum two full terms in the state Senate.

But he already has announced plans to run for the new 116th District in the state House, where he previously served only one term. If he gets elected, Engler could serve three more terms in the House.

"Back in the old days, you never went from the state Senate to the state House," Engler acknowledged.

But he says he's gotten lots of encouragement from supporters who have told him that the state House could benefit from his "institutional knowledge."

Engler said that the average member of the Missouri House has served less than two years. "I've got 10 years of experience" in the General Assembly, he said. "I would think that the House could use me as a reasonable resource."

Engler observed that he supported term limits early on. "You shouldn't go into public service as a lifetime occupation," he said.

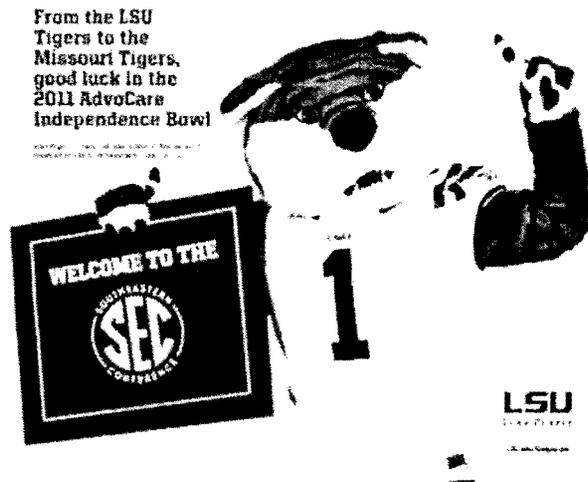
But now, while continuing to support the general concept, Engler is among those who'd like to see Missouri's term limits lengthened to 12 years a chamber.

As it stands in the Senate, he said dryly, "You spend the first four years figuring it out — and the last four years not caring."

Missourinet

LSU and SEC pull off classy move (AUDIO)

December 22, 2011 By [Bill Pollock](#)



LSU Tigers welcome Mizzou Tigers

The Missouri football team arrived in Shreveport, LA on Wednesday to prepare for the Independence Bowl. In the heart of LSU Tiger territory, our Tigers were made to feel at home. LSU placed ads in Northwest Louisiana newspapers encouraging fans to welcome and support Mizzou. It is support like this that makes a Mizzou fan realize the University of Missouri made a good move in switching from the Big 12 to the SEC.

Despite finishing fifth in the Big 12 standings, Missouri couldn't even get a bowl bid to one of the seven that are aligned with that conference. Yet, here is a new rival welcoming Missouri and wishing our Tigers good luck.

Seeing this reminded me of a conversation I had on a recent podcast with Kevin McCreary, the sports director of our sister news network in Columbia, SC...South Carolina Radio Network. He said while there is a strong passion when it comes to cheering against your SEC rival, there is also an extreme amount of pride in pulling for SEC teams in bowl games and tournaments. This is a classic example of that. That's pretty awesome.