Mo. lawmakers may buck Nixon's higher ed cuts

By DAVID A. LIEB | Posted: Wednesday, January 18, 2012 7:37 pm

Missouri university officials warned Wednesday of potential tuition increases, course reductions and employee furloughs if Gov. Jay Nixon's newly proposed 12.5 percent funding cut for higher education comes to fruition.

Nixon's budget proposal would drop state aid to public colleges and universities to its lowest level since 1997, compounding the financial strain on schools that already have been forced to trim costs during several consecutive years of flat or declining state funding.

The Democratic governor suggested in Tuesday night's State of the State address that higher education institutions should adopt "leaner, more efficient operations" and "change their business models." On Wednesday, a key lawmaker pledged to try to block the governor's plan and college officials said it won't be possible to account for the collective $106 million cut merely by administrative efficiencies.

"It is fair to ask how long we can continue to do more with less," said Steve Owens, the interim president of the University of Missouri system. "After a decade of reductions in state support and implementation of operational efficiencies, we are near the point where either the level of funding will have to increase or the scope and quality of services will have to decrease."

Owens said the university is still assessing how the proposed funding cut would affect such things as student tuition and employee wages.

Missouri State University would need to fill a budget hole of about $15 million _ $11 million attributable to the state funding cut and the rest to rising costs, said interim president Clif Smart. Some of that could be covered through administrative cuts, but it also likely would be necessary to raise student tuition by more than the rate of inflation and to dip into the university's $60 million of reserves, he said.

Smart was meeting Wednesday with student leaders to discuss the proposed state funding cut and the potential for tuition increases.

"I think our students are willing to pay more to keep the quality high." Smart said.

Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Kurt Schaefer said Wednesday that he does not intend to follow Nixon's college-funding recommendation when preparing the state budget for the fiscal year that starts July 1. But the senator, whose district includes the flagship campus of the University of Missouri system, said it was too soon to know how much funding he would propose for higher education institutions.
The governor's proposed cut is "a huge blow, not just for the education community itself, but I think for the advancement of economic development of the state of Missouri," said Schaefer, R-Columbia.

Last year, Nixon proposed a roughly 7 percent cut to the core budgets of colleges and universities. The Legislature pared that back to roughly 5.5 percent. But when he signed the budget into law, Nixon imposed additional spending restrictions on higher education institutions _ essentially restoring the cut to the level he originally proposed.

Because of that move, House Budget Committee Chairman Ryan Silvey said he didn't know whether it would be worthwhile for lawmakers to try to lessen the 12.5 percent cut proposed this year by the governor.

"Clearly we want to put more in higher education," Silvey, R-Kansas City, said Wednesday. "We just don't know that he'll actually spend that."

One of the many pressures on Missouri's budget is the need to set aside around $100 million over a two-year period for disaster recovery costs associated with a deadly tornado that hit Joplin last May and with flooding along the Mississippi and Missouri rivers.

Nixon's proposed higher education cuts do not make any exception for Missouri Southern State University in Joplin, which incurred costs while serving as a staging area for disaster response efforts. The university has pledged to provide $1,000 scholarships for Joplin-area students who graduate from high school in the next couple years.

University President Bruce Speck said the school would not rescind its scholarship offer as a result of the proposed state funding cuts.

But "in a sense, that commitment is a little more painful now," Speck said.

He said the university will consider a range of options, including employee furloughs, restructuring degree programs and offering more courses electronically.

"We can't continue to whack here and whack there, we really need to think about how higher education is going in Missouri and how we need to adapt to that environment," Speck said.
Missouri colleges say impending state cuts will force tuition hikes

Gov. Jay Nixon wants the state's public colleges and universities to respond to his proposed 12.5 percent cut in state funding by running 'smarter, more efficient operations.'

But the campuses say they have virtually no chance of bridging the gap without tuition increases.

That position — staked out almost immediately after Nixon delivered his proposed budget Tuesday — could lead to a showdown between the governor and the schools over the size of tuition hikes.

For weeks, campus leaders have heard rumblings from Jefferson City about their role in Nixon's plan to plug a $500 million hole in the state's budget. Their fears were confirmed Tuesday, when Nixon revealed a proposed $106 million cut to four-year and two-year schools.

With Nixon, lawmakers and college administrators all stressing the need to keep college costs in check, the cut creates the potential for friction if anticipated tuition increases exceed the governor's wishes. The governor has not said what he expects.

A similar scenario played out last year when the University of Missouri raised tuition 5.5 percent, despite Nixon's suggestion to go no higher than 5 percent. The governor responded later by taking away an extra 1.1 percent of state appropriations from the system.

In his annual State of the State address Tuesday, Nixon said colleges and universities need to focus on ways to cut overhead and administrative costs.

"Public colleges and universities must change their business models," Nixon said, citing a program at the University of Central Missouri that could accelerate some undergraduate programs to three years or less.

But campus presidents and chancellors said Wednesday they have done much already in recent years to be more efficient. Salaries have been frozen. Staffing has been cut. Maintenance has been delayed.

At Missouri State University in Springfield, where administrators could be facing a deficit of more than $14 million, departments will again be asked to tighten their belts. But there is no hope of avoiding a tuition increase, said Clif Smart, the school's interim president.
"Not any way in the world do we have a chance of doing that. It's not realistic to think in year four of this austerity program that there are easy cuts," said Smart, noting the school has raised tuition a total of 4 percent over the last three years.

His thoughts were echoed by Troy Paino, president of Truman State University in Kirksville. The problem is that the 12.5 percent cut follows two years of reductions totaling more than 12 percent.

"That's roughly a quarter of our state appropriations in a three-year span," Paino said. "Obviously you are going to have to raise tuition when you are getting cut like this."

The University of Missouri system — in the midst of a leadership change as its new president prepares to take office — issued a statement by its interim president, Steve Owens. The four-campus system is reviewing the proposal and its impact on pay raises, tuition increases and potential cuts.

The statement noted the system receives less annual state funding than it did in 2001, despite substantial growth in enrollment.

"After a decade of reductions in state support and implementation of operational efficiencies, we are near the point where either the level of funding will have to increase or the scope and quality of services will have to decrease," Owens said.

In December, the system took its first steps toward an increase that would raise undergraduate tuition by at least 3 percent starting in the summer. But that was based on the assumption that state support would remain flat.

According to board documents, a 1 percent cut in state funding equals a loss of $3.9 million, meaning Nixon's plan would cut nearly $50 million from the system. Every 1 percent increase in tuition gains back $4.4 million.

The issue is likely to be an important part of the February meeting of the system's Board of Curators, particularly if they want to push for increases higher than the rate of inflation, which is expected to be 3 percent. Anything above that requires the system to apply for a waiver from the Commissioner for Higher Education, as the system did last year when it passed tuition increases averaging 5.5 percent for the four campuses.

That process can add more than a month to the timeline for getting an increase in place.

It's unclear, though, whether Nixon's entire cut will stick. Already, some key Republican legislators said they will work to soften the blow.

"That's the single largest cut to higher education in the state's history," said Senate Appropriations Chairman Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia. "That's a real problem."

Noting that community colleges provide job training that helps the state recruit businesses and retool plants, Schaefer called cutting college funding "an enormous blow to economic development."

Students would bear most of the burden because if the cut goes through, Schaefer said, "the realistic response from universities is very likely going to be a tuition increase."
The higher education cuts are among several initiatives proposed by Nixon. His budget also calls for $191.7 million in cuts to Medicaid, $64.3 million in gains from new debt collection measures and $51.8 million saved through a tax amnesty program.

Schaefer and Sen. Jim Lembke, R-Lemay, said they plan to scrutinize the growing Medicaid budget, which provides health care for the poor.

"We shouldn't just automatically go to higher education," Lembke said. "That just seems punitive."

But others warned that the state has already eliminated the "low-hanging fruit" in previous years' budget cuts, so the decisions are getting tougher.

Given sluggish revenue growth and the end of one-time federal funding, Nixon's "got to cut somewhere," said Sen. Kevin Engler, R-Farmington. "You can't just keep doing whistles and mirrors and smoke. You have to cut services."

Nixon's plan received a vote of confidence from Rep. Mike Talboy, D-Kansas City, who said higher education officials likely have been working with Nixon's office on the proposed cuts to find a number the schools can stomach.

"It's not just something they came up with," said Talboy, the Democratic leader in the House.

Though Talboy expressed faith that the administration would not seek to cut more than the state's higher education institutions could withstand, he ventured no stance on what would happen if those cuts led to a call for tuition increases.

"That's a decision I have zero input in," Talboy said.
University of Missouri System interim President Steve Owens reacted to Gov. Jay Nixon’s proposal to slash $106 million from higher education financing by pointing out that Missouri already ranks 45th among states in per-capita higher education spending.

That’s lower than all of Missouri’s neighboring states and states in the South.

“It is fair to ask how long we can continue to do more with less,” University of Missouri System interim President Steve Owens says in response to a proposal to cut higher education financing.

Owens’ statement follows Nixon’s Tuesday evening State of the State speech, which included a call for a 12.5 percent ($106 million) cut to higher education financing.

Missouri Department of Higher Education figures show that with Nixon’s recommended budget, higher education would receive a total appropriation of $842.9 million; the system received $876.1 million in fiscal 1998.

Owens said that financing for higher education has been dropping since 2001, even though the system now has 17,000 more students.
“We are still reviewing the governor’s budget recommendation presented last night and assessing its impact on pay raises for university employees, tuition increases for students and further cuts throughout the university,” Owens said.

Nixon also proposed eliminating 816 state government positions and making cuts to Medicaid.
UM looks at budget’s potential tuition impact

By Janese Silvey

University of Missouri System administrators are still crunching the numbers, but a proposed cut in state funding might trigger a larger tuition increase.

UM administrators last month were eyeing a 3 percent tuition increase — the consumer price index — but only if state appropriations remained flat. Gov. Jay Nixon’s proposed budget calls for a $45 million cut, or 12.5 percent, to UM.

“I think we’re going to see higher tuition rates,” Curator Wayne Goode said. “It’s hard to say how high that’s going to be at this point. ... We may need to run a little beyond inflation. Hopefully not too much.”

Curators are expected to see proposed tuition increases at their February meeting. In December, Nikki Krawitz, vice president of finance and administration for UM, said the system already was facing a $78 million gap in a 2013 budget that called for 3 percent salary increases and money for building improvements.

In a statement, UM interim President Steve Owens said his staff is reviewing how the proposed cut will affect pay raises and tuition.

Sydney Miller, an intern with the Associated Students of the University of Missouri, said she understands the need to increase tuition to plug state funding gaps, but she worries about the effect on future students.

“Everyone says they want a world-class education provided for Missourians, but this is making it a little more difficult for anyone wanting a higher education,” said Miller, a junior at MU. “It’s putting more on the backs of students and families.”

Nixon called on colleges and universities to continue to look for ways to cut overhead and administrative costs. But university representatives argue they’ve been doing that for years. Right now, the UM System receives less state support than it did in 2001 while educating 17,000 more students on the four campuses.

“It is fair to ask how long we can continue to do more with less,” Owens said. “After a decade of reductions in state support and implementation of operational efficiencies, we are near the point where either the level of funding will have to increase or the scope and quality of services will have to decrease.”
That Nixon “wants us to try harder, we are a little disappointed with that sentiment because we have been doing that for 10 years, and it’s going to start affecting the quality of education,” Miller said.

MU Chancellor Brady Deaton expressed similar sentiments this morning.

“The university has been doing so much with less funding on an ongoing basis,” he said. “There are limits as to how far we can go.”

Reach Janese Silvey at 573-815-1705 or e-mail jsilvey@columbiatribune.com.
Governor proposes a 12.5 percent cut.

JEFFERSON CITY — Colleges and universities took the biggest hit yesterday when Gov. Jay Nixon unveiled his budget for the coming year, losing $105.9 million, or 12.5 percent, of their state support.

Nixon’s recommendations for the $23.1 billion budget for the year that begins July 1 envision savings in many areas, but colleges and universities are the only large section of the budget singled out for a major cut. The University of Missouri will absorb $45 million of that cut, reducing its state support to $348.5 million — the lowest level since 1996.

The budget plan was presented at the same time Nixon offered his legislative plan for the year. The speech was part recitation of past achievement and part calls for action. Some items are unlikely to pass the Republican-controlled General Assembly, such as campaign donation limits. Others, such as changes to tax credits or new programs to promote job growth and exports, might find more favor.

Nixon did announce scholarships will get $25 million more general revenue next year to replace funds from a one-time source.

The cuts are necessary to make up a $500 million shortfall between revenue and spending, said Linda Luebbering, state budget director. Other areas for savings include Medicaid, where the state will find savings by holding the line on payments to managed care companies, and state employment, where Nixon intends to eliminate 816 jobs. Most of those positions will be jobs that will not be filled, Luebbering said.

There are a few places where Nixon is adding spending. He is giving state workers a 2 percent raise next Jan. 1, which will cost the state $23.6 million. And he is adding $5 million to the state Foundation Formula for public schools, allowing him to say it is the highest allotment for public education in state history.

But there is uncertainty in Nixon’s proposal — $64 million of the $8.02 billion general revenue budget depends on tax amnesty legislation that failed to win passage last year.

The reaction among lawmakers was swift and, for the most part, negative.

Although it might seem easy to take the raises from state employees to offset cuts to higher education, that is not the way it should be viewed, said Rep. Stephen Webber, D-Columbia.
"My problem is pitting two groups of hardworking people against each other," Webber said. "We have cut taxes for years, and now there is no money for either group, and they are fighting over the scraps."

Senate President Pro Tem Rob Mayer, R-Dexter, said he wanted Nixon to present a budget that did not rely on lawmakers to pass new revenue measures.

"This once again relies on shell games to be balanced," Mayer said.

Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, said the tight budget will hem in lawmakers as they seek to make changes.

Last year, when lawmakers restored a bit of the money Nixon cut from higher education, it was withheld when the budget year began, and it has not been released.

Nixon even went further than his originally proposed cut when dealing with the University of Missouri budget to punish the school for raising tuition at its four campuses by more than 5 percent.

"The budget for the past three years has been balanced on the back of higher education," said Schaefer, who also criticized Nixon on budget issues in the GOP response.

Asked whether the deep cut provides cover for a massive tuition hike, Schaefer said that is up to the University of Missouri Board of Curators.

"I don’t think it is a green light to raise tuition as high as they want, but with a 12.5 percent cut to the University of Missouri, it is the curators’ job to evaluate what that means," he said.

Schaefer’s likely Democratic opponent, Rep. Mary Still of Columbia, said Nixon and Schaefer should try harder to find money for the university.

"It is disappointing to me that neither Sen. Schaefer nor Gov. Nixon offered any revenue solutions to save the University of Missouri from devastating cuts," she said.

Reach Rudi Keller at 573-815-1709 or e-mail rkeller@columbiatribune.com.
UM System, MU respond to Gov. Nixon's proposed higher education cuts

By MISSOURIAN STAFF
January 18, 2012 | 9:17 p.m. CST

UM SYSTEM STATE FUNDING
in millions

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In his 2012 State of the State address Tuesday, Gov. Jay Nixon proposed an $89 million reduction in funding for four-year higher education institutions in fiscal year 2013. This includes a $55 million reduction in funding for the UM System, a 13.7 percent decrease from fiscal year 2012's gross appropriations.

COLUMBIA — Uncertainty reigned Wednesday as faculty, staff and students in the University of Missouri System reacted to Gov. Jay Nixon’s proposed cuts to higher education.

Some wondered if the cuts would lead to a decline in the quality of education and many speculated about how they would affect proposed increases in student tuition and course fees.

In his State of the State address Tuesday, Nixon announced that his proposed budget for fiscal year 2013 includes stable funding for state college scholarships, including Bright Flight, Access Missouri and A+ scholarship programs. As written, the cost of that stability is an $89 million reduction in funding for four-year higher education institutions.
The UM System would see a nearly 13.7 percent reduction from fiscal year 2012's gross appropriations, which would be a cut of more than $55 million to the system's operating budget.

In an official statement released Wednesday, interim system president Steve Owens addressed the governor's proposed cuts.

"It is fair to ask how long we can continue to do more with less," Owens said in the release. "After a decade of reductions in state support and implementation of operational efficiencies, we are near the point where either the level of funding will have to increase or the scope and quality of services will have to decrease."

MU Chancellor Brady Deaton has yet to release a statement about the proposed reductions, and MU spokesman Christian Basi said it's too early to know the full economic impact of Nixon's proposal on the university's budget.

"We have a very long way to go in this process," Basi said. "But we will obviously be doing a lot of work until the budget is finalized."

Owens said in the statement that the system is still looking through the budget recommendation and assessing its impact on employee pay raises, student tuition increases and other cuts throughout the university.

At its December board meeting, the UM System Board of Curators discussed what a decline in state funding would mean for the system as well as potential tuition and course fee increases needed to bridge the $78 million funding gap the system already faces.

The board also discussed a proposal to raise 2012-13 tuition at MU, the University of Missouri-Kansas City and the University of Missouri-St. Louis at the rate of inflation assuming the system received the same state appropriations as in fiscal year 2012.

Faculty Council Chairman Harry Tyrer said there are ways to alleviate some financial pressure, but they might cause other problems.

"The faculty work very hard to maintain standards, so I don’t believe the quality of education is in danger, but this may cause concern financially for students," Tyrer said. "The university can increase enrollment to increase our budget, but doing so will run us into other problems, such as possibly higher classroom fees. More students mean more laboratory equipment and classroom space, which is a problem because we are already pushing our capacity levels."
Corbin Evans, legislative director of the Associated Students of the University of Missouri, said the quality of education might be affected if the university was unable to pay for the best faculty or maintain efficient class sizes. He also expressed concern that the quality of different facilities might not remain up-to-date, which might affect students with specialized majors.

"I'm almost certain (the decreased appropriations) would result in a tuition increase," Evans said.

Nick Prewett, MU student financial aid interim director, said in an email that with higher tuition costs comes lower accessibility to Missouri colleges and universities. Students with already-limited resources would find it difficult to attend college, he said.

The proposal still needs to be reviewed by legislators, some of whom might protest the proposed cuts. According to a report by the Associated Press, Kurt Schaefer, senate appropriations committee chairman and Columbia Republican, plans to resist the proposed cuts.

"As we move forward together, the university remains committed to working with the governor and the legislature to find ways to adequately fund higher education and to maintain the quality and excellence that Missourians rightfully expect from the university," Owens said.

Breanna Dumbacher, Ryan Finan, Abigail Geiger, Margaux Henquinet, Allie Hinga and Zach Murdock contributed to this report.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Missouri public university funding falls 13.6 percent since 2002

NO MU Mention

By Celia Ampel
January 18, 2012 | 8:54 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA — The state reduced per-student funding for major public research universities by 13.6 percent from 2002 to 2010, according to a news release sent Wednesday from the National Science Board.

The report comes on the heels of Gov. Jay Nixon's State of the State address, where he proposed a $196 million reduction in funding for higher education institutions. This comes to an approximate 13 percent decrease from last year's budget. After adjusting figures for inflation, the higher education section of the board's report found per-pupil spending in Missouri dropped from $10,200 to $8,812 from 2002 to 2010. Nationally, state funding for the top 101 public research universities decreased by 10 percent on average during that time, the release stated.

The report, Science and Engineering Indicators, is prepared every two years. It provides data on American jobs and education funding and performance, which have not been adjusted for inflation. Policymakers, federal agencies, researchers and journalists use its findings to evaluate the country's competitiveness in science and technology, the release stated.

Despite the decline in state funding, Missouri's per-pupil spending is above the national average for the first time since 2005, according to the release. The most recent data reported are for 2010.

The report also examined state spending on student aid per full-time undergraduate student. Missouri has spent far less than the national average on student aid since data were first collected in 1995. For example, in 2006, Missouri spent $198 per student. Nationally, states averaged $785 per student. But from 2006 to 2008, Missouri's per-pupil student aid spending did increase to $503, which was closer to the national average at that time.
Editorial: Missouri leadership lacks big ideas

By the Editorial Board | Posted: Thursday, January 19, 2012 12:15 am

No MU mention

A Missouri resident who might wander into the state Capitol this week would get a pretty good sense of the priorities of the state Legislature, which enacts laws that affect our daily lives.

It's an important week: The first bills tapped by Republican leaders make their way to the floor. Other priorities get quick hearings, with bills put on the "fast track" to send a message that might steal a headline from Gov. Jay Nixon's annual state of the state speech, which he gave Tuesday.

Such a person, wanting to see progress made on jobs or education or roads or perhaps new rules to save dying children in unregulated day cares, would be disappointed. They might even be spitting mad.

That describes the feelings of Republican Sen. Jason Crowell of Cape Girardeau toward his colleagues as they tried to rush through a bill favored by the Missouri Chamber of Commerce that would make it harder for workers to be compensated fairly for workplace injuries.

The bill looked nothing like one senators passed the previous session after a full year of intense debate and behind-the-scenes negotiating. Instead, it mirrored what the chamber wanted, with little regard for workers who might get sick from certain occupational diseases and find themselves with nothing to show for it.

The bill, Mr. Crowell said, "spits" at the tradition of the Senate.

Indeed, if what is going on at the state Capitol this week is any indication, the Missouri Legislature is all but abandoning any serious work in this election year.

In the House, leaders rushed a bill to the floor that would limit the ability of the state to raise revenue when the economy improves, rather than doing anything to counter the ongoing budget crisis. In the Senate, the first bill slated for serious debate would make it easier to discriminate against workers. Businesses violating the civil rights of their employees would avoid costly lawsuits.

In hearings this week, lawmakers heard bills that would reduce workers' wages and criminalize undocumented immigrants, importing unconstitutional bills from Arizona and Alabama to the Show-Me State. A hearing on a very important topic, the future of Interstate 70, highlighted the
state's inability to embrace its responsibility to fund transportation, instead looking to tolls as the only solution worth discussing.

**Meanwhile, Mr. Nixon,** a Democrat, once again embraced Missouri's cost-cutting race to the bottom, proposing a budget that cuts higher education by 12 percent while repackaging the same tired, old business incentive handouts that have done little to rebuild the state's economy.

Yes, Mr. Nixon, Missourians are granite-strong, and we will rebound from natural disasters. But as the state continues to cement its status as one in which there is no hope that our educational system will ever be funded adequately, or even reach the middle of the nation's rankings, where is the countervailing message to the Republicans' attempts to destroy the social contract that says we care for our fellow man and that we should build a better future for the next generation than the one we have?

**Such hope** is hard to find while walking the stately marble floors of the Missouri Capitol this week. Neither the governor nor the Legislature is willing to commit to big ideas that might actually make Missouri a better place to live.

Be scared, Missourians. Be very, very scared.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

UPDATE: Lawmakers might resist governor's proposed cuts to higher education

By DAVID A. LIEB/The Associated Press
January 18, 2012 | 6:47 p.m. CST

JEFFERSON CITY — Missouri university officials warned Wednesday of potential tuition increases, course reductions and employee furloughs if Gov. Jay Nixon's newly proposed 12.5 percent funding cut for higher education comes to fruition. Nixon's budget proposal would drop state aid to public colleges and universities to its lowest level since 1997, compounding the financial strain on schools that already have been forced to trim costs during several consecutive years of flat or declining state funding.

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Last year, Nixon proposed a roughly 7 percent cut to the core budgets of colleges and universities. The legislature pared that back to roughly 5.5 percent. But when he signed the budget into law, Nixon imposed additional spending restrictions on higher education institutions — essentially restoring the cut to the level he originally proposed. Because of that move, House Budget Committee Chairman Ryan Silvey said he didn’t know whether it would be worthwhile for lawmakers to try to lessen the 12.5 percent cut proposed this year by the governor.

"Clearly we want to put more in higher education," Silvey, R-Kansas City, said Wednesday. "We just don't know that he'll actually spend that." One of the many pressures on Missouri's budget is the need to set aside around $100 million over a two-year period for disaster recovery costs associated with a deadly tornado that hit Joplin last May and flooding along the Mississippi and Missouri rivers.

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"We can't continue to whack here and whack there. We really need to think about how higher education is going in Missouri and how we need to adapt to that environment," Speck said.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

GEORGE KENNEDY: Closing the gap between rhetoric and reality will be a challenge

By George Kennedy
January 19, 2012 | 6:00 a.m. CST

COLUMBIA — Here we go again. If you thought last year’s legislative session was bitter and unproductive, this year’s is likely to make 2011 seem like the good old days.

That’s the only thing we can take for granted after Gov. Jay Nixon and the Republican respondents to his State of the State speech talked past each other Tuesday night.

Oh, they used a lot of the same words, the most repeated being "jobs." But their rhetoric left little room for optimism that they’ll reach agreement on actually creating any.

In fact, the governor's proposed budget includes job cuts and another major reduction in funding for higher education. Our own Sen. Kurt Schaefer, who chairs the Senate budget committee, immediately declared that "unacceptable."

About the only thing the governor and legislative leaders agree on is their refusal even to consider the only way to avoid draconian cuts. Of course, that would be an increase in our lowest-in-the-nation cigarette tax or joining the ranks of states that tax Internet commerce.

Gov. Nixon does favor the trimming of tax credits. We saw how that turned out in 2011, as Republican legislators in the House and Senate squabbled among themselves in a special session that will be remembered for what it didn’t accomplish.

To be fair, I’m sure the Republicans would agree with one thing the governor said: "We’re all Missourians first." Shared values cut across party lines, he added. I took that to mean that he thinks we’re content with being a low-tax, low-service state. It would certainly appear that most of us are.
The Post-Dispatch in an editorial summarized our ranking. We’re 47th in tax burden, which leads to being 42nd in funding higher education, 37th in supporting lower education, 46th in teacher salaries and 50th in pay for state employees.

Those numbers call into question another of the governor’s assertions. He said, "The good people of Missouri never give up or give in."

Despite the temptation to do both, Boone County’s representatives persist. Except for Sen. Schaefer, they’re all Democrats, which means they’re powerless. That reality hasn’t discouraged them from fantasizing about raising the tobacco tax and levying a sales tax on purchases made online.

Gov. Nixon emphasized the importance of higher education and urged funding for scholarships. Rhetoric gave way to reality, however, in the 12.5 percent cut he proposed for the institutions the scholarship recipients will attend. **For the university’s four campuses, the hit would be more than $55 million.**

Rep. Chris Kelly told the Missourian, "You have to ask yourself, where’s the line between access and quality?" He added that "having accessibility to institutions of decreasing quality is not a benefit."

The governor said he expects university budget builders to cover the cuts by increased efficiency and decreased overhead. A reasonable translation would be bigger classes and more nonregular faculty to teach them. Or, as he put it, public universities will have to "change their business model."

Gov. Nixon concluded his speech with the ritual request that God bless us all. I realized that closing the gap between rhetoric and reality probably would require divine intervention. Let us pray.

*George Kennedy is a former managing editor at the Missourian and professor emeritus at the Missouri School of Journalism.*
School funding formula is focus of Missouri legislators' work

BY ELISA CROUCH • ecrouch@post-dispatch.com > 314-340-8119 | Posted: Thursday, January 19, 2012 12:05 am

JEFFERSON CITY • Missouri's lagging revenue has school districts bracing for a situation in which some may gain and others may lose millions of dollars if adjustments aren't made to the state's school funding formula.

Lawmakers began on Wednesday debating fixes to the formula — a calculation approved in 2005 to provide adequate funds to all students by next year. For four years, budget shortages have delayed that goal. Now, legislators are faced with a $250 million to $300 million shortage that could pit districts against each other.

However, they decide to adjust things, there will be winners and losers, legislators concede. But because of the intricacies of the formula, doing nothing could result in hundreds of millions of dollars shifting among school districts, with some losing as much as 20 percent of their state funding and others gaining as much.

"The money moving back and forth is not a fair thing and will not be good for our state," Rep. Mike Thomson, R-Maryville, told the House Committee on Elementary and Secondary Education.

The intent of the funding formula is to bridge funding gaps between wealthy and poorer school districts. The plan had hoped to phase in an additional $800 million of school aid over seven years. But it provided little guidance as to how to scale back spending to individual districts if that new money did not materialize.

Currently, all of the state's more than 500 school districts are taking the same percentage hit. But the consequences aren't equal. School districts that rely mostly on local property taxes to operate, such as Kirkwood and Clayton districts, are affected differently from those that rely more on state aid, such as Riverview Gardens, Wentzville and Francis Howell.

Thomson's bill would apply the shortfall to school districts differently depending on their funding classification.
School districts dependent on the formula, which have gained more state revenue than they used to collect, would take a bigger hit than the 151 districts not on the formula, often defined as "hold harmless" districts. Funding to some of those districts has remained frozen since 2005.

Hold harmless districts would take one third of the hit of those on the formula, because formula districts have generally seen greater increases in funding. Hold harmless districts in the St. Louis area include St. Louis Public Schools, Lindbergh, Ladue and Parkway. Formula school districts include Fort Zumwalt, Mehlville, Rockwood and Webster Groves.

The bill also would allow the Missouri education department to recalculate cost-of-living and labor adjustments in the formula annually, potentially distributing more cash to suburban and urban schools.

In the Senate, the Education Committee heard a similar bill Wednesday that would divvy up the money a bit differently.

The total cost of the formula is driven by its goal of reaching "adequacy targets," which are intended to provide a minimum level of per-pupil spending. That amount is based on how much money the state's highest performing districts spend. This year, the target is $6,131 per student.

But that target is rising. As it does, the state has less money to distribute to hold harmless districts. At the same time, districts fully funded by the formula would generally see increases.

And this is what bothers legislators.

"I don't like the idea of taking money from some and giving it to others," said Rep. Joe Aull, D-Marshall.

But Aull also expressed concern that new legislation could hurt some school districts — including at least one that he represents — more than others.

"The whole point of this thing is trying to get everybody more equal," Thomson said. "So yes, there will be some losses and there will be some gains. But they will be smaller. ... We don't want schools winning or losing 20 percent in excess."
Missouri teachers could be evaluated on student progress

BY JESSICA BOCK jbock@post-dispatch.com 314-340-8228 | Posted: Thursday, January 19, 2012 12:15 am

No MU mention

For the first time, Missouri teachers would be evaluated partly on the performance of their students, according to a plan that could free the state from the increasingly unpopular No Child Left Behind law.

Missouri — as are nearly all states — is moving forward with its application to federal education officials for a waiver relieving the state from the law that requires all children be proficient in reading and math by 2014.

Last year, less than 18 percent of districts in the state met yearly goals required by the accountability rules of the federal law. Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education leaders say schools would still be held accountable, but the new flexibility would allow the state to set "ambitious, yet achievable" goals.

But the application requires states to make certain reforms, including changing teacher evaluations, which also could be unpopular with educators.

"This personalizes the pressure," said Jack Jennings, founder of the nonprofit Washington-based Center on Education Policy. "It becomes a personal consequence, rather than a school consequence."

Many teachers are coming to grips with a new evaluation system that takes into account student performance, he said. Some believe that measure should be a part of a teacher's evaluation as long as it is not the predominate factor, and it is based on the right tests.

Teachers unions in Missouri have concerns.

Ann Jarrett, teaching and learning director for the Missouri National Education Association, said the Missouri Assessment Program, the state's standardized test, should not be that measure. It was not designed to evaluate teachers, she said.

But the association is in favor of improvements to teacher evaluations.
"Teacher evaluations should help teachers to improve, and it should help schools to improve. It should give teachers feedback on what their strengths and weaknesses are," Jarrett said. "Right now, in too many instances, it does not do that."

The union — as well as the Missouri State Teachers Association — say local teachers and school boards should determine how their educators are evaluated, not state officials.

In its application, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education says it would develop a model for teacher evaluations, and it would be up to the local school districts to use that example or develop their own. But individual models would be required to use certain parts of the state model, including student performance.

Eleven states — Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Tennessee — submitted applications to federal officials for waivers in the first round, and dozens more, including Missouri and Illinois, have said they intend to apply by the Feb. 21 deadline.

In Illinois, education officials had already begun work on a new teacher evaluation system before beginning their application.

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has said that giving states flexibility in No Child Left Behind will allow them to move beyond the bubble tests and dumbed-down standards based on arbitrary ideas of proficiency. Improving evaluations to consider student growth will help focus on what really matters — the annual gains of students, federal education officials say.

As the state refines its application, the change in teacher evaluations has sparked the most debate. But educators say the other ideas floated in the application are welcome changes.

New measures of accountability are needed, officials say. Rather than basing performance on a single test, the focus would change to individual student growth over time.

If the application is approved, Missouri will move toward one accountability system. Right now, districts are held to No Child Left Behind benchmarks, as well as measures in the state's annual performance report. It leads to confusion when some districts are labeled as failing under No Child Left Behind but considered a top performer by the state. That has happened with the Parkway School District, for example.

The district did not meet annual progress goals when the state released the results of standardized tests last summer. Just a few months later, the district received 14 of 14 performance points in its review from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

"That was a huge conflict we were constantly having to explain," said Kathy Blackmore, an assistant superintendent in Parkway.

Under No Child Left Behind, schools that fail to make the required yearly gains face a series of sanctions, such as allowing students to transfer to more successful schools.
But in many cases, educators believe those sanctions can work against progress in student achievement.

States seeking waivers are required to focus on improving schools that score in the lowest 5 percent and those with the widest achievement gaps.

If a state's application is approved, schools there could see changes in requirements under No Child Left Behind as soon as 2012-13.
Chamber of Commerce sees ways for Missouri to still play games in KC

By TEREZ A. PAYLOR

Even though Missouri officials have said they want the Tigers to maintain an athletic presence in Kansas City, local leaders wanted to be sure MU is serious about continuing to play games here after it joins the Southeastern Conference.

That’s why Jim Heeter, head of the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce, called a 90-minute meeting Wednesday that included Missouri athletic director Mike Alden and political representatives from Jackson County, Kansas City, the Chiefs and Sprint Center.

Heeter came away convinced about MU’s desires.

“It was real clear to me,” he said, “that Missouri was absolutely sincere in wanting to keep a major presence here in Kansas City.”

The meeting also showed local leaders have moved past the “please don’t go” stage that began when Missouri’s talks with the SEC were revealed.

“I suggest it’s a great opportunity for Kansas City,” Heeter said. “We keep our Big 12 base and then expand our base to the SEC. We can make what’s already one of the great sports towns in America an even greater sports town.”

While both sides called this first meeting exploratory, there is some interest in a few of the ideas that were tossed around. Among them were Missouri continuing to play an annual football game in Arrowhead Stadium, and serving as host for a holiday basketball tournament at Sprint Center, which would be reminiscent of the old Big Eight tournament that used to be held around Christmastime.

“A lot of us would love to see that tournament revive, maybe with former Big Eight schools and maybe even some regional schools like Drake and Creighton,” said Heeter, who called it “a real possibility” though it probably would be difficult to make it happen next season.

The group also discussed a possible date for a 2012 football game at Arrowhead, though Heeter and Alden admitted that it might be difficult to make it happen because MU is still trying to finalize its football schedule.
"We have three games that we need to get for 2012," Alden said. "Our focus has got to be on filling out that schedule."

Alden said Missouri hopes to have the schedule done by March 1, though he reiterated that one of those games will almost certainly not be against archrival Kansas. Although Missouri was originally scheduled to face the Jayhawks at Arrowhead in 2012 for the annual Border War game, Alden said numerous discussions he's had with KU leaders have not been fruitful.

"We do" want to play Kansas and "we've made that pretty clear," Alden said. "It's a great rivalry, and we would hope to be able to play that ... but again, that's a decision that's beyond us. Certainly, the University of Kansas has had to make their decisions, and certainly they've made their decision clear."

In fact, when asked whether he received a direct and final no on Kansas about the upcoming Border War, Alden basically said he had.

"I would say probably yes," Alden said. "I don't know how you would define a 'direct and final no,' but I would say yes."

Alden also reiterated the school's desire to bring the SEC men's basketball tournament to Kansas City, possibly as soon as the 2017-18 season.

"They're gonna take a look at bids throughout their entire footprint, which includes KC," said Alden, who added that he spoke with SEC officials Tuesday. "I know they're hoping they would receive a bid and proposal from Kansas City to be able to host their tournament here."

Heeter also shot down the belief that Missouri's departure for the SEC would hurt the city's chances of keeping the Big 12 basketball tournament in Kansas City.

"We don't believe that's the case," Heeter said. "and the indications are that is not the case."

But while optimism ran high about the future Wednesday, Heeter and Alden said numerous times that talks about any of the things discussed were still in the early stages.

Heeter said the same group — which included Chiefs president Mark Donovan and Chiefs special-events director Gary Spani; Kansas City Mayor Pro-Tem Cindy Circo; Jackson County Executive Mike Sanders; and Kansas City Convention and Visitors Association president Rick Hughes — plans to reconvene again in late February or early March to continue discussions as Missouri transitions to the SEC.

"Missouri has made its decision," Heeter said. "I understand why they did."

"Now what's important to Kansas City is to make lemonade out of that."
A new study casts doubt on the popular notion that a gender stereotype—namely, that girls are bad at math—explains why men dominate the higher levels of mathematics achievement and accomplishment. The researchers suggest that evidence is "weak at best" for what's been called the "stereotype threat" explanation.

They suggest this comes at a real cost, because focusing interventions on this particular issue leads to neglect of other, and possibly more promising, paths to better gender balance in the math field.

"The stereotype theory really was adopted by psychologists and policymakers around the world as the final word, with the idea that eliminating the stereotype could eliminate the gender gap," said David Geary, a professor of psychological sciences at the University of Missouri, in a press release issued today. "However, even with many programs established to address the issue, the problem continued. We now believe the wrong problem is being addressed."

The new study, co-authored by Geary and Giljsbert Stoet from the University of Leeds in England, will soon be published in the journal, Review of General Psychology.

The two researchers examined 20 studies that sought to replicate the original 1999 research on the stereotype threat. In doing so, they say they discovered that many of the subsequent studies had serious flaws, including the lack of a male control group and improperly applied statistical techniques.

The new study says that while most researchers agree that gender differences exist in math achievement at the higher levels of performance, "the really interesting question is what factors contribute to these differences, especially given that it will be impossible to close the gender gap without understanding these factors."

The researchers continue: "When policymakers believe that achievement differences in mathematics can be overcome by simply reducing stereotypical beliefs (as the literature suggests), they might not be willing to invest in the study of other potential contributing factors and thus will not pursue solutions for these factors."

For those especially interested in research on math education, here are a few links to other studies we've highlighted on this blog and elsewhere at edweek.org over the past year. One especially popular story with readers was Sarah D. Sparks' article about the causes of math anxiety. In addition, we've featured:

• A study finding that U.S. students typically encounter an easier math curriculum than those in many other nations, with wide differences also seen across states and school districts.
• A study that offered insights into the kinds of math skills children should learn early on to be best prepared for success in the subject as they advance into higher grades.

• Research showing that a lack of language skills can hamstring a student's ability to understand basic concepts in mathematics.
Bringing the world to Mizzou and Mizzou to the world

By Rebecca S. Rivas | Posted: Thursday, January 19, 2012 12:09 am

Dr. Handy Williamson Jr. was preparing for a visit with Indonesian officials on Jan. 5 when The St. Louis American called.

"Indonesia wants to become more competitive," said Williamson, the vice provost for international programs and strategic initiatives at University of Missouri–Columbia.

Indonesian officials were proposing MU as a partner to help them improve their higher education system. The proposal aligns with a 2010 agreement President Obama signed to encourage such partnerships with Indonesia.

On Jan. 13, Williamson was supposed to depart to Indonesia with the St. Louis World Trade Center and former Senator Kit Bond, who was leading a trade mission to Indonesia to help Missouri companies enter into that market.

Williamson cancelled because he had to receive a representative from China at MU during that time.

This thick list of delegation engagements came out when Williamson was asked a simple question, "What is your typical day like?"

Williamson does a lot of traveling around the world, and he’s often called to serve as an international trade and agriculture expert.

Williamson leads the university in providing MU students faculty with study abroad opportunities. Yet he also has his hands in building international career opportunities for his students when they graduate. And on top of that, he helps with global development efforts around the world.

In the fall, Williamson was appointed to serve on the Sub-Saharan Africa Chamber of Commerce, which is a trade and investment promotion organization whose mission is to enhance mutual partnership, and trade and investment with Sub-Saharan Africa.

"The most important thing is to be in a position to help improve the life of other people, and that includes Missouri as well," he said.

As a graduate student at MU in 1969, Williamson never saw this life coming.

"When I was a student here, my focus was on the needs of African Americans in the South – in rural sections and in agriculture," he said. "I was approached by a team to go to Nicaragua, and I adamantly said 'no' because I needed to focus on my people. Tuskegee exposed me to the international development arena."

Williamson says it was serendipity. His first job was at Tuskegee Institute, serving as associate director and assistant professor for the Center for Rural Development Research (1974 to 1977). While
there, he was tapped to speak with international delegates about Tuskegee’s historical role and what the institute was doing in agricultural development. He was then invited to go to Swaziland to do a human-resource assessment in 1976. Since that time, he has done consulting assignments every year somewhere in Africa or around the world, in addition to his “day job.”

Williamson arrived at MU one year after Martin Luther King Jr. was killed.

“It was an interesting time,” he said. “While I was here, I was able to recruit. The department provided a supportive environment back then. To jump forward, MU has been successful in increasing African-American students. We have the highest enrollment ever in the history of enrollment for African-American undergraduate students.”

And in his office, he sees many African-American students explore foreign countries as part of the study abroad program.

One of the most enriching parts of his life right now is his collaborative work with peanuts.

Two days before Christmas, he returned from Malta, where he participated in an international workshop on peanuts. For 20 years, he has been an advisor for the Peanut Collaborative Research Support Program.

Contaminated peanuts can compromise the immune system in people, he said. The group works to improve quality, increase production and increase products of peanuts around the world. The project is sustainable as schools are purchasing the products, and students now have improved diets.

“I have a chance to assist in small ways with improving the conditions and prospects of people around the world,” he said. “That gives me great satisfaction. I never imagined I would be able to do that.”

MU has students enrolled from 109 countries around the world and 1,400 international visiting scholars. It has partners with over 200 universities around the world.

“We have vast study abroad programs around the world,” he said. “And we are enabling Missouri businesses to get better traction in China and other places.”
Missouri University of Science and Technology to name new chancellor

ROLLA, Mo. — Officials of the University of Missouri system are preparing to name a new chancellor for the Rolla campus.

The appointment at the Missouri University of Science and Technology is scheduled to be announced Thursday.

The previous chancellor, John Carney, retired in August 2011 after six years at the helm. During his tenure, the school's name was changed from the University of Missouri-Rolla.

Former provost Warren Kent Wray has been serving as interim chancellor. Wray was announced Wednesday as one of six finalists for chancellor of North Dakota's university system.