COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Columbia legislators vow to fight Gov. Nixon's education cuts

By Jacob Kirn, Zach Murdock
January 26, 2012 | 8:49 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA — Columbia legislators expressed unanimous outrage to the proposed cuts to higher education at a Mizzou Alumni Association event Thursday night.

The meeting, the 10th annual Legislative Forum on Higher Education, became a call to action for alumni.

State Sen. Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, said the cuts are happening because the university community failed to speak up during smaller cuts the previous two years.

"We're going to use our voices this time," he said. "(If this budget passes) it will mean a 25 percent cut for higher education in the last three years."

Rep. Mary Still, D-Columbia, implored the crowd to support her initiative to raise the state’s cigarette tax, which would raise revenue.

"There's no redeeming value in having the lowest cigarette tax in the country," Still said. "We can add $400 million in revenue in one year by having a reasonable tax."

If other measures fail, Schaefer said he will fight the cuts in the Senate, the last place the budget will go before it reaches Gov. Jay Nixon's desk.

"There are a lot of other places in the budget where it could come from," Schaefer said. "(This budget) has been balanced on the back of K-12 and higher education. Period."

Though Schaefer offered few specifics, Rep. Chris Kelly, D-Columbia, said money could be cut from the Missouri Office of Administration and called the recommendation to cut administrative costs to the University of Missouri System insulting.

Kelly said the system has already been making those cuts for years, which has the system "eating itself from within."
Things being done at Missouri universities are vital, Kelly said, but admitted that giving more money to colleges and universities only means less money for someone else.

Rep. Stephen Webber, D-Columbia, agreed that the budget situation has put everyone in a bind.

"It's pitted equally worthy parties against each other to fight for the scraps," he said. "And now the legislature is saying that it thinks students should have to pay more. Not the big corporations getting tax breaks."

Kelly said there is no telling whether a push to alleviate some of the cuts to higher education will succeed.

"I'm a legislator not a fortune teller," he said. "It's just the start of a ball game."
Students stand against education cuts

The Missouri Students Association is calling on students to sign an online petition, send letters to legislators and tweet about the proposed cuts for higher education.

By Molly Duffy Published Jan. 27, 2012

In the wake of Gov. Jay Nixon’s proposed 12.5 percent budget cut to education, some MU students are voicing their opposition.

“We want to let legislators know that students are very passionate about this issue.” Missouri Students Association Senator Zach Toombs said.

MSA passed a resolution opposing the cuts Wednesday. It hopes to show legislators there is overwhelming opposition to the proposed budget, as well as highlighting facts and trends in education funding in Missouri, Toombs said.

The UM System receives less funding than it did in 2001, yet educates 17,000 more students, according to MSA's bill. If the proposed budget is passed, the UM System will be operating with the lowest amount of state funding since 1997.

Compared to other states, Missouri ranks 42 in state funding for higher education. MU Budget Director Tim Rooney said.

MSA President Xavier Billingsley said when MU moves to the SEC, it will be dead last in the conference for funding.

The resolution also points out that MU students are paying 21 percent more of MU’s operations budget compared to 20 years ago. The state is paying 28 percent less.

MSA’s “Resources for Taking a Stand” page on its website calls for students to fight against “this trend that burdens students with more debt and more costs every year.”

The page outlines several ways to show opposition to the budget cuts. MSA asks students to sign an online petition and write a letter to their state representative or senator.

MSA will host a letter-writing campaign in the student center from Feb. 6 to 10. MSA Senator Steven Dickherber said students will be able to sign pre-written letters or draft their own that MSA will mail.
Dickherber said he thinks a letter campaign will be effective because it shows students are willing to put in the extra effort to make themselves heard.

MSA’s online petition was launched yesterday and has already surpassed 100 signatures.

“We’ve had a very exciting online presence just in the last 12 hours or so,” Toombs said.

MSA has also started using #moreforless on Twitter. The phrase alludes to students in Missouri paying more money for schools with less state funding.

“It kind of highlights how off these trends are as far as state funding for education in Missouri goes,” Toombs said. “We’re at the point where students are facing a very real situation where they’re very likely going to be paying more money for less resources.”

The Associated Students of the University of Missouri has partnered with MSA on this project, Toombs said.

“(Our partnership) is going to give us a really valuable voice down in Jefferson City,” he said. “It’s going to give us connections nobody in MSA would be able to provide.”

Toombs said MSA passed the resolution hoping to show its opposition, but was unsure how much it could affect the state budget. With a growing online presence, the campaign’s effects could be greater than expected.

“All we can do is focus on our end of things. I think so far, everything has exceeded expectations,” Toombs said. “It’s adapting at this point, and it’s hard to really tack down what kind of effect we think it will have.”
GEORGE KENNEDY: MU's budget nothing but bleak

By George Kennedy
January 26, 2012 | 6:25 p.m. CST

Coming soon to a service club near you: **Tim Rooney and more than you ever wanted to know about our university's budget.**

Along with about 20 other faculty members, I got to see a kind of preview earlier this week. It was even more depressing than last year's version. Tim is MU's budget director. Working for Provost Brian Foster, he has the unenviable job of trying to balance revenue and expenditures when the latter keep growing and the former is increasingly inadequate. I've attended several of his show-and-tell sessions now, and the news is never good.

Actually, he told me when I called him Thursday, off-campus groups won't get everything we saw. They'll get a shorter version that explains the components of the budget and emphasizes the university's impact on Columbia. They won't get to play with the budget scorecard, an interactive program that allowed us to follow along as he demonstrated a variety of ways to cope with the latest bloodletting proposed by the governor. In case you're not a Rotarian, here are some of the basics:

MU is a $2 billion business. Most of it is provided (and spent) by the auxiliary enterprises. The hospital and its physicians make up about three quarters of that. Other enterprises include the athletics department, the bookstore, KOMU and a few other self-sustaining operations.

The general operating budget, the part that pays faculty and staff, amounts to about $510 million. Tuition and fees now contribute 60 percent of that. Only a third comes from the legislature and governor. As we've heard, Gov. Nixon recommends for next year a 15 percent cut for higher education. The hit for UM's flagship campus would be $21 million.

And how important to Columbia is the flagship, you ask? Well, if we were all paid weekly, the payroll would be $16 million. Over the past 10 years, the campus has averaged spending $138
million on construction and renovation. Projects valued at $450 million are under way now. Without the university, Columbia would be Hallsville.

State support peaked in 2001. Since then, the state appropriation has decreased 15 percent. That has happened while MU's enrollment has grown by 45 percent (from about 23,000 to about 33,000). The Consumer Price Index has inflated by 30 percent.

These days, Missouri ranks 44th among the states in state support per capita. All our neighboring states do better. Arkansas, for example, contributes twice as much per capita. When you divide our state appropriation by the number of Missourians, you get $161.82. That's the lowest in the Big 12. It will be the lowest in the SEC.

The only states that do worse are Oregon, Arizona, Colorado, Vermont, New Hampshire and Pennsylvania. Wyoming is the most generous state. The top 10 include Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Nebraska. Looking ahead, the picture gets no brighter.

One thing we probably won't see is the 3 percent salary increase that has been discussed. Tim's scorecard shows why. When he plugs that raise into the program, it responds that a 13 percent increase in tuition would be needed to balance the budget.

Even without the raise, closing the gap would require tuition to go up 8.5 percent.

Neither of those hypotheticals is likely. The budget builders remember what happened last year, when the university raised tuition above the inflation rate and the governor responded by cutting the appropriation further.

So the scorecard shows that with no raises and a 3 percent tuition increase to match the inflation rate, there's a $12.6 million chasm between income and outgo. Bridging that gap will be painful.

As Tim said at Tuesday's session, "We've already plucked the low-hanging fruit."

He likes an analogy between the university and a tree. The roots are nourished by the state and tuition. The trunk is the core missions, with benefits to all the stakeholders as the branches and foliage.

We can only hope the noise coming from Jefferson City isn't a chainsaw.

George Kennedy is a former managing editor at the Missourian and professor emeritus at the Missouri School of Journalism.
Gov. Jay Nixon, a successful Democrat in an increasingly Republican-leaning state, might be the luckiest man in politics.

When his likely opponent in November, Lt. Gov. Peter Kinder, saw his political life implode last fall following a series of personal and professional embarrassments, Mr. Nixon was left with no serious GOP competition. He now will face one of two political neophytes: underfunded and unknown Kansas City attorney Bill Randles or wealthy St. Louis businessman Dave Spence.

Oddly, to judge by Mr. Nixon's State of the State speech and his proposed budget, the lack of competition is moving the moderate Democrat farther to the right. It's as if he wants the GOP nomination, too.

Mr. Nixon is not just accepting but embracing the "no new taxes" ideology so popular in the GOP-controlled Missouri Legislature. He's cutting funding for Medicaid and higher education. He's offering more tax giveaways to businesses.

Even if Mr. Randles or Mr. Spence find a way to stage a credible campaign, Mr. Nixon isn't leaving them much Republican air to breathe, unless they want to bash organized labor and trial lawyers, which we expect they will.

Missouri would be better off if Mr. Nixon had a more competitive challenger. We have one in mind.

His name is Jeremiah W. "Jay" Nixon, and he ran for governor in 2008. That Mr. Nixon, the Old Jay, lamented Missouri's moribund rankings in higher education funding.

"Here in Missouri, we are moving the wrong direction on college affordability," Old Jay said while running for governor. He seemed to care that "middle class families are getting squeezed" and that "higher education is moving further out of reach...."
New Jay announced a budget that cuts higher education spending next year by 12.5 percent. He has proposed a budget that would put higher education spending in Missouri at its lowest level since 1997.

Old Jay called Gov. Matt Blunt's 2005 Medicaid cuts "brazen and insensitive." He said, "Democrats will make restoring the cuts to Medicaid and health care our No. 1 priority."

New Jay says those Medicaid cuts won't effect services. We're sure the disabled and elderly patients left hanging by a bungled SynCare contract — an attempt to save money — beg to differ.

Old Jay tried to restore some cuts in his first year in office. The Legislature balked. Since then, New Jay has proposed Medicaid cuts in each of the last three years, though, unlike Mr. Blunt, he would not cut anyone from the rolls. The single largest line item in about $500 million of cuts proposed by Mr. Nixon in the upcoming budget is $192 million to Medicaid.

The Missouri Democratic Party has given up on priorities such as funding education and Medicaid, but the party's leader has abandoned those very priorities.

A number of Democrats, including Old Jay's former communications director, Rep. Mary Still, D-Columbia, have backed proposals to increase the state's revenue for higher education and health care, including collecting Internet sales taxes and increasing the state's lowest-in-the-nation cigarette tax.

New Jay sticks his finger in the political winds. sees no upside to standing on principle and declines to utter an opinion on such ideas.

Mr. Nixon said in his State of the State speech that he's made tough choices. Well, sure he has. Managing a $23 billion budget is difficult even in the easiest of economic circumstances.

But making cuts the Republican Legislature probably would have forced on him anyway isn't really all that tough. Challenging lawmakers with the reality that Missouri is on a low-tax, low-service race to the bottom would be courageous. Pushing hard for the very things you campaigned for even when the political winds are blowing against you is bold leadership.

When we endorsed Jay Nixon for governor in 2008, we rooted for a "New Nixon." The one we envisioned was a governor who "consistently puts his admirable principles before his political ambitions."

That guy, if he ever existed, is nowhere to be found.
Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon’s proposed 12.5 percent cut to higher education spending could have dire consequences for the University of Missouri-Kansas City, officials warned.

State funding for UMKC already has dropped from $84 million in fiscal 2009 to $75 million this year. Resident tuition has crept up from $8,272 to $9,029 during that period.

Those trends are set to continue, as the state looks to plug a $500 million budget gap, and the UM System Board of Curators said it would have to raise tuition.

In previous years, the governor spared higher education deeper cuts in exchange for tuition freezes. No such deal is on the table this year.

“This is nothing new,” said Tom Bloch, chairman of the UMKC board of trustees. “The last decade or so, state support has really taken a hit. If the governor’s 12.5 percent cut were adopted, that would mean a 25 percent reduction over the last three years. ... I’m hopeful that when all is said and done, the cut won’t be anything like what’s been proposed.”

The looming cuts come as UMKC targets big goals, including a capital building program and possibly creating a downtown arts campus. Much of the money for that the arts campus would be private, but general education programs without dedicated sources of financing rely on state money and tuition.

As attrition reduces staff, the school is teaching 25 percent more students than a decade ago, said Gary Ebersole, a history and religion professor and chairman of the UMKC Faculty Senate.

“We decimated the low-hanging fruit many years ago,” he said.

Meanwhile, he said, it’s tough to recruit top-notch faculty because “we are woefully behind what peer institutions are paying in terms of salary.”
UMKC Chancellor Leo Morton and other administrators did not respond to requests for an interview.

UM System curator and Kansas City Southern Kansas City Southern Latest from The Business Journals Kansas City Southern tracks record revenue Kansas City Southern rides big fourth quarter to record revenue Intermodal business fuels KC Southern’s jump in freight traffic Follow this company executive Warren Erdman is backing a petition drive to boost education spending by raising the cigarette tax from 17 cents to 90 cents a pack. But that wouldn’t fix this year’s budget, and similar initiatives failed in 2002 and 2006.

Paul writes about legal affairs and advertising and marketing.
Education officials testify about public school funding

By Rudi Keller

JEFFERSON CITY — There is a $470 million difference between what Missouri law says the state should spend on public schools and the amount in Gov. Jay Nixon’s budget for next year, a top state education official said yesterday.

Deputy Commissioner of Education Ron Lankford said that gap in the foundation formula, which supports classroom education and other district expenses, is likely to grow.

The House Appropriations-Education Committee began hearing departmental reports yesterday. The committee will hear more about the public school budget next week before moving to higher education.

Lankford and department Budget Director Sharon LePage went through Nixon’s recommendation line by line after Commissioner of Education Chris Nicastro gave opening commentary.

“Our budget this year is fairly straightforward,” Nicastro said. “You will not find too many surprises. The only thing we ask full funding for — that departs from the governor’s recommendation — is full funding for the formula. We did that full well understanding that is not a possibility this year.”

If lawmakers provided all the money the law directs, the formula would have $3.48 billion for the year beginning July 1, Lankford said. Nixon’s budget plan calls for $3.01 billion, up $5 million from last year.

To provide even that minor increase in funding, Nixon is proposing to cut $106 million from state colleges and universities and find $192 million in savings in the Medicaid program.

For the current budget, the gap between what the formula directs and actual funding is about $180 million, Lankford said in an interview before the panel meeting. In another, he said, it will be $700 million.

The force widening the gap is known as the adequacy target. It is a basic starting point for the formula enacted by Republicans in 2005, when they controlled both the General Assembly and the governor’s office.
Calculated as the average of per-pupil spending in school districts that meet all 14 accountability standards, the target is $6,131 this budget year. It is recalculated every two years, with increases phased in. It will be adjusted to $6,423 in the coming year and climb to $6,716 for fiscal 2014.

As they asked questions about the budget, many lawmakers focused on cuts Nixon made in spending levels set last year. Nixon withheld money from several programs, including school transportation, and did not restore any of it in his new budget plan.

“"It is a little disingenuous to say we are increasing funding for the foundation formula when really we are not,” said Rep. Genise Montecillo, D-St. Louis.

Committee Chairman Mike Lair, R-Chillicothe, said the lean year will be tough, but the schools will get by. “I know public education wants more money, but they are going to have enough money to do what they have to do,” he said. “It is not as much as they want or as much as I would like to give them.”

The growing gap requires action, state Rep. Mary Still, D-Columbia, said after the meeting.

Still has filed a bill to ask voters to enact a 73-cent-per-pack tax on cigarettes. Missouri’s tax of 17 cents per pack is the lowest in the nation. The tax increase would raise as much as $400 million annually. “It is a reasonable proposal,” Still said.

Reach Rudi Keller at 573-815-1709 or e-mail rkeller@columbiatribune.com.
MU gets replica of MLK memorial

By Janese Silvey

Thursday, January 26, 2012

A replica of the Martin Luther King Jr. National Memorial was presented to the University of Missouri Wednesday by MU alumnus Ty Christian. The replica is 2 feet tall and weighs 30 pounds.

Last night’s event also included MU alumnus Ty Christian, who presented university administrators with a replica of the Martin Luther King Jr. National Memorial in Washington, D.C.

Christian was the chief marketing strategist for the national project, helping to raise $115 million. The tabletop bronze replica sits on a slate of the same granite used for the national statue, Christian said.

“The goal of this piece of art is to represent the fact that the University of Missouri offers anyone and everyone the opportunity to dream,” he said. “To dream not in black or white but to dream in rainbow colors.”
Dramatic school plan offered for failing schools

BY VIRGINIA YOUNG • vyoung@post-dispatch.com > 573-635-6178 | Posted: Friday, January 27, 2012 12:05 am

JEFFERSON CITY • In exchange for addressing a vexing court ruling that has become a headache for many school districts, an influential state senator wants to fundamentally reshape the urban education landscape in Missouri.

On one end of the state, Sen. Jane Cunningham would dissolve the unaccredited Kansas City School District and require adjoining school districts to carve it up and operate the city's schools.

On the other end, Cunningham would let St. Louis County districts open charter schools in the failing St. Louis district, even as students were allowed to transfer to better suburban public schools, if space was available.

Meanwhile, children in unaccredited districts statewide could tap tax credit-supported scholarships to attend private and parochial schools.

"Our goal is to make sure every child in the state of Missouri gets a quality, accredited education. Period. The end," said Cunningham, R-Chesterfield.

The proposed changes are part of a bill she introduced on Thursday. Though it hasn't been formally referred to her General Laws Committee, she announced that she will hold a public hearing on the issue at 3 p.m. Tuesday.

Ideas such as using tax credit-funded scholarships to send children to private schools spark fierce opposition and have died in the Legislature repeatedly, with critics saying the money could be better spent on public schools. But Cunningham has leverage this year because of the case of Turner vs. the School District of Clayton.

In that landmark decision in 2010, the Missouri Supreme Court held that a 1993 state law allows students in unaccredited districts, such as St. Louis, Riverview Gardens and, more recently, Kansas City, to transfer to districts in the same county or neighboring counties, with the home district paying the tab for tuition and transportation. The law's implementation has been delayed by continuing court battles.
Suburban districts are hoping to gain control over transfers to avoid overcrowded classrooms, while the St. Louis Public Schools says it could go bankrupt if thousands of students flee the city.

Cunningham has been a forceful school-choice advocate for years. Because of her strong interest in the issue, Senate President Pro Tem Rob Mayer said he put her in the driver's seat on the transfer issue, even though she does not head the Senate Education Committee.

Cunningham said the Kansas City part of her plan was drawn up by the superintendents of the bordering districts in that area. She even named the Kansas City portion of her proposed law after the Independence district's leader, Jim Hinson, who spearheaded it along with Bob Bartman, superintendent of the Center School District. Bartman is a former state commissioner of education.

While effusive in her praise for Kansas City-area officials for "focusing on what's best for kids," Cunningham blasted St. Louis County superintendents, accusing them of foot-dragging since the Turner decision was handed down.

"I've been asking for two years: 'Come up with your plan.' And we haven't gotten anything except, 'Let us out of the law,'" she said.

Don Senti, executive director of the Cooperating School Districts of Greater St. Louis, defended the area's educators. He noted that St. Louis County districts have a long history of admitting city students under the voluntary transfer plan.

Districts are willing to accept even more city students, he said, so long as the numbers don't inflate class sizes to unacceptable levels.

"We just wanted to have some reasonable parameters placed on the process, so we could control the quality of schools," Senti said.

He added that the state's two urban areas can't be handled the same under Turner, because in Kansas City, the adjoining districts are all academically and financially healthy while some of the so-called collar districts in St. Louis County have problems of their own. The Jennings and Normandy districts, for example, are provisionally accredited.

St. Louis Public Schools Superintendent Kelvin Adams could not be reached Thursday for comment.

But Mike Lodewegen, who represents the Missouri Association of School Administrators, said the bill was "an attempt to take advantage of the severe situations that are occurring in St. Louis and Kansas City and does nothing to address the underlying problems in those communities."

Cunningham shared details of the bill Thursday evening at a public forum on the Turner lawsuit at Washington University. Panelists included lawmakers, one of whom questioned whether the bill would apply as equally to struggling rural schools as it does urban ones.
"Is this a fix that applies to kids in Perry County, Pemiscot County, Hayti or Caruthersville?" asked Rep. Tishaura Jones, D-St. Louis. "We have to be forward looking here."

In an interview earlier in the day, Cunningham said she didn't know what the city districts would make of her plan. "They're unaccredited and we have to deal with it."

The suburban districts have to deal with it, too, because of Turner.

Bartman said the Center, Independence, Raytown and North Kansas City districts had worked together on the Kansas City plan. Rather than annex parts of the Kansas City district, he said the neighboring districts proposed to contract to operate city schools. The outlying districts would be paid from Kansas City district taxes and state money.

"The idea was that we would break even," Bartman said. "We wouldn't make money but it wouldn't cost the taxpayers of our respective districts money, either."

Bartman said the plan would provide stability for low-income families, who often move in and out of various school districts that have varying standards now.

Under the bill, the Kansas City plan could be used in other parts of the state where districts became unaccredited, except in St. Louis, where city families would meet with an independent clearinghouse to determine the best option.

While some could transfer to county districts, the bill grants St. Louis County superintendents their wish — to control transfers based on 'seats available." The bill says that calculation should take into account the availability of teachers and classroom space. It doesn't dictate class size, though Cunningham said she considered it.

But she hopes the additional charter schools and virtual schools described in the bill would help fill any gap.

Even with all those far-reaching changes, her proposal to use tax credits to send city students to private schools could be the most controversial part of the plan.

The bill would authorize up to $40 million in tax credits for donors who contributed to scholarship funds that would help cover tuition at private schools for children in unaccredited districts. People and companies that gave to the fund would have 60 percent of their donation reimbursed by the tax credit.

The "passport scholarships" would be available to all children in unaccredited districts, including those who currently attend private schools.

Cunningham said she views that as saving the state money because funding the tax credits would be cheaper than paying for the students to transfer to suburban public schools, as the law allows.

The bill is SB706.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

No tenants yet for Discovery Ridge Research Park building

By Jessica Clark
January 26, 2012 | 10:26 a.m. CST

COLUMBIA — Seven months after plans were announced, no clients have stepped forward to occupy a proposed building at MU's Discovery Ridge Research Park designed to attract technology oriented businesses.

CarrBaierCrandall Real Estate Group in Kansas City revealed plans in June for the first of a three-phase project to develop what the Discovery Ridge website describes as a "dramatic 80,000-square-foot flexible lab and office space building featuring a towering, glass-encased architectural centerpiece."

At the time, representatives of the real estate company said construction could begin as early as the beginning of 2011.

Greg Williams, director of research parks for the UM System, cited the economic downturn as the reason no tenants have committed to the project.

"Deals are still very few and far between," said Williams, who works with CarrBaierCrandall to market space in the building. "We have some interest that is growing."

The building is geared toward "tech-oriented enterprise," and tenants could range from "high-intensity research and development to office space," Williams said.

Development will not move forward until at least 50 percent of the space has been leased. Rick Baier of CarrBaierCrandall said the firm will begin design and construction once that occurs.

"At this point in time, we're negotiating with a couple of groups," Baier said. "We're focusing on companies that have a relationship with the university or would like a relationship with the university.'
Existing clients at the MU Life Science Business Incubator "could possibly become tenants in the future, as they mature to the marketplace," Williams said.

Specific building requirements could mean significant increases in the cost to develop the project. The building's cost could range from $16 million to $30 million, Baier said. As a result, the cost to rent space for potential tenants also remains speculative.

Williams said rental rates could start in the upper $20 to $40 per-square-foot range.

"Until we determine the needs of the tenant, we can't determine the exact rent rate," Baier said.

Discovery Ridge Research Park is home to ABC Labs, which does analytical work for the pharmaceutical and chemical industries, and the Research Animal Diagnostic Laboratory, which researches infectious diseases and fertility in animals. Aside from generating tax revenue for Missouri, Williams said the research park builds relationships for "tech transfers," where ideas generated in a university lab can move into the private sector.

The starting price for land at the research park is $100,000 per acre or $2.30 per square foot. Williams said the rate CarrBaierCrandall will pay for leasing the ground will not be determined until 50 percent of the building's space has been leased. If no tenants are found in a year to 18 months, Williams said, CarrBaierCrandall and the UM System would revisit the terms of the agreement.

Once a price for the land is determined, CarrBaierCrandal will lease the ground for 55 years, after which a second 55-year ground lease to the same real estate company would begin. Should costs to maintain the space increase due to "certain economic conditions," Williams said, the ground lease might be restructured after the first ground lease expires.
For decades, scientists have used a technique called confocal microscopy to look at the distribution of proteins within a cell. But in a study published recently in *Arteriosclerosis, Thrombosis and Vascular Biology*, researchers used the technique in a new way: to investigate how those proteins form structures between cells.

"These are some of the first views of the skeleton of the blood vessel," says Gerald Meininger, a vascular physiology researcher from the University of Missouri–Columbia. Previous studies told scientists which proteins were used to build a blood vessel wall, but not how they were arranged in three-dimensional space.

To create the image above, Meininger and his colleague Michael Hill used fluorescent tags to label different components of an arteriole wall: cells are labeled in green, whereas elastin—a stretchy protein that holds the vascular cells together—is labeled in red. By taking a series of images with a confocal microscope, which relies on point illumination to eliminate out-of-focus areas, the researchers were able to construct a 3-D view of the blood vessel's architecture.
Using similar techniques, Hill and Meininger have already found that the elastin structure of a blood vessel wall differs between body parts and changes as an organism ages. The researchers hope that their tool will improve the understanding of how structural proteins change when people develop high blood pressure or cardiovascular disease and that, one day, it will lead to new therapeutic devices.

"In the past people thought that proteins like elastin were nothing more than a support medium for vascular cells," Hill says. "But we're starting to realize that blood vessels are much more complex than a group of cells, and that the protein environment plays an important role in helping those cells to function."

—Sarah Fecht
Babies understand gravity and other properties of physics, studies show

University of Missouri's Kristy vanMarle says infants grasp difference between liquids vs. solids

By Nina Mandell / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

Thursday, January 26, 2012, 2:59 PM

Even infants appear to have an innate sense of physics.

Babies may be smarter than we think.

University of Missouri researcher Kristy vanMarle found that babies are born with basic knowledge about objects around them, known as “intuitive physics”.

“We reviewed past and recent research which together suggests that babies may be born with knowledge about how the world works,” she said.

From early on, she said, babies understand how different objects can fall or interact with each other. For example, they have a basic understanding of gravity as well as solids vs. liquids.

With experience, this initial knowledge gets elaborated and fine-tuned and provides the foundation for adult-like thinking about objects and other entities in the world.
Those instincts, while basic at birth, are developed through childhood and into adulthood, the study adds.

These basic skills help infants form what is automatic for adults — like the instinct to stop items from dropping or spilling.

"The person doesn't have to consciously think about what to do because the brain processes the information and the person simply reacts," vanMarle told ANI news wire.

In a study last year, vanMerle also found that by 10 months old, infants are able to tell which containers hold more food than others. That means they can understand how many people are in a room and how far apart they are.

Babies' inherent understanding of some concepts doesn't mean that parents are off the hook though. VanMerle says parents can further their children's development by playing and talking with them.

“Natural interaction with the child, such as talking to him/her, playing peek-a-boo, and allowing him/her to handle safe objects, is the best method for child development," she said in a press release. “Natural interaction with the parent and objects in the world give the child all the input that evolution has prepared the child to seek, accept and use to develop intuitive physics.”
Committee narrows down search for law school dean

A search committee narrowed the list down to five prospective candidates.

By Hanna Jacunski Published Jan. 27, 2012

MU’s School of Law is on the hunt for a new dean, and a unique search committee has been narrowing down a large pool for a suitable replacement.

Provost Brian Foster has brought different departments on campus together to form a "search committee" specifically for the purpose of filling the dean position. After the dean position has been filled, the committee will be disbanded.

Law professor Thom Lambert is co-chair of the committee.

"The committee is made up of 15 people — law professors, other faculty members, a Missouri Supreme Court judge, a local lawyer who is an alumnus of the law school and some students," Lambert said. "I think that (the committee) offers a good range of people."

The process for finding a new dean is a long one with many stages.

"We begin by putting out advertisements in scholarly publications and websites that law professors are connected to and might see," Lambert said. "We initially interviewed 10 people via video conferencing."

The committee narrowed the pool down to five finalists after the video interviews, College of Business Dean Joan Gabel said. The finalists are on campus for several days to meet with as many stakeholders as possible.

Lambert said Foster is instrumental in the decision.

"Provost Foster solicits feedback from everyone who meets with the candidate during the time they are on campus," Lambert said. "The committee meets with the Provost, and he makes the final decision."

The law school’s current dean, R. Lawrence Dessem, is leaving his position as dean to focus on full-time teaching at MU.
“I’m finishing up 10 years here,” Dessem said. “Before that, I was dean for seven years at the Mercer Law School, and directly before that I was associate dean at the University of Tennessee. Basically, it has been 20 years since I have been a full-time teacher.”

Dessem will talk to the potential deans when each comes to campus, but he is not on the committee that makes decisions about the candidates. After 20 years, he said he is itching to get back into full-time teaching.

“I’d like to get more time in the classroom with students and less time with administrative duties,” Dessem said. “I’ll miss the ceremonial things, like commencement. I’ve loved getting to work with the alumni. But I like people, and I want to be involved more directly. There are definitely some things I won’t miss. Meetings, budgeting, personnel items — those just aren’t as interesting to me.”

The committee hopes to choose a dean by early March.

“Our goal is to identify the very best candidate and, of course, to show that candidate what a wonderful opportunity the University of Missouri School of Law offers,” Gabel said.
Henrickson wins curator confirmation

Thursday, January 26, 2012

JEFFERSON CITY — Pam Henrickson easily won approval yesterday as a member of the University of Missouri Board of Curators.

Pam Henrickson: Joins board of curators

Henrickson, a Republican, will hold the Fourth Congressional District seat on the board. Henrickson is an attorney and a former assistant director and general counsel for the Division of Design and Construction in the Office of Administration.

After a perfunctory confirmation hearing, the Senate approved Henrickson and 24 other appointees.

The list included Roger Worthington of Columbia, who will hold a Democratic seat on the Missouri Human Rights Commission, and Christine Grace of Columbia as a member of the Missouri Task Force on Prematurity and Infant Mortality.

Henrickson has been serving as a curator since August, when she was appointed to replace Doug Russell of Lebanon.
Gov. Jay Nixon wants to appoint local attorney Craig Van Matre to the University of Missouri Board of Curators. Van Matre would be an outstanding member, but his appointment is being challenged by Republican leaders for illegitimate reasons.

Last year he was held up because of a squabble over an unrelated appointment. “If you don’t name Mr. X to Committee E, we will block Van Matre,” GOP leaders told Nixon, causing him to resort to interim temporary appointments to keep Van Matre in the game.

In the session just under way, it seemed his appointment would go forward only to hit another roadblock, this time among GOP leaders on the Senate Gubernatorial Appointments Committee who last week brought up an article Van Matre wrote defending Missouri’s nonpartisan court plan against charges by Republicans the process is controlled by trial lawyers. Instead, he wrote, the real agenda of reformers is to impose right-wing religious views through the judiciary.

Van Matre’s nomination faces a Feb. 3 deadline for Senate confirmation, after which he would be barred from serving if not confirmed. Senate President Pro Temp Rob Mayer, R-Dexter, said Tuesday that Van Matre will be the subject of a committee meeting Monday and that he intends to hold a vote on the nomination.

Van Matre’s views on judicial selection should not be an issue in his appointment to the board of curators. Let us pray committee leaders, having duly spanked Van Matre for his public commentary, finally proceed with his appointment.

Van Matre would be a superior curator. He deserves confirmation.

HJW III
Editorial: Student fees done right

Published Jan. 27, 2012

In a few weeks, our university library will present a proposal for a student fee to the Missouri Students Association. MSA needs to approve it, and our entire university needs to learn from it and copy it.

As the proposal stands, the fee would be anywhere from 50 cents to $1 per academic credit hour, and it would be used to fund one of the most important infrastructures to any academic institution. It's the library, where we study (cram), do homework, write papers, read and anything else necessary to attain that grade we want. The fee would allow the library to buy books, which it hasn't been able to do since the state stopped funding it, and carry out maintenance as well as general improvements. The money might even be used to fund a 24-hour section for finals weeks.

Plus, when the cost of making sure that tool is in the best condition possible is about the equivalent of two Chipotle burritos per semester, there's absolutely no reason anyone should be opposed to a student fee such as this.

Sure, it's another fee we have to pay, but it is the most reasonable and useful student fee we'll ever have to pay.

That is why MU as a whole needs to look at this proposal and see how its functionality can be applied to other areas. We've had to pay a lot of stupid student fees. If you need an example go to the St. Louis or Dickerson Park Zoo to see the $25,000 tiger habitats MSA is paying for over five years.

$1 dollar per credit hour from every student, that's all it takes. This student fee proposal is an example of how small amounts of smartly-handled money can create large amounts of positive, effective change. This is a student fee we actually want, so the university needs to take advantage, and hopefully can continue to come up with even better proposals for the future.
CAPE GIRARDEAU — A new ranking lists Southeast Missouri State University as Missouri's safest public four-year university.

StateUniversity.com, a website for college information, released the ratings Wednesday. The ranking is based on incidents of campus crime as reported by campus safety officers.

StateUniversity.com analyzed crime statistics for 450 colleges and universities around the country.

Southeast Missouri State public safety director Doug Richards said the university has implemented several safety measures in recent years, including around-the-clock patrols, security cameras throughout campus, emergency text messaging and warning alerts.

Including private and community colleges in Missouri, Southeast Missouri State was ranked No. 4, while MU was ranked No. 11 on the list. Columbia College was No. 12.
School choice is the next revolution in American education, panelists say

By Dale Singer, Beacon staff
Posted 11:32 am Thu., 1.26.12

After three failed waves of education reform in the past 50 years, a new movement will mark a revolution in how American students learn: school choice.

That was the view voiced by political commentator Dick Morris at a forum Wednesday night held at Loyola Academy in St. Louis as part of National School Choice Week.

Conjuring up an imaginary scenario from Tuesday night's State of the Union address, Morris asked the audience of about 100 to recall the part about a government agency that would tell Americans what kind of car they would have to drive.

"Imagine how outrageous that would be," he said. "Yet that's exactly what happens to determine what school our child goes to."

Another member of the panel, Robbyn Wahby (right), who is Mayor Francis Slay's education adviser, said that without the choice of quality schools in St. Louis, families are faced with a difficult dilemma.

"If we don't have quality choices available to families in their neighborhoods," she said, "there is another choice, and that's called moving. It's a choice too many families are making. Their children come first."

One topic that took up much of the discussion involved the possible use of public money to pay for children's education in private or parochial schools. Michael Podgursky (left), an economics professor at the University of Missouri at Columbia whose expertise is in education, noted that Catholic schools in St. Louis and Kansas City have the space available to offer students in those cities a good education at a reasonable cost.

But, he noted, the so-called Blaine Amendment to the Missouri Constitution bars the use of tax dollars for that purpose, and efforts to remove or change it have failed in the past.

"The issue we have to confront in Missouri," Podgursky said, "is where we put the boundaries on
Past failures of education reform

Morris recounted three recent eras when efforts were made to improve the quality of American public schools -- but all subsequently fell short.

First, in the 1960s and 1970s, when nationwide rankings of states' schools began to be published, efforts began to fund schools more aggressively. He recalled working in Arkansas at the time, when the state perennially ranked 49th in school quality. "We used to say, thank God for Mississippi," Morris said.

In the 1980s, the focus moved to upgrading the curriculum, with more emphasis on math and science, higher standards and better teacher training.

Finally, when George W. Bush became president, No Child Left Behind put new emphasis on standardized tests, to identify which schools were falling short and needed more resources.

After those failed experiments, Morris said, school choice appears to be the best solution to improving American education.

"We've come to the conclusion that the answer is to let everyone be creative," he said, "to come up with the best ideas for schools and let parents vote with their feet and send their children to the schools that are doing the best."

Calling the movement "a total revolution in public education in the United States," Morris added:

"We're moving toward a system that will soon reach the tipping point where choice will be the norm in public education."

The panelists agreed that the problem is not financial. Conservative activist and commentator Dana Loesch (right), a city resident who home-schools her two sons, noted that education has enough dollars, but they are not being spent in the right way.

"We continually pass spending package after spending package," Loesch said. "For what purpose? It never looks at any of the core causes of the problem."

Wahby added targeting the money to right places -- teacher quality, up-to-date technology, school safety -- is the best approach.

"We know that just throwing money at any situation isn't what it takes to solve it," she said. "It's more complicated than that. It's the way the money is used. There is a need to fund education appropriately in this country and make sure that residents have the highest quality schools so they can be part of the economic development engine of the community.

"You can't do this without resources. You can't just say more money is the solution, but we have
to use the money we have creatively, to get to the key issues."

Targeting teachers

The crowd responded with applause at several times during the evening, but the most enthusiastic response came from attacking teachers unions. Morris recounted the story of New York's "rubber rooms," where teachers deemed unfit to be in the classroom could not be fired because of union rules. Instead, these teachers spent their time doing nothing, getting full pay and benefits, while younger teachers had to be let go.

"There is nothing wrong with public education in America that breaking the teachers unions would not cure," he said.

Podgursky weighed in, saying that the problem is more complex than simply the rules won by collective bargaining.

"I've crossed swords with teachers unions on lots of things," he said, "but I don't think that's a significant part of it. It's a factor, but I think there is just a lot of inertia, a lot of regulatory crust. I think you need more innovation, and you need markets. One size doesn't fit all."

He noted that because school budgets are spent primarily on personnel, districts have to use the money wisely. If they get more money to spend, he said, they have two choices: They can hold pay constant and hire more teachers, or they can raise pay and keep the same number of teachers. Too often, he said, they opt to add to the teaching force.

"We've had a lot of talk about teacher quality," he said. "There's a conference about teacher quality every week. But the reality at the grassroots level has been quantity, quantity, quantity."

Choice in St. Louis

In the city, Wahby noted, the numbers show that choice already exists. She said 23,000 students go to St. Louis Public Schools, while 11,500 more go to charter schools, 6,000 take part in the voluntary transfer plan and attend schools in St. Louis County and 7,000 are enrolled in private or parochial schools.

Still, she said, parents need more than just choices -- they need more high-quality choices.

"We're lucky to have enough choice," she said, "but in high-quality district schools, high-quality charters and in the transfer program, there are waiting lists. Until there are no children on waiting lists, we have a lot of work to do in the city of St. Louis."

Loesch noted how successful New Orleans schools have been because Hurricane Katrina forced the city to revamp and reinvent public education totally. That kind of local initiative, she said, is preferable to forcing ideas on schools from the federal level. She cited No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, common standards adopted by several states and other examples.
"I continue to see an erosion of parental rights when it comes to education," Loesch said. "I hope more parents in St. Louis become more active and fight to keep local control of their schools."

In the end, Morris said, school choice works best in pretty much the same way that private enterprise works.

"The answer here is that nobody has the answer," he said. "It's the nature of the free market. You don't plan a success. You let everybody try, and the ones that do best attract the most students."

He recalled discussing the issue at a forum where he said he was heckled by members of teachers unions.

"One of them yelled, 'Which of our public schools are you going to close?'" Morris said.

"I answered, 'The empty ones.'"
How the Recession Has Affected Your Kids in an Unexpected Way

By Alice G. Walton

Jan 26 2012, 8:06 AM ET 1

Kids live out their parents' financial stresses, according to a new study. That is, your money problems today could hurt them tomorrow.

If you think you and your spouse are the only ones affected by the harsh economic times -- and that your kids are blissfully immune -- think again. Kids, for better and for worse, are a lot more intuitive than we like to admit. Now, a new study demonstrates a cascade of effects set in motion by the economic climate: It begins with the monetary stresses of the parents and ends, several steps away, with the kindness that children express to their peers and family.

In the new research, a team queried parents about certain factors like "money-related chronic stress," depressive symptoms, and how connected they felt to their children (in this last measure, parents ranked themselves on statements like "I feel close to my child," "I am able to relate to my child," and "I feel understood by my child"). Most of the participants were college-educated, middle- to upper-class white families.

Economic stress is linked to depression, which is linked to poorer parent-child relationships, which is linked to fewer pro-social behaviors.

A year later the parents were surveyed again. And so were their kids.

The more stressed the parents were about money, the more likely they (the parents) were to be depressed. Not a surprising finding. But parental depression also affected the strength of the relationships between the parents and their kids: Parents who experienced more depressive symptoms were less connected to their children -- and this was true based on reports from both the parents and the kids.

But the most revealing connection was one between the intimacy of the parent-child relationships and the "pro-social behavior" of the kids. The children, between the ages of 10 and 14 when the study began, were polled on how they felt about reaching out to friends, family, and strangers. They ranked
themselves on statements like "I help others even if it's not easy for me," "I volunteer in programs to help others in need," and "I really enjoy doing small favors for my family." Kids who had less-connected relationships with their parents were less likely to exhibit these pro-social behaviors than kids who enjoyed stronger relationships with their parents.

The chain of events goes like this: Economic stress is closely linked to parental depression, which is closely linked to poorer parent-child relationships, which is closely linked to fewer pro-social behaviors in kids.

While earlier studies have looked at the effects of the economy on kids' psyches, they have typically considered only the development of negative behaviors, like substance abuse, mental illness, aggression, and other "problem behaviors." The idea that the economy could, through indirect means, cause a shift or decline in kids' positive social behaviors has not been illustrated until now.

Also interesting is that the study's participants are the people who would typically be considered the most resistant to economic stress. **Author Gustavo Carlo says that "a unique aspect of this study is the focus on middle, upper-middle-class families. Most other studies looked at high-risk families (low socioeconomic status, ethnic minorities, rural farm families during the Farm Crisis years)."**

Note that this study was just getting underway when the economic crisis began. Carlo suggests that "one would expect that under more dire circumstances the effects could be stronger and more deleterious. Data collection began in 2007, just as the economy was hitting its worst cycle and the outcomes were examined in 2008." The cascade of events that lead from parental depression to a shift in pro-social behaviors exhibited by children is likely present in both good times and bad, but would be more pronounced in times of extreme financial stress.

It would be interesting to repeat the study today and see how the current economic climate might affect the relationships found here. The obvious question, since parents are apparently not so good at hiding their stressors and depressed moods from their children, is, how can we make sure to not transmit our own woes (economic or otherwise) onto our kids?

Since kids are so perceptive -- and sponge-like -- managing the problem rather than masking it is probably the way to go, says Carlo, who recommends becoming aware of the issue first and then taking steps to get support, both psychological and economic. "Parents may need to seek support from relatives (including any available spouse or partner), school counselors, therapists, friends, or others," he says. "Of course, seeking help to address the root issue (economic difficulties) has to be part of the long-term solution. Once parents have begun to address the stress and emotional issues, then they need to focus on their relationships with their teens and to provide the support they need."

Given all the stressors in tweens' and teens' lives, it's important to be sensitive to the extra stresses we unintentionally add. "We know how challenging it is to be a parent and this adds a layer to that challenge," Carlo says. "The responses have to be holistic and this is why professional help is usually a good approach whenever possible."
Beef prices hit record highs -- and will keep on climbing

BY GEORGINA GUSTIN • ggustin@post-dispatch.com | Posted: Friday, January 27, 2012 12:10 am

For anyone who loves a good steak, a juicy burger or a nice Sunday roast, these are anxious times.

Prices for beef, which have been climbing for months, hit a record high in December -- an average of $5 a pound -- and analysts predict they could climb 5 to 8 percent higher this year.

"Prices have gone up quite a bit. That usually happens around the holidays, but we expect them to come down," said Pam Neal, owner of Al's Steakhouse, north of LaClede's Landing. "Not this time. They're going to be jumping even higher. It's hard to handle."

Beef prices are soaring for a number of reasons. Producers, who struggled with high feed costs and diminishing profits, began shrinking their herds roughly five years ago. Since then demand from overseas markets has shot up -- roughly 11 percent of American beef went overseas last year, another record -- claiming more American beef.

In July of last year, the US beef herd had dropped to its lowest point since 1958. Also last year, a drought in Texas and Oklahoma, the top two cattle-producing states, forced producers to cull herds. That means that the 2012 cattle numbers, due out this week, will be even lower. Some estimates predict the country's cattle herd could shrink by 600,000 head this year. Last year's cow inventory was 30.9 million, while the total number of cattle was 92.6 million.

"There's not enough beef out there," said Ron Plain, an agricultural economist with the University of Missouri. "This year, there's going to be less beef, more people, the supply is going to be tighter, and that means more records."

Compounding matters for beef lovers are soaring feed, fuel and production costs, which are forcing price increases all along the production chain.

"Look at our fertilizer costs, our grain costs. Any piece of machinery we buy has just gone up," said Tom Sachs, who raises cattle in St. Charles County. "Our input costs are just really high."

For Missouri's $3 to $4-billion cattle industry, which currently raises the third-highest number of calves in the nation, and for the nation's cattle industry in general, the numbers come as good
news. Prices, per pound for a steer, were $1.75 on Tuesday, compared to about 95 cents 5 years ago. For the average 1,300-pound steer, that adds up.

“Times are good,” said Mike Miller, of Cattlefax, a Colorado-based cattle industry research firm. “Our expectation is it's going to be good for some time.”

But the good times for the industry have not come without effort.

Since 1980, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, per capita beef consumption has plummeted 25 percent. In 2011, the average American consumed 57.6 pounds of beef, down 13 percent from a decade prior. This year the number is predicted to decline again to 54.1 pounds.

The reasons for the decline are difficult to isolate. But they include health concerns over the higher fat content in red meat, worries about humane treatment and links to environmental problems, including greenhouse gasses, all of which have gotten a lot of attention in recent years. Some people point to public health campaigns, such as “Meatless Mondays,” for the shrinking numbers.

The industry insists the American appetite for beef is still strong, while some analysts and researchers suggest the decline, at least in recent years, is simply due to the recession.

“These non-economic factors are really tough to talk about,” said Scott Brown, a livestock economist with the Food and Agricultural Policy Research Center at the University of Missouri. “Frankly, when the consumer goes to the store or restaurant, it’s the relative price that's driving their decision.”

Whatever the reason for the decline, the country's cattle producers have helped compensated for it by making inroads into overseas markets, particularly in Asia.

“Worldwide consumption of meat and demand has increased,” said Jeff Windett, who heads the Missouri Cattlemen's Association. “I think it's just good business sense to expand market opportunities for producers.”

Overseas markets also embrace pieces of the animal that American's typically don't consume, bringing more dollars to American beef producers.

“Tripe, ox tail, tongue – some of those kinds of meat sell for a lot of money,” Windett explained. “It's really creating a market for some of those variety meats and adding value to the carcass overall.”

Japan, a major beef importer, restricted US beef in 2003 after an outbreak of Mad Cow disease, but has since eased the barriers. With Japan a major trade destination again, American beef exports are poised to hit another record this year – nearly $5 billion. China, which does not officially import US beef, could be on the horizon.
“It spells a very bright spot for the US beef industry,” Brown said. “There are just a lot of things on the trade front that look to be very positive.”.

That will, inevitably, put more pressure on prices in American supermarkets, at least in the short term. Because cattle herds take years to rebuild and require huge amounts of capital, it could be some time before the American cattle inventory can help even out costs to consumers.

In the meantime, retailers, restaurants, butchers and shoppers are all getting creative.

Recently, for example, Dierbergs gave away free potatoes, onions and carrots to customers who bought ground beef.

“Customers are almost by default moving toward value cuts,” said Michael Cornelius, the chain’s meat director. “We’re trying to make sure there are items out there that address the value-consciousness of the customers.”

At Kenrick’s Meat and Catering, in south city, the meat counter has seen more customers looking for sales.

“People are eating more pork, but overall they’re just being more economical,” said manager Steven Weinmann. “They’re buying on sale. When everything was cheaper, people just bought by taste.”

At Kreis Steakhouse, on TK, owner George Tompras has been keeping an eye out for good values, too, but says he’s just managing to cover his costs.

“When tenderloins started going up in November, I bought 50 cases at $8 a pound,” he said. “Now it’s 11. That’s the kind of thing you have to do.”

Al’s, which just celebrated it’s 87th year in business, recently made a change to a long-standing tradition. Responding to customers’ concerns, the restaurant decided that instead of just displaying the beef cuts to diners on a tray, it would offer paper menus, with prices.

“We wanted to keep the elegance, the tradition,” Neal explained. “But we wanted to make sure people knew how much something was going to cost.”
Missourinet

Bills to clean up, reform adoption laws hit both chambers

January 26, 2012 By Jessica Machetta

The House is considering three bills that would help prevent adoption cases from being contested and held up in court.

Rep. Chris Kelly (D-Columbia) says his legislation comes from a biological father taking a case against a baby’s adoptive parents to the Missouri Supreme Court on the grounds that he never agreed to the adoption. Kelly says many cases such as these come forward when a biological parent or parents figure out they can financially gain from holding up the process.

“A woman’s parental rights were … her consent for adoption of the child was irrevocably filed, the court had ruled, she had consented, the adopted child had been living with the adoptive family for almost a year, then she attempted to name a punitive father, and he attempted to disrupt the adoption proceedings,” Kelly says. “Either once you have had your rights terminated, finally, or once you have not shown responsibility … it happens regularly that people try to hold the perspective adoption parents up for financial benefit by threatening to disrupt the adoption proceedings.”

Kelly’s bill says a father can establish his interest in the child, legally, by providing support to the child both before and after it is born.

Mary Beck is a law professor at the University of Missouri who specializes in adoption cases. When she was asked by a committee member about biological fathers of children who say they had no knowledge of the pregnancy prior to the adoption, she says current law already addresses that.

“That goes back to part of a statute that was passed years ago,” she told the House Committee on Children and Families. “It says that every man, who has sexual intercourse with a woman is on notice that she may become pregnant. So for him to say he didn’t know doesn’t work in Missouri, as well as about 20 other states, so he is liable to provide support for this child, prenatally, under this bill, because he is on notice.”

Beck says the legislation helps protect the rights and decisions of all parties involved, the birth mother, the biological father and the adoptive parents.