

APR 06 2012



Senate panel identifies cuts in spending plan

By Rudi Keller

JEFFERSON CITY — By the time the Senate Appropriations Committee completed its first pass through the next state budget this morning, Chairman Kurt Schaefer had announced plans for cutting millions from dozens of lines throughout the spending plan.

Slashing items as small as \$78,850 for the Missouri Eating Disorder Council and as large as \$11 million set aside in case the state sustains a new round of natural disasters, Schaefer, R-Columbia, left most controversial decisions until next week.

No firm figures for the total amount of cuts were available this morning. The changes were made over four committee sessions yesterday and today, and most items were "closed," meaning they are off-limits to further changes.

The final item touched last night — funding for the program that provides medical coverage for 2,800 blind Missourians — was left hanging. It will not be discussed again until next week, Schaefer said after the meeting.

But one of the first items addressed, funding levels for state colleges and universities, was decided in favor of the House plan to keep spending level in the coming year, instead of the \$66 million cut recommended by Gov. Jay Nixon.

The Republican-controlled budget process has made significant changes in the \$23 billion budget Nixon, a Democrat, originally proposed. One big change was taking away spending flexibility on more than 400 budget items, mainly funded by federal programs, and inserting larger figures to reflect likely spending.

The budget, in GOP hands, has grown to \$24 billion.

Accepting House figures on most education items — the committee made a few additions and a subtraction of \$2 million from Southeast Missouri State University — shows unity, House Budget Committee Chairman Ryan Silvey said.

"Keeping it out of conference, it sends a strong message to the governor that the legislature is tired of his recommending cuts to education," Silvey said.

One issue that must be decided in the budget conference, however, will be where the money comes from. Schaefer swapped \$74 million in lottery funding for higher education with the same amount of general revenue designated for public schools programs.

Sen. Jim Lembke, R-St. Louis, wasn't sure that was a good idea.

"What we are doing in this fund switch is we are, as far as the formula, taking a bigger gamble — no pun intended — as far as funding going to education," Lembke said.

Schaefer did reveal a portion of his plans for the money secured from cuts. Schaefer added \$10 million to the Parents as Teachers program, revived the Missouri Scholars and Fine Arts Academies with \$1 million and set aside \$200,000 for the State Historical Society of Missouri.

The society, housed on the University of Missouri campus, received \$1.2 million this year. "It is amazing they even keep the doors open," Schaefer said of the society, which has taken on new duties at a time of shrinking budgets.

And he told the committee he wanted to set aside \$40 million as a reserve. Nixon's budget envisioned an ending balance of \$8,000; the House spending plan held back \$5 million.

The cut to disaster funding left the account with \$15 million. Other cuts proposed by Schaefer that received committee approval are:

- \$1 million to increase funding at six autism regional projects.
- \$2 million and 40 full-time positions from the field staff at the Department of Social Services. Schaefer said early in yesterday's first budget session that he would cut funding and positions for all jobs that had remained open for more than three months.
- \$3.2 million from the \$13.2 million tourism budget.

Social Services Interim Director Brian Kinkade did not protest the cut to field staff but noted that his department has high turnover in those positions. In the fiscal 2011 budget, lawmakers allowed 2,622.15 full-time field staff positions in the Family Support Division. If Schaefer's cut survives, the division will have 2,337 field staff.

"Our operations are very staff-intensive and paper-intensive," Kinkade said. "We want and could benefit greatly from technology investment. We're doing it the same way we have for the last 100 years."

Reach Rudi Keller at 573-815-1709 or e-mail rkeller@columbiatribune.com.



Nixon rallies disabled advocates at Capitol

By Rudi Keller

JEFFERSON CITY — Gov. Jay Nixon yesterday urged disability advocates against dividing over the issue of whether 3,000 blind Missourians deserve state-paid health care.

In a 10-minute speech to more than 250 people with disabilities and advocates who were in the Capitol for a day of lobbying, Nixon called the program "a vital lifeline to help needy blind people afford medical care."

The \$28 million program was eliminated in the \$24 billion budget plan approved last month in the Missouri House. Nixon has lobbied lawmakers to restore the funding and announced last week a source of money to put back \$17.7 million of the cut.

"Without it, they would be forced to make impossible choices between lifesaving prescriptions and groceries, between doctors visits and electric bills," Nixon said of the health care program, which provides services similar to Medicaid paid for entirely from state general revenue. "These are decisions no one should have to make."

The House budget moves the money to higher education.

"I appreciate the importance of higher education and its critical role in keeping our economy moving forward," Nixon said. "But let me be clear, not one college or university president has asked for more funding at the expense of needy, blind Missourians. Not one."

In defending the cut, House leaders have called it a program that singles out the blind for special benefits.

The coverage is available for blind people with incomes or assets that make them ineligible for regular Medicaid coverage.

Nixon's speech drew loud applause from the audience, and the message of unity was a theme for the day.

Cathy Brown of the Missouri Developmental Disabilities Council said the lobbying day provides lawmakers with a chance to talk with people with disabilities about their concerns and "reinvigorates us as a community."

Buttons saying "Take Note I Vote!" were on every chest. "It tells the legislature we are engaged and paying attention, and we are coordinated for our collective priorities," Brown said.

Reach Rudi Keller at 573-815-1709 or e-mail rkeller@columbiatribune.com.

MISSOURIAN

UPDATE: Missouri Senate seeks to restore benefits for the blind

Thursday, April 5, 2012 | 6:20 p.m. CDT
BY DAVID A. LIEB/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NO MENTION

JEFFERSON CITY — A Missouri Senate committee searching for ways to restore health care benefits to the blind is targeting cuts at other social services, including the foster care system and state staff who screen applicants for Medicaid and food stamps.

The Senate Appropriations Committee on Thursday completed its firstpass-through of a proposed \$24 billion budget for next fiscal year without deciding whether to fund a \$30 million blind benefits program that was eliminated in the House version of the budget. But it appears likely that committee members will reverse all or part of the House's cut when they resume work next week.

Asked if he would restore the blind aid program, Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, said Thursday: "We're still working on it."

Schaefer is seeking to free up money by cutting other parts of the budget and has taken particular aim at the Department of Social Services, which accounts for about one-third of the state's budget.

The Senate committee decided to eliminate an \$11.8 million pool of money used by the department's Children's Division to pay for foster care in homes or institutions, or to provide subsidies to families who adopt children in state custody. The division already has separate line items in the budget for the various means of caring for foster children. The additional pool of money gives administrators flexibility in spending decisions, because it's not always clear what kind of care will best suit children, said Linda Luebbering, the budget director for Gov. Jay Nixon.

But Schaefer said the pool of money is a vestige of a couple of decades ago, when the state was flush with cash. He called it "a slush fund with very few strings" and said

bureaucrats should instead do a better job of projecting how much they will need for each section of the budget.

If it turns out the division needs the money, lawmakers can provide it during a supplemental budget in early 2013, Schaefer said.

Luebbering said the flexible fund is not really extra money but is instead needed to meet the projected caseload. She said the department will almost certainly have to seek additional funding for children's services to make it through the 2013 fiscal year, which runs from July 1 through June 30, 2013.

The Senate committee also has decided to eliminate training money for staff in the Department of Social Services, and approved a \$2 million cut to an \$85 million budget item for employees who handle eligibility determinations for Medicaid, food stamps and welfare payments. The cut would eliminate 40 of the 2,377 full-time positions the House had budgeted for those services.

Schaefer said that was a small cut compared with reductions made in recent years to public colleges and universities.

Although the committee hasn't outlined its own plan for providing health care to the blind, it has made clear that it will not follow the House's proposal.

After eliminating the blind health care program, the House added \$6 million to the budget for a new, slimmed-down program that would have been funded partly by taxing the ink and other supplies used to produce newspapers. The Senate panel struck that proposal from the budget. Schaefer said there was no chance of a newspaper tax passing the legislature.

MISSOURIAN

Board of Curators discusses lower than expected faculty salary increases, budget

Thursday, April 5, 2012 | 6:57 p.m. CDT; updated 8:49 p.m. CDT, Thursday, April 5, 2012

BY CELIA AMPEL, ZACH MURDOCK

ROLLA — Salary increases for University of Missouri System faculty would average 1.75 percent across its four campuses, according to the system's preliminary budget.

At a UM System Board of Curators meeting Thursday, Nikki Krawitz, the system's vice president for finance and administration presented the projected salary increase figure, which is lower than the 3 percent increase discussed at a Feb. 20 curators meeting. Each campus will come up with its own plan for how to dole out salary increases. MU Provost Brian Foster said at the meeting that MU is planning a 2 percent salary increase along with a pool for special raises.

However, Krawitz said final numbers for the salary increases won't be available until the budget is presented in June because the system is still calculating an increase in medical benefit costs that will accompany the salary bump. In addition, Wolfe said that any increases in state support could go to help boost salary increases.

The board spent part of its April meetings Thursday reviewing the system's preliminary budget for fiscal year 2013, which is still based on the reduction in state support announced by Gov. Jay Nixon earlier this year.

In the afternoon, curators heard a legislative update from Steve Knorr, UM System government relations vice president, about major issues in Jefferson City affecting the university, especially the budget.

Knorr referenced an action Wednesday by the Senate Appropriations Committee to put forward a budget plan that reverses Nixon's cuts to higher education and provides a modest increase in funding for K-12 schools.

David Lieb of the Associated Press reported Wednesday that by following the House's budget recommendations, the Senate "has essentially locked in those dollars."

Knorr agreed with that conclusion, but conceded that the budget is not fully finalized and will likely go to the Senate floor next week.

Because the state budget is not finalized, the system is still planning its budget based on a \$30 million reduction in state support, which includes an additional \$18 million as part of the state's inclusion in a settlement with the nation's five largest mortgage banks.

System President Tim Wolfe said any money more than the governor's proposed decrease will be used for strategic investments — such as providing faculty salary increases and padding the system's massive deferred maintenance debt — that position the four campuses for success and strength going forward.

"It won't be going back to do the same old, same old," he said.

On Thursday morning, curators discussed an investment structure for UM System employees' retirement fund. Investment consultants presented the board with advice about the portfolio for the retirement plan, which currently includes approximately 18,000 active employees and 4,000 retirees.

The changes in the investment portfolio are a part of an ongoing review process that supports the university in receiving a desired 8 percent return on investments.

To help pay for the rising cost, the system needs to make more in returns on its investments, which could mean changing the types of investments it selects, such as taking on more stocks for more return and, consequently, more risk. The system's financial advisers, Strategic Investment Solutions, Inc., presented a range of portfolio options for curators to consider and eventually choose from at the board's June meeting.

The board approved an investment policy for the new retirement plan that will begin in October and combines some elements of a defined benefits plan with a defined contributions plan.

The board also heard a presentation regarding its required annual contribution to the plan. During the economic downturn in 2008 and following, the system made a lower than planned return on its investments. Playing catchup on those losses, coupled with the increasing cost of funding a growing retiree pool, means that the annual required contribution for the next fiscal year is 10.15 percent of the system's payroll — the highest in the history of the plan.

Also during the afternoon meetings curators approved:

- financing for the Henry W. Bloch Executive Hall for Entrepreneurship and Innovation at the University of Missouri-Kansas City;
- the project design for a new Chemical and Biological Engineering Building at Missouri S&T;
- a new master of medical science program at UMKC. The program would train physician assistants and would begin admitting students in January 2014 at the earliest.

The board met at the Havener Center at the University of Missouri Science & Technology on Thursday and will continue its meeting Friday when it will hear reports from Wolfe and board chairman David Bradley.

The Chronicle of Higher Education

Teaching Future Scientists to Talk

By Jack C. Schultz and Jon T. Stemmler

Much has been written about the need for scientists to speak more plainly and compellingly about their research. Yet complaints about their poor communication skills continue unabated in the popular and academic press and in agencies that finance their work.

But perhaps it's too late to work on those communication skills once scientists are already established. That's why we have devised a program, with support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, that seeks to build and maintain those skills early—in undergraduates who are exploring research careers by working in life-science laboratories.

Our program is a collaboration between life scientists at the University of Missouri at Columbia and faculty members in the School of Journalism. We pay students to work in research laboratories and develop independent research projects, and, at the same time, we train them in journalistic and communication techniques. Participating students produce blogs, news articles, videos, and other science-news reports using our media lab and the SciXchange Web portal. They meet weekly or biweekly with members of the journalism school for mentoring and to discuss the relationship between research and the public's perception of it.

Our goal is to produce a generation of researchers who appreciate the need for public communication and are prepared to do it well.

Cross-training young scientists is a fine idea, but it requires bridging a cultural gap between scientists and communicators, whether the latter are journalists, public-relations officers, or others seeking to get science's messages across to the public.

We knew that many scientists, especially those in mid-to-late career, fail to see the value of bridging that gap and may even be hostile to the idea. For their part, journalists and communicators often feel inadequate when trying to translate science. We have been shocked by the size of that cultural gap during the first two years of our project.

Early on, we were amazed to find that the student researchers selected for our program did not understand what it meant to learn to communicate broadly—even though they had been fully informed of the program's goals when they joined it. As we got to know our talented participants better, the reason for their confusion became clear: They had already been in research labs too long.

Undergraduates are thrilled to be accepted into the "secret society" of science, where they learn a new language that only they and their research colleagues understand. They are motivated to cement their place in that new community by quickly adopting the lingo.

The speed of that transition came as a shock. Our first cohort of students had been working in labs for about a year, on average, when we began working with them on their communication skills. Already, however, they had difficulty in describing their work to someone outside of their field of study. They were unaware of how the news media were reporting on science, even when the news involved research from their own fields and sometimes from their own labs.

All of that made it difficult for us to start a conversation about how to communicate science to nonscientists. Some of our student researchers had little knowledge of blogs, and didn't know that some scientists engage in blogging.

We found that we needed half of our first semester to find ways to impress upon these young scientists the importance of broad communication before we could begin helping them develop communication skills. We did this by examining the relationship between public understanding and research support, the responsibility we have to the taxpayer, and the many egregious examples of poor science reporting. Discussing the cultural phenomenon of distrust of news outlets and scientists allowed students to imagine ways of creating trust and communicating clearly with journalists and others.

Soon the students began bringing their favorite good or bad examples of science-news reports to each meeting. Assignments like critiquing and correcting published news reports, polishing elevator speeches, and reporting on their success (or failure) in getting their families and friends to understand their research allowed us to get into the necessary mechanics and techniques of communication.

Within a year of joining a lab, our student researchers had demonstrated a rapid loss of interest in excelling at communication. We compared their reaction with our experience with recent high-school graduates who join college labs as freshman researchers. Those fresh-faced students are eager to join the research community, and they want to tell everyone about their exciting new work. In fact, most of them have to explain their strange new jobs to their families.

It became clear that if we could catch students before they replace their normal communication styles with the narrow views and language of their labs, we could keep them interested—as they develop as scientists—in reaching out to nonscientists.

Our program is an experiment based on the premise that many scientists are not prepared to communicate with outside audiences. That may be true, but the greatest barrier to clear communication with the public is cultural, not technical, and the more daunting task is to impress upon researchers as soon as possible the need to acquire or retain broad communication skills. Once they are pulled into the disciplinary research society, it becomes very difficult to recover their interest and skills for communicating with other audiences.

Students in our program are quite capable of learning broad communication skills. By focusing on freshmen and sophomores and dealing with attitudes early, we have learned, we can help them communicate broadly and well.

Our students are now producing scores of blog posts, articles, videos, and photo essays. Two are applying for science-journalism internships, and one has decided on a career change. We are supporting a new student-run club on science communication and outreach on our campus.

What we failed to realize at the start was how difficult it is for even brand-new "scientists" to step outside their isolated disciplinary world, and the importance of working on their attitude first.

Jack C. Schultz is director of the Christopher S. Bond Life Sciences Center at the University of Missouri at Columbia. Jon T. Stemmler is director of the Health Communication Research Center at the Missouri School of Journalism.

MISSOURIAN

Discussions of MU Nuclear Science and Engineering Institute future have new timeline

Thursday, April 5, 2012 | 5:10 p.m. CDT; updated 5:46 p.m. CDT, Thursday, April 5, 2012
BY BREANNA DUMBACHER

COLUMBIA — Faculty and administrators are working together to determine what the structure of the MU Nuclear Science and Engineering Institute will become.

The institute was dissolved on March 15, a move affecting about 70 faculty, staff and students. A week later at the Faculty Council meeting, Sudarshan Loyalka, curators' professor of nuclear science and engineering, pictured at left, announced that the dissolving was on hold.

When the decision to dissolve the institute was announced, there was an uproar from a number of faculty and students affected by the change. The main concerns were that a decision was made without faculty input and that the change was occurring too quickly. The original plan set out to:

- move the tenure homes of the four professors who were part of the institute to various colleges.
- move the research component of the institute to the MU Office of Research.
- create a new academic program under the Graduate School that focused on nuclear science.

George Justice, dean of the Graduate School, said these goals remain the same, but the timing and process of the restructuring has changed. Originally the new academic program was set to have a concrete plan and a new director by July 1.

“I think we’ve determined that the July 1 date is probably too ambitious to have a program up and running,” Justice said.

Consulting faculty

Since the decision to slow down the restructuring process, faculty and administrators have had several meetings to discuss how the restructuring will be handled.

Loyalka said that the meetings have been productive, but that there are still several topics up for discussion. He said it was too early to discuss what decisions had been made because there was still a chance these could change.

Under the new plan, Justice said, the institute will continue under the current name for students who are already enrolled in the institute or have been admitted to the program for fall 2012.

Justice said, "Continuity is important." Therefore, if there is not a well-planned program ready by fall 2013, administrators will consider continuing the operation of the institute into the 2013 school year, he said.

What the players want to see

Justice said the faculty members involved have been proactive in their attempts to find new tenure homes and develop a plan for the new academic program.

Loyalka said he is optimistic that a solution can be reached. He hopes the restructuring process will be a "constructive exercise" that can use the strengths of the current professors and classes to help the current program expand rather than one that will get rid of it.

"I really want us to build on all of those things, not do anything that hurts any of these efforts," Loyalka said.

Loyalka and Veera Rajesh Gutti, a post-doctoral student in nuclear engineering, both said they would like to see the program expand to collaborate with more universities.

Currently the institute has a medical physics program that collaborates with Washington University in St. Louis. Gutti said this collaboration has been successful and helped the institute's medical physics program earn accreditation. The institute has other collaborative efforts as well, but Loyalka said the institute could still benefit from more.

Loyalka also said he would like to see collaborative efforts not only with other universities, but also other professors at MU. At the same time, he would like to make sure the professors currently associated with the institute continue to play a large role in the academic program because they have helped the institute be successful in the past.

"The NSEI, in fact, is very successful with an extramural competitive funding of about \$2 million per year with just four regular faculty, and an enrollment of about 65 graduate

students," Loyalka said. "We want to see that that expertise is well used and we build upon that expertise."

Justice agrees that building a strong academic program is important, but he said the Nuclear Science and Engineering Institute will eventually be dissolved, leaving a new academic program housed in the Graduate School but organized and taught by various professors at MU.

"We want to enhance nuclear engineering while, at the same time, pursue a restructuring plan for the Graduate School that allows us to do what we do best," Justice said.

For Justice, what the Graduate School does best is oversee academic programs, but not house faculty tenure.

What students think

Since the hold has been put in place, students, alumni and faculty are less worried about the future.

MU and institute alum Ryan Meyer was among the students and alumni who wrote letters protesting the initial plan to dissolve the institute. He said he is "cautiously optimistic" about the institute's future.

He said the decision to change the plan for restructuring is good, but he worries past decisions may hinder the process to reach compromises about the future of the program.

"I do view that (the hold) as positive," he said. "But I do think in some sense there's already been some damage done."

Gutti said he was happy that the students' voices were heard and that the administrators have decided to slow down the process. He said he doesn't mind discussions to improve the institute.

Gutti said the hold is the best solution to the original problems students had with the plan — that decisions were made too quickly and without faculty consent.

Although he wishes the administration would have consulted students and faculty in the first place, Gutti said the hold was what students hoped for when they protested the decision to dissolve the institute.

"That's (the hold) the best thing that would actually happen," Gutti said.

MISSOURIAN

MU researchers develop system to store cadaver tissue for joint surgeries

Thursday, April 5, 2012 | 12:47 p.m. CDT; updated 4:38 p.m. CDT, Thursday, April 5, 2012

BY GRACE LYDEN

COLUMBIA — Patients who have formerly had to wait three to nine months for joint surgery could have a shorter wait and better-quality transplants in their future as a result of a new tissue storage system developed by MU researchers.

Joint surgeries rely on cartilage tissue from organ donors, and the new system allows donor tissue to be stored for 63 days — more than twice as long as the current system used by most tissue banks.

The system developed at MU has been used clinically with canines at the Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital for five years. Researchers are now in the process of licensing with a tissue bank, so that it can be available to humans, too.

James Cook, director of the Comparative Orthopaedic Laboratory at MU and the study's lead researcher, said in an email that he hopes the storage technology will be in use with patients at the Missouri Orthopaedic Institute by late 2012 or early 2013.

Before a joint surgery can happen, a surgeon decides that a patient with a cartilage defect, whether from trauma, injury or arthritis, needs an osteochondral allograft — "living bone and cartilage from an organ donor," Cook said. The patient then waits for a matching graft to be located at a tissue bank.

Most tissue banks use the same storage system, which involves refrigerating grafts at 4 degrees Celsius. The banks operate on a 28-day deadline from the day that an organ donor's graft is received to the day of a patient's joint surgery, Cook said. Studies have shown that after 28 days, a graft's cell viability — the ratio of living to dead cells — goes below 70 percent, which is the lowest acceptable level for usage.

Tissue banks currently throw away 80 percent of donated grafts, Cook said, because donated tissue cannot be matched to a patient within the 28-day time frame.

"Because of the strict storage time frame you have, there is very seldom a graft available the moment you get diagnosed as needing a surgery," said Aaron Stoker, an assistant professor at MU and another of the team's three main researchers.

Stoker had a knee surgery last year, and it took three months from the diagnosis until doctors were able to locate a graft that matched his size parameters.

Cook said the wait is sometimes as long as nine months.

The new storage system would maintain high-quality grafts, meaning tissue with 90 percent cell viability, for at least 63 days after harvest, Cook said. This translates to a larger supply of available cartilage tissue, and therefore a shortened wait for patients.

The doubled life span is achieved with a combination of the temperature (25 degrees Celsius), container, storage solution and individual quality testing of each graft, which is not possible in the system most tissue banks currently use.

Quality testing and higher cell viability increase the likelihood that a patient won't need a second surgery, Stoker said.

The study will be published in the *Journal of Knee Surgery* in April. Although the system has only been tested fully for use in knees, Cook said the method is amenable for the other major joint surgeries, such as ankle, shoulder, elbow and hip.

Stoker said others have created systems that allow for cell viability to be sustained at a higher level to the end of the 28 days, but not longer.

"We were the first and certainly the only ones so far to be able to extend it to this timeline," Cook said.

AP Associated Press

News-Leader.com
Springfield, MO

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

MU medical school seeks Springfield campus

COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) — The University of Missouri wants to expand its medical school with a second campus in Springfield.

The Columbia-based School of Medicine is joining CoxHealth and the Sisters of Mercy Health systems to support a clinical campus in southwest Missouri. The plan was to be outlined Friday afternoon at a news conference at the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce.

Proponents say the campus would offer significant economic benefits to the state, create thousands of new jobs and expand medical care in rural Missouri counties.

MISSOURIAN

GUEST COMMENTARY: It's time to raise Missouri's cigarette tax

Friday, April 6, 2012 | 6:00 a.m. CDT
BY CHRIS KOSTER

NO MENTION

Like you, I am against raising taxes in Missouri, particularly in a weak economy. But there is one exception whose time has come — Missouri's cigarette tax. The Missouri General Assembly should give Missourians a chance to vote on a moderate cigarette tax increase.

The current situation is well-known. Missouri has the lowest cigarette tax among the 50 states, at 17 cents per pack — a rate established almost 20 years ago. The state with the highest cigarette tax, New York, places a levy of \$4.35 on each pack. The state with the 25th-highest cigarette tax, Iowa, places a tax of \$1.36 on each pack. Even tobacco-producing states such as South Carolina and Kentucky have higher cigarette taxes than Missouri.

Public policy favors a cigarette tax that places Missouri somewhere in the middle, at about 90 cents per pack. This change would create approximately \$400 million annually in new revenue.

The current budget and health problems facing our state are equally well-known. Missouri spends more money under Medicaid to provide health care for smoking-related illnesses than we collect from the entire cigarette tax. In 2004, the Centers for Disease Control estimated that tobacco-related illnesses cost our state's Medicaid program \$532 million, and these costs have only skyrocketed with inflation. Yet, Missouri collected just \$90 million last year in cigarette taxes.

Viewed through this lens, the General Assembly is subsidizing sick smokers more than \$400 million annually. Under current tax law, Missouri has become an enterprise zone for cigarettes. I'm a strong supporter of enterprise zones, but not for cigarettes.

To our legislative leaders, I would say this: The cigarette tax is going to increase. Missouri will not remain in 50th place for very much longer.

I propose raising the cigarette tax by 73 cents per pack, placing Missouri 33rd out of 50 states. The \$400 million in new revenue should be directed to building Missouri's educational infrastructure, with particular emphasis on higher education, and addressing our state's health care needs. Such a proposal should be placed before the people in November, so Missourians themselves may decide.

This plan addresses two important goals.

First, the proposal addresses a serious public health issue. Missouri has the second-highest smoking rate per capita in the country. Many people addicted to smoking begin in their teenage years. Alarming, almost 19 percent of Missouri high school students smoke cigarettes. Using increased revenue to treat smoking-related illnesses and to promote cessation programs not only prevents premature deaths in our state, but makes compelling economic sense.

Second, it addresses the devastating funding cuts visited on Missouri's colleges and universities over the last 10 years. Adjusted for inflation, Missouri's higher education system has been cut by 34 percent since 2001.

Fifteen years ago, the Missouri Attorney General's Office settled its landmark case against Big Tobacco. That settlement marked the turning point in public sentiment regarding smoking-related risks, and it has brought over a billion dollars into Missouri's general revenue fund over the last decade. Nonetheless, because Missouri's cigarette tax is the lowest in the nation, our state's smoking-related health challenges remain among the country's highest.

The General Assembly should take action before the people are forced to act on their own behalf through the initiative process. Our state should utilize this money in a way that improves public health, promotes education, and provides real economic benefit for our citizens. To miss this opportunity is to fail in our responsibility as elected leaders of Missouri.

Chris Koster is Missouri's attorney general.

theman eater

UM System moves forward with endowed scholarships

Lottery funds leveraged by Gov. Jay Nixon will help fund the scholarships.

By Hunter Woodall

A new initiative from the UM System Board of Curators will fund 56 need-based endowments for students at each of the system's campuses.

After Gov. Jay Nixon decided he would release \$1.1 million in lottery funds, the UM System announced it would raise the same amount to fund a new set of scholarships for undergraduates studying in Missouri. The endowed scholarships will each have a \$40,000 endowment, according to a UM System news release.

“We are excited about developing these new need-based scholarships and hope it will enable more students to attend one of our University of Missouri campuses,” UM System President Tim Wolfe said in a news release. “We appreciate additional appropriations, such as the \$1.1 million recently received from Gov. Nixon that allow us to do even more to make the college dream a reality for Missouri students.”

The decision to use the additional funding for scholarships was deemed the most appropriate way to use the funding, said Nikki Krawitz, UM System vice president for finance administration.

“The Columbia campus will be able to use those scholarships to help students who have financial need attend MU,” Krawitz said.

Krawitz said the way the programs works is that \$20,000 comes from state funds and an additional \$20,000 is financed by a donor. Each of the 56 endowments will create a \$2,000 scholarship for a needy student.

According to the release, during the 2011 fiscal year, \$102 million in grant aid from the UM System allowed about 80 percent of undergraduate students in Missouri to benefit from various types of financial aid. Earlier this year, the Board of Curators voted unanimously to approve tuition increases for both in-state and out-of-state undergraduate students. In-state students will see an increase of 3 percent and out-of-state resident tuition will increase by 7.5 percent.

Krawitz said although she does not know if additional scholarships like the current endowment will be created in the future, this practice is something the UM System has done in the past. MU students would be able to receive nine of the 56 scholarships.

“We understand the economic hardships many Missouri families face, especially when deciding to send their children to college,” Wolfe said. “These scholarships can help make access to college more affordable for high-need students.”

In the news release, Wolfe said this development exemplifies the system's commitment to Gov. Nixon's work to increase the number of college graduates in Missouri.

“I'm confident with the support of our alumni and friends that we can provide important new financial support for our students,” Wolfe said. “We are pursuing every avenue possible to ensure the affordability of the University of Missouri for our state's families.”

Krawitz said public reception of the endowment has been encouraging.

“I think the public is always happy to see the university is using its resources strategically to support access and accessibility for students,” she said. “The fact that what we're doing is taking those funds and leveraging those to raise another \$1.1 million, I think the public likes to see us be responsible and use our resources in that way.”