MU graduates prepare for next phase

Hessler advises to 'stay tough.'

By Karyn Spory

Sunday, May 19, 2013 at 2:00 am

For the 5,292 University of Missouri students earning degrees over the course of this weekend, the various ceremonies aren't just about celebrating their accomplishments or the memories made during their college careers.

Beyond that, they signify the next big transition — whether that is into graduate school, the real world or whatever unknown lies ahead.

"This signifies me being done with my undergraduate degree," Megan Schmidt said after the honors ceremony yesterday.

Schmidt, who received a bachelor's degree in biological engineering, was packing up and heading north to begin work on her graduate degree at the University of Minnesota.

Schmidt said she will miss the sense of community she found at MU.

"Mizzou was not my first choice, but I don't think I would change" my experiences here "for the world," she said.

For Sydney Miller, the weekend represented the transition from college life to professional life. Miller, who earned dual degrees in journalism and political science, will begin work at Missouri Lawyers Media in St. Louis.

"It's scary," Miller said. "I'm not looking forward to joining the real world."

She said although taking the next step is intimidating, knowing she has a job lined up has allowed her to enjoy her last few weeks of college more.

Over the three-day celebration, 5,902 degrees will be awarded, including 4,218 bachelor's degrees. More than 300 of the degrees awarded were earned online.
In addition, a special degree was awarded during the honors ceremony yesterday morning, and its recipient is a familiar face to many in Columbia. MU Chancellor Brady Deaton awarded an honorary degree to a man who's made many transitions in his life, Columbia native Peter Hessler.

Hessler, the son of MU professor emeritus Richard Hessler and Columbia College adjunct professor Anne Hessler, received the honorary doctor of letters degree. Hessler is best known for his books on China, including National Book Award finalist "Oracle Bones," "River Town" and "Country Driving." His non-fiction work chronicles the lives of ordinary people in other countries, and his latest is "Strange Stones," a collection of his magazine work, primarily as a writer for The New Yorker.

Hessler — who attended Hickman High School and Princeton and Oxford universities before joining the Peace Corps in 1996 — said at yesterday's ceremony that he was "deeply grateful" for the honor at MU.

As he gazed out at the graduates, Hessler said he remembered sitting in the position they were in, graduating in the middle of an economic downturn.

Hessler said he was sympathetic to their situation but encouraged them to "stay tough." The skills and knowledge they obtained during their time at MU, he said, would follow them past the Columns and throughout their lives.

Jim Gwinner, president of the Mizzou Alumni Association, reminded the graduates during the honors ceremony that they wouldn't only take with them the skills and knowledge obtained at MU, but also the university's sense of family.

"You will always be an MU Tiger," Gwinner said. "If you're in an airport terminal and you hear someone yell 'M-I-Z,' you can say back, 'Z-O-U,' " he said.

Commencement ceremonies continue today with the School of Law ceremony at 1:30 p.m. in Jesse Auditorium and the College of Human and Environmental Sciences at 3 p.m. in Mizzou Arena.

This article was published in the Sunday, May 19, 2013 edition of the Columbia Daily Tribune with the headline "Grads prepare for transition to next phase: Hessler advises to 'stay tough.'"

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Posted in Education on Sunday, May 19, 2013 2:00 am.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Graduation ceremonies continue at MU

By Katie Yaeger
May 18, 2013 | 6:43 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — Mizzou Alumni Association President Jim Gwinner had one parting congratulations as he addressed graduates at the Honors Ceremony:

"Welcome to the west side of Faurot Field," he said.

Gwinner was referring to a football tradition, in which students sit on the east side of the football stadium Faurot Field and alumni and guests sit on the west side. When chanting, the students shout, "M-I-Z," and the alumni and guests shout, "Z-O-U."

MU planned to distribute degrees to 5,292 graduates on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Seven commencements and ceremonies took place Saturday in Jesse Auditorium, Hearnes Center and Mizzou Arena.

Saturday's events included the Honors Ceremony and commencements for the College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources, the College of Arts and Science the College of Education, the Graduate School, the School of Medicine and the School of Natural Resources.

Honors Ceremony

Stephanie Linneman, a 2011 MU graduate of the Trulaske College of Business, watched as her fiancé, Nathan Matt, was recognized for his academic achievements Saturday morning.

Matt, 23, received his master's degree in accounting this weekend, about a month before he and Linneman will marry in St. Louis.

Their wedding will be black-and-gold themed in honor of their alma mater.

"I'm very proud," Linneman said. "He worked really hard for this."

Linneman and others in Mizzou Arena watched as 1,319 students eligible to graduate with honors were recognized at the Honors Ceremony. The graduates and faculty mentors, whom
the graduates selected to accompany them, filled the seats on the arena’s floor and overflowed into the first two rows of the permanent seating.

At the ceremony, MU awarded an honorary degree of letters to the speaker, creative nonfiction writer Peter Hessler. A graduate of Hickman High School, Hessler has won awards for his books about China, where he was stationed in the Peace Corps and then worked as a freelance journalist. He also taught freshman composition classes at MU for two years.

In his speech, Hessler called his experience in China through the Peace Corps life-changing and encouraged graduates to take risks and leave their comfort zones.

But he also talked about remaining connected to MU. In China, students don’t have a strong connection to their alma maters, he said.

"Range widely, but stay in touch," he advised the graduates.

**College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources**

The morning of his graduation, Preston Reuter, 22, was missing two graduation essentials: his tassel and his tie.

While Reuter, who received his bachelor’s degree in agribusiness management, retrieved these items, his sister Christen Stark and the rest of his large family scrambled to get everyone in the same place, so they could watch her youngest brother graduate.

"We're willing to do it because we're so proud of the work it took for him to get here today," Stark said.

Reuter was one of 382 students who received degrees from the College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources on Saturday. When Dean Thomas Payne addressed the graduates, he advised them to take care of these degrees when they leave and face challenges as the world's population and demand for food increase.

"It's like exercising," he said. "If you stop, you go back to the way you were before."

The speech from Sen. Roy Blunt, R-Mo., addressed how to tackle these challenges with advice he gave his children: Life is about trajectory.

By that, he means when one sets sights a bit higher, unexpected things happen. This can be done every day, he said, and the commencement celebrated graduates doing that at MU.
College of Arts and Science

Bradley Haberstroh received more than a bachelor's degree in political science Saturday.

Because Haberstroh, 22, transferred to MU for his sophomore year, he had to take more credits each semester than the average student, said his mother, Linda. His father, Bart, bought a Jeep Wrangler and told his son he could have the vehicle if he still graduated in four years.

The Jeep Wrangler is sitting in the driveway of the family's house in St. Charles, waiting for Bradley Haberstroh when he returns.

"We put a big gold bow on it this morning," Linda Haberstroh said.

Bradley Haberstroh was among many students who received degrees from MU's largest college, the College of Arts and Science. The college had one of its graduates return to speak: Boone County Circuit Judge Kevin Crane, who graduated with bachelor's degrees in speech and dramatic arts in 1983.

Crane told the graduates that the next day would mark the beginning of an adjustment period. He encouraged the graduates to do something, even if it could lead to failure.

"Anyone who doesn't experience rejection and failure is not trying," he said.

Crane advised graduates to deal with rejection with a sense of humor, and he used his own sense of humor to give the graduates one final piece of advice:

"Be careful tonight," he said. "MUPD's crawling all over this joint, and I don't want to see any of you in my courtroom Monday morning."
MU students, families celebrate graduation at Hearnes Center

By GH Lindsey, Zach Strader
May 19, 2013 | 6:04 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — New graduates and their families and friends flooded MU throughout the weekend for spring commencement ceremonies.

In total, MU awarded 5,902 degrees this spring.

At the Hearnes Center on Friday evening, the Trulaske College of Business and the College of Engineering held back-to-back commencement ceremonies.

At the business school’s ceremony, attendees heard speeches from alumnus Leslie Flegel, the owner of Flegel Family Enterprises, and Christopher Cary, a graduating senior selected to speak for his fellow graduates.

After the tassels were turned and the diploma covers were in hand, families and friends of graduates mingled outside the center and snapped photos, capturing the moment and celebrating their new accomplishment.

“It’s so cool to graduate,” electrical engineering graduate Jing Siang Wang said. “We study four years here and pass a lot of hard classes. There’s a lot of happiness right now.”

Other graduates were reveling in their newfound, if short-lived, freedom. Many of the new alumni had found new jobs or were moving on to graduate school.

“I feel free,” biological engineering graduate Megan Jean Kovarik said. “Even if I am starting grad school in a week.”

MU’s graduations continued through the weekend, concluding with the College of Human Environmental Sciences ceremony Sunday afternoon in Mizzou Arena.
Graduations wrap up at MU with law school, human environmental sciences ceremonies

By GH Lindsey
May 19, 2013 | 6:08 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — Another year of spring commencement ceremonies came to a close at MU on Sunday.

MU's final two graduation ceremonies took place Sunday afternoon, wrapping up a weekend of 18 commencements and ceremonies. In all, MU awarded 5,902 degrees over the weekend.

School of Law

Britta Wright sat in the balcony of Jesse Auditorium and beamed as her friend Mihaela Britt received her purple hood and crossed the stage.

"This is the culmination of all her hard work," Wright said of the new graduate, who worked full time and raised a young son while working to complete her law degree.

Britt was one of the 126 graduates of MU's School of Law to walk in the school's hooding ceremony. Each graduate was presented with new academic hoods, purple on the outside, representing the study of law, and black and gold on the inside, representing their new alma mater.

Before the hooding, graduates and their families heard from Judge Duane Benton of the U.S. 8th Circuit Court of Appeals in Kansas City. Benton, a graduate of Yale Law School and former adjunct professor at the MU School of Law, exhorted graduates to improve the standing of the profession of law through ethical conduct and service to the public.

"This school has given you the tools, now go out and make the world a better place," he said.

College of Human Environmental Sciences
As the strains of “Pomp and Circumstance” reverberated throughout Mizzou Arena, Nick Arnold led the procession of his fellow graduates around the arena floor and into their seats.

Arnold, a nutrition and fitness graduate, was chosen to lead the 199 undergraduates of the College of Human Environmental Sciences into their commencement ceremony because of his academic accomplishments. Arnold graduated summa cum laude with an honors certificate.

The graduates and their families then heard brief speeches from the college’s dean Stephen Jorgensen and Alumni Association President Suzanne Rothwell. Both speakers emphasized that graduates should look to the future with excitement.

“There are no real endings in life, just new beginnings,” Jorgensen said.

Some excited parents crowded around the stage to snap photos as their graduates came down from the stage, while others watched from the stands.

“We’re very proud of her,” Mike Kemp said of his daughter Angela, an interior design graduate. “It’s a field she’s been interested in since the start of high school.”

Rothwell also emphasized the special bond MU graduates have with their campus

“Never forget your time on this campus because we won’t forget you,” Rothwell said.

*Supervising editor is Zach Murdock.*
Trio marks a first for MU astronomy study

By Karyn Spory

Sunday, May 19, 2013 at 2:00 am

Hundreds of students walked across the stage during the University of Missouri's College of Arts and Science commencement ceremony yesterday, but only three received a degree in physics that included an emphasis in astronomy, a new offering at MU.

Angela Speck, the director of astronomy at MU, said she has been working on building up the astronomy program since 2004, but it wasn't until April 29 that the emphasis area was officially approved and could be awarded to the three eligible students: Laura Hosmer, David Nash and Matthew Reel.

The degree in physics with an emphasis in astronomy is equivalent to an astrophysics degree, something that isn't available elsewhere in Missouri, Speck said.

"It's important to offer Missourians this opportunity, and now we do," Speck said in an email.

Hosmer said she had been researching stardust with Speck and had asked her many times whether an astronomy degree would ever be available at MU. Hosmer said Speck always answered that it was in the works.

"I'm lucky enough that I took enough astronomy classes that qualified," Hosmer said. The emphasis area requires students to take Astronomy 3010, Introduction to Modern Astrophysics and three astronomy elective courses.

Hosmer said having a physics degree is wonderful, but because she's done all of her research in astronomy, having the emphasis in astronomy validates her career at MU.

"I can show employers I'm an astronomy girl," said Hosmer, who received dual degrees in chemical engineering and physics with an emphasis in astronomy.

Reel said he is proud of Speck — his adviser and mentor — not only for creating the emphasis area but also for building up the astronomy department. Before she "got here, we didn't really have astronomy research, much less a department and graduate research available," he said.
To build the program, MU hired two new faculty members: Professor Linda Godwin, a former NASA astronaut, and Assistant Professor Haojing Yan.

"We get to work with people who have the scientific expertise and with people who have actually done the stuff," Reel said.

Speck said she was excited to see the three students graduate with the emphasis area. "I actually requested to be able to be the department representative" at graduation "just so I can be the person who shakes their hands," she said.

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One St. Louis charter school to close, another in trouble

May 18, 2013 12:15 am • By Elisa Crouch ecrouch@post-dispatch.com 314-340-8119

ST. LOUIS • One charter school announced Friday it will close. Another is fighting to stay open.

One year after the Missouri Board of Education voted to shutter the six Imagine charter schools for academic failure, the city faces losing two charter schools for very different reasons.

Shearwater High School, 4431 Finney Avenue, will close voluntarily in late June after three years of trying to help students who had quit school or were in danger of dropping out. Chief Executive Stephanie Krauss announced in a statement Friday that Shearwater’s governing board decided to close the school because it was “unable to establish the necessary conditions for getting the majority of our students on track to graduate.”

Jamaa Learning Center, 1106 North Jefferson, is fighting to remain open after learning this month that the University of Missouri-Columbia would revoke its sponsorship, unless Jamaa successfully appeals. Without a sponsor, a charter school cannot receive state money.

A May 7 letter from the university’s director of charter school operations listed deficit spending and unsatisfactory academics as grounds for pulling the plug on the school, which would have kindergarten through eighth grade next year. Jamaa’s board plans to plead its case at a hearing this summer and is searching for a new sponsor.

“Jamaa does not intend to close,” said Trina Clark James, the school’s chief executive.

The school expects an infusion of $100,000 next month from a donor, which would eliminate a deficit, James said. The school, with 144 students, needs more time to catch up financially and help students grow academically, she added.

Charter schools are public schools that do not charge tuition but operate independently of traditional school districts. Twenty-one are operating in St. Louis.

Critics and supporters of charter schools have demanded for years that the schools be held accountable for not meeting the financial and academic standards spelled out in their charters.

The closure of one school, and potentially two, for not meeting such goals is a reversal from even three years ago, when sponsors and boards did little or nothing when charters didn’t meet expectations.
"From the accountability side, you can say yes, accountability is working," said Doug Thaman, executive director of the Missouri Charter Public School Association. His organization released a statement Friday applauding Shearwater for holding itself to high standards.

Shearwater's mission was to help at-risk students receive a high school diploma before age 22.

But many of the students arrived at the school so far behind that the staff couldn't get them caught up in time, Krauss said. Sixty-four students were enrolled at Shearwater in the fall. The school is on the campus of Ranken Technical College.

"I'm sad," said Robbyn Wahby, education liaison for Mayor Francis Slay. "So many kids really did benefit from this. So many kids greatly need this."

Krauss, who ran away from home and dropped out of school as a teen, said she and her staff have learned many lessons in three years at Shearwater. They hope to find a different way of helping the same students achieve their goals.

"We're still in this," Krauss said. "It's just the charter school model may not be the best way to do it."
Man leads chase from MU hospital

Friday, May 17, 2013 at 2:00 pm

An 18-year-old man who escaped from University Hospital on Thursday led law enforcement officers on a foot chase near a University of Missouri baseball game and was captured inside a nearby home.

A Boone County Sheriff's Department deputy responded yesterday to a report of a suicidal person in the 4700 block of Millbrook Drive, Detective Tom O'Sullivan said. The man was located at Hy-Vee, 3100 W. Broadway, and taken in for medical evaluation.

While in the emergency room, O'Sullivan said, the man bolted out into the parking lot and then led sheriff's deputies and Columbia police officers on a foot chase through the hospital parking lot, near Truman Memorial Veterans' Hospital, through a tunnel under Stadium Boulevard and then across Providence Road, between MU's baseball and track facilities and eventually into the Grasslands subdivision. Deputies found he had finally forced his way into an occupied residence in the 100 block of Burnam Road. The resident of the home was unharmed, O'Sullivan said.

More than 650 baseball fans were in attendance at the stadium for last night's contest against Kentucky at the time.

The man was taken back into custody and resubmitted for hospital evaluation. He might face charges of burglary and resisting arrest, but no warrant request had been issued as of this morning.

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Posted in Local, Crime on Friday, May 17, 2013 2:00 pm.
Add up the credits for Advanced Placement and other college-level courses that Jaime Staengel took in high school, and the Rockwood Summit senior has quite a head start. She'll probably begin her freshman year of college with as many credits as some sophomores.

The academic and financial benefits made the challenging classes worth it to Staengel, who says she's happy to save herself time in college by moving into more advanced classes sooner for a major in German. And she says her parents think it's great, too.

“It's saving them money in the long run,” said Staengel, who is headed to Murray State University in Kentucky.

Thousands of students across the state took Advanced Placement exams this month. Proponents of the College Board-created program hope underclassmen see success like that of Staengel and sign up. But despite efforts by Missouri’s education department and area districts to increase enrollment in the courses, the state's public school students still rank among the bottom in the nation for both participation and pass rates, even though both are up in recent years.

At the same time, area universities say the number of high school students taking what's known as dual credit courses is growing rapidly — and argue that those classes may offer more benefits than AP for some students.

The two approaches — dual credit and AP — offer competing schools of thought on helping high school students earn college credits. AP prepares students to pass an exam to prove their mastery of college-level curriculum. Dual credit in effect enrolls students in college courses while they are still in high school, allowing them to earn credit for both.

Caught in the middle are students and parents who wonder which approach produces the best payoff.

Experts say both approaches can work. When done the right way, they say, many students are able to lop off an entire year or more of college before they even get there.
"It really depends on the individual student's circumstances," said Nicole Buesse, a high school counselor at Fort Zumwalt North High School. "Both (dual credit and AP) are very good options."

But there are pitfalls to both. And that can leave students who thought they did the work without the credits that count.

Students in AP classes, for example, may find that although they passed an exam, their score isn't high enough. At some elite colleges, even the highest mark doesn't count. And while dual credit offers students a transcript proving they completed a course, it may be a transcript some colleges do not accept.

Students and parents who want to shop for the best approach may find their options are limited based simply on the school they attend.

In Missouri, a push — at least at the state level — is building behind AP, after years of popularity for dual enrollment. For the first time this summer, the percentage of students passing an AP exam will factor into a district’s report card from the state. Although dual credit courses also are considered, AP earns a district extra points.

Missouri officials regard AP courses as a mark of a school’s quality, demonstrating that it is offering students challenging options to prepare them for college.

“There is a level of rigor that’s established,” said Margie Vandeven, a deputy commissioner for the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Meanwhile, those national rankings that schools love to boast about — by publications such as Newsweek and U.S. News & World Report — use AP courses as a measure of excellence.

TWO APPROACHES

As education experts debate the quality of college credit courses, the issue for parents and students increasingly is controlling college costs.

“‘This is a huge asset to making college affordable,’” said Gayle Rogan, director of the 1818 Advanced College Credit program at St. Louis University.

The SLU program offers a dual credit approach. High schools that participate must have teachers who have been vetted and approved by SLU, which also oversees the curriculum.

Students, in turn, enroll at a fraction of the cost they would pay as a traditional college student. A similar program by the University of Missouri-St. Louis, for example, costs just $60 per credit hour while enrolled in high school, compared with the $258 rate charged to college students.

Enrollment in dual credit courses in Missouri has outnumbered AP exams for years and has grown at twice the rate since 1999.
Kathleen Burns, director of the Advanced Credit Program at the UMSL, says the program has seen an 18 percent increase in the last four years. Likewise, 5,000 students took at least one dual credit class through SLU’s program this year, up from 3,000 in 2000.

Students who pass the course have a college transcript with credits that, at a minimum, the school that sponsored the course will honor. Those credits also could be eligible for transfer to another college or university.

Of course, transferring those credits can be tricky. Many schools won’t accept them.

Vandeven, of the Missouri education department, also points out that the quality of dual credit courses can be difficult to measure. AP courses, in contrast, can be judged on a more consistent standard — the national exam.

The number of Missouri public school students passing at least one AP test has more than doubled during the past 10 years. But that growth rate is still among the smallest in the nation. And only a small percentage of all public school graduates pass at least one AP test — 9.6 percent in 2012. In Illinois, nearly 20 percent passed at least one exam last year.

But a passing score of 3 out of 5 may not be good enough for credit at all colleges; many require a minimum score of 4. The University of Missouri-Columbia, for example, requires a 4 on more than half of AP exams. Some colleges also have limits on the number of credits they'll accept.

Buesse, the Fort Zumwalt North counselor who is also a past president of the Missouri Association for College Admission Counseling, urges students to consider a host of factors, such as their intended major and where they anticipate going to college.

Every institution, she said, has its own policy on AP tests and dual credit transfers. Dartmouth, for example, announced this year that it won’t award credits at all for AP exams.

Still, admissions officers like to see AP courses on an applicant’s transcript, as a sign that the student can handle challenging courses.

SIDE BENEFITS

Advocates say offering college-level courses of any kind in high school pays off, even if not every credit is honored. They argue that schools raise the bar for students and teachers by offering more rigorous courses.

Some, however, warn that pushing students into the courses can backfire. For example, more than half of the AP teachers surveyed a few years ago by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute said that too many students were in over their heads.

The study also said many parents were overeager to have their child in AP courses. It also found that 75 percent of teachers believe high schools are expanding their AP programs mainly to improve the schools’ rankings and reputations.
Despite those criticisms, states and the federal government continue to push for more course offerings and higher enrollments.

In 2011, the U.S. Department of Education gave St. Louis Public Schools a grant of more than $1.7 million to encourage participation in AP courses. Since then, the district has added classes and boosted enrollment.

In Hazelwood, increasing enrollment in AP, as well as dual credit, has been a goal of Assistant Superintendent Darrell Strong for the past two years. That includes boosting the enrollment of minorities, who make up a small percentage of AP participants in Missouri.

Recruiting for AP classes in the district starts in middle school. This year, eighth-graders have peered into high school AP classes through Skype.

At the same time, Hazelwood has added honors classes to help better prepare students for AP. The district has also offered more training for teachers. The efforts increased enrollment in AP classes by 38 percent this year at the district’s three high schools, including Hazelwood Central, where the number of AP students went to 288 from 190.

Larry Wilbon, a junior at Hazelwood East who took an AP Government class this year, said some students thought the classes were intimidating.

“It’s not a joke, but you can handle it,” he said. “It’s a lot of personal responsibility.”
Alternative energy fuels hopes for Pea Ridge mine

Never mind the lawsuits, regulatory hurdles and competing against the Chinese. Jim Kennedy is plotting a comeback for the mine he used to own in eastern Missouri.

The St. Louis-area developer was forced to sell the now shuttered Pea Ridge Mine in Washington County in January 2012. The new owners of the iron ore mine say they are testing its flooded caves and figuring out a storage and disposal plan for mining waste before deciding whether to reopen.

But Kennedy retains a 70 percent stake in the mine's other resources. They including rare earth minerals, a key ingredient in laptop computers, cellphones and other household electronics that are almost exclusively mined in China.

And he's a relentless advocate for thorium, a radioactive mining byproduct that Kennedy touts as a green energy alternative to uranium-reliant nuclear power. He speaks of thorium's benefits with an evangelistic zeal, recounting how U.S. scientists were on the brink of major breakthroughs before ceding the research battle to scientists in China.

He also bemoans the failure of traditional mines to exploit an underutilized resource. "They throw them away, and drop them right back into the tailings lake," Kennedy said of the standard mining approach to rare earth minerals.

It's a message that's generated enthusiasm among lawmakers, including state Rep. David Schatz. A resolution introduced by the Sullivan Republican and co-sponsored by 30 others calls for development of Pea Ridge as a rare earth refinery and urges Congress to revise federal law to allow for a thorium "storage bank." The measure won the backing of two House committees before the Missouri Legislature adjourned on Friday.

"There's a huge opportunity with that aspect of the mine," Schatz said. "As I look at our potential energy needs in the future, this is a resource we need to look at. It's clean energy, it's abundant and it's a much safer alternative than nuclear energy."

Patrick Pinhero, a University of Missouri chemical engineering professor, testified in support of Schatz's resolution at a mid-April hearing of the House Utilities Committee. He noted Missouri is "uniquely suited" to embrace thorium energy. Both the flagship campus
in Columbia and the Missouri University of Science and Technology in Rolla are home to research reactors.

Pea Ridge is one of two U.S. mines where rare earth elements can be mined. The other, in California’s Death Valley, is owned by a company by that both Kennedy and Pinhero said sells its refined minerals to companies in China.

The state House resolution also notes that discrepancy, along with the limitation that Molycorp Inc.’s mine in Mountain Pass, Calif., has only eight of the 16 recoverable rare earth elements. The elements are a key component in the manufacture of lasers, missile guidance systems and other pillars of defense — another reason why proponents are pushing for a domestic alternative to the Chinese.

"We've given most of it away — the refining methods and the intellectual property associated with it — to other countries," said Pinhero, who is researching a portable thorium power source at his lab. "They can squash anybody who tries to make a run at it."

Kennedy's company retains a 70 percent stake in minerals other than iron ore following a messy legal dispute with a former business partner that culminated in the sale of the mine he purchased in 2001, the same year it closed.

The new owners are MFC Industrial Ltd., a Canadian commodities supply chain company, and Alberici Constructors, which is based in St. Louis County. Kennedy's first step in reviving the mine's fortunes will be convincing them to reopen the facility.

"If we determine to move forward with the project, significant additional investment would be required," said Rene Randall, an MFC Industrial vice president.