Sen. Schaefer defends opposition to Medicaid expansion at GOP meeting

By Brendan Gibbons
June 18, 2013 11:17 p.m. CDT


The bulk of the meeting centered around the legislature's refusal to expand Medicaid. Four people came to the meeting wearing signs that read, “Full Medicaid expansion now.” For about an hour, they debated Medicaid expansion with Schaefer.

One of the protesters brought up recent layoffs at MU Health Care and Boone Hospital Center, sparking the discussion over Medicaid. Last week, Boone Hospital Center stated it would be cutting 13 part-time and full-time positions, and MU Health Care said it would lay off or cut the hours for 35 employees and not fill 90 vacant positions.

“Boone Hospital’s message is they’re doing the layoffs because of Medicare reductions. Boone Hospital and BJC never said Medicaid,” Schaefer said.

He contrasted this with the reasons MU Health Care gave for eliminating positions.

“The university is going to lay off a handful of people and actually said, and I could not believe it, that they were going to lay people off because we didn’t pass Medicaid expansion,” Schaefer said. “The university hospital made $28 million last year, and they’re going to lay off, what, $200,000 worth of employees to make a statement on that.”

“I think that is absolutely irresponsible,” he continued.
Schaefer expressed his opposition to Medicaid expansion and the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act as a whole. One reason he cited for not wanting to expand Medicaid is inefficiency in the system.

“You can’t fix the problem by simply pouring more money into it,” he said.

He also said expanding Medicaid will affect other parts of the state budget, such as education.

“I am firmly convinced as the chairman of appropriations that there is no possible way to do Medicaid expansion and not have a serious negative impact on public education,” Schaefer said.

Proponents of the expansion have argued for months that it would provide relief to the working poor. They argue there are people who make too much money to qualify for the state’s current Medicaid eligibility, but not enough to pay for insurance on their own or pay out-of-pocket for health care.

For example, a single parent in Missouri with children would not be covered under the state’s current Medicaid system unless he or she made 18 percent of the federal poverty level, according to the Missouri Foundation for Health.

“When you look at farmers and small rural communities, a lot of them don’t have access to work-based insurance,” said Brian Smith with the Missouri Rural Crisis Center, who attended the meeting wearing a Medicaid expansion sign. “So, you know, you’re looking at older populations, lower incomes, and they’re paying more for their insurance to begin with.”

Smith said the existence of small, rural hospitals is threatened without expansion.

“What happens is, they have to drastically cut services or in some cases even close,” Smith said. “Then that’s going to put more financial and just patient load pressure on places like Columbia, Springfield, St. Louis.”

“You’re right about some of those hospitals,” Schaefer replied. “I mean, there’s a question about the economic viability of some of those hospitals.”

Schaefer said rural patients often seek care farther away in a place like Columbia because of the high quality of care.

The second-most-discussed topic during the meeting was the collection and sharing of Missouri residents’ information by the Missouri Department of Revenue. Several attendees
told Schaefer they were concerned with what the department was doing with the data it collects from them when they renew their driver’s license.

“You have to give up that data to drive on the road now in the state of Missouri,” Schaefer told them.

Schaefer condemned the Revenue Department for collecting Missouri residents’ information and sharing it with a company called MorphoTrust USA. He compared this to the National Security Agency’s PRISM surveillance system, which was revealed by The Guardian earlier this month.

At the beginning of the meeting, Rowden listed some reasons he thought the session was successful, including the passage of the Second Amendment Preservation Act, which attempts to restrict federal acts from infringing on Missourians’ gun rights.

“We’re serious about the Second Amendment,” Rowden said. “We will fight back.”

Rowden also mentioned the passage of an income tax cut as a major victory. Gov. Jay Nixon vetoed the bill.

“We could very well have the votes to override him in September,” Rowden said.
COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) — The University of Missouri is about to hang a vacancy sign on its hilltop presidential home, Providence Point.

University system President Tim Wolfe says he plans to move out of the official residence overlooking Hinkson Creek and buy a private home. After his December 2011 hiring, Wolfe’s wife and two children had remained in Massachusetts for most of the year so the twins could complete high school.

The nearly 13,000-square-foot home was built in 1971, with a residential addition completed 14 years later. Each of Wolfe’s eight predecessors has lived at the presidential home since it was built.

Wolfe told The Associated Press he’s exploring ways to open Providence Point to the community, including as a possible party rental site.
Loss of Roger Mitchell is felt deeply by many

Tuesday, June 18, 2013 at 2:00 pm

Editor, the Tribune: Our community and beyond has lost a wonderful compassionate man — Roger Mitchell, the former dean of the University of Missouri College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources.

Roger wasn't one to boast about himself — so to me and others, he was simply known as Roger.

I met Roger 13 years ago while volunteering at the food bank. I soon discovered that my dad had worked for Roger in the Agronomy Department. When Roger found out who my dad was, he was delighted. Whenever Roger would introduce me to someone, he would tell people that my dad and he used to “work together.”

Those who never got to meet Roger missed knowing an angel on Earth. Those who knew Roger know terribly how much he will be missed. Roger treated everyone with respect and grace. My 33-year-old son, who has autism, got to feel that love from Roger, who always gave him big hugs. Roger also donated his 50-yea-old riding saddle to Cedar Creek Therapeutic Riding Center for a big horse that Chris rides.

A true gentleman with sweetness and kindness — loved by all. What a privilege and honor to have known this man. Roger is on my very short list of the greatest men I have ever known, starting with my dad. Roger was an angel on Earth. Now, somewhere over the rainbow, he is one of God’s angels in heaven — no doubt “working with” my dad and making others smile, … just like he did here on Earth.

Nancy Atkinson 5903 E. Route HH

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Posted in Letters To The Editor on Tuesday, June 18, 2013 2:00 pm.
Stephens hires new VP for advancement

Tuesday, June 18, 2013 at 2:00 pm

A longtime University of Missouri employee has been named as Stephens College's new vice president for institutional advancement and initiatives.

Meichele Foster will begin her new position at Stephens on July 1. She has worked at MU for 14 years, most recently as assistant to the dean for strategic opportunities for the School of Health Professions. During her time at MU, Foster's school was the first to reach its fundraising goal for the For All We Call Mizzou campaign, raising $7 million 18 months ahead of schedule and eventually surpassing its goal by $1 million.

In a prepared statement, Foster said she sees the value of Stephens "locally and nationally for the unique environment it affords and the significant role Stephens plays as a provider of undergraduate liberal arts education for women."

Foster has a master's degree from MU's Truman School of Public Affairs and a bachelor's degree from Columbia College.

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Posted in Education on Tuesday, June 18, 2013 2:00 pm.
MU golf course to be named for former curator

By The Associated Press
June 18, 2013 | 8:44 a.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — An $8.3 million contribution has earned a former University of Missouri curator naming rights for the school's golf course at a Columbia country club.

The university's Board of Curators voted unanimously last week to designate the facility as the Walsworth Family Golf Complex, a part of the Club at Old Hawthorne.

That comes five months after Don and Audrey Walsworths' gift for upgrades at Memorial Stadium and a new clubhouse for the men's and women's golf teams.

Don Walsworth, of Marceline, is an MU graduate, CEO of a northern Missouri publishing company and former curators' chairman. Two of his three children played golf for Missouri. A third was a Pac-10 golf champion at Stanford University.

A Mizzou Arena outdoor plaza is also named for the family.
MU to become smoke-free July 1

A colorful sign plastered on a yellow sandwich board in the middle of Speakers Circle congratulates MU's move to a 100 percent smoke-free campus, effective July 1.

Additional boards stand outside other frequented spots, including the Student Center, Memorial Union and Plaza 900, informing faculty, students and Summer Welcome groups of the new smoke-free policy.

The previous phase of the new policy had allowed smoking only in designated outdoor areas and on the top level of parking structures.

Originally projected to begin July 2014, the smoke-free campus policy was moved to a starting date of January 2014 before being fast-tracked to July 1, 2013. The smoke-free initiative prohibits smoking everywhere on campus.

Various smoking-related policy changes have been in the works for a few years, as MU first banned smoking in the dorms and eventually limited it to designated outside areas. Conversations about making the entire campus a smoke-free property began as early as 2008, said Terry Wilson, director of the health promotion and wellness department at the Student Health Center.

"It's been going on for a long time — the initiative to move the campus to smoke-free — but there's a lot of resistance along the way," Wilson said. "You have to be patient when you're changing a huge public health policy like that."

More than 1,000 universities in the U.S. have already adopted (with some yet to take effect) 100 percent smoke-free campus policies, according to the Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights Foundation.

Wilson said the Student Health Center has received input from students, faculty and staff regarding second-hand smoke inhalation on campus, and the health concern is the primary reason for supporting the policy's implementation.

"The Student Health Center's mission is very consistent with the smoke-free campus initiative," Wilson said. "Tobacco smoke has been classified as a Class-A carcinogen; it's cancer-causing. So there's really no safe level of exposure, and it's considered a toxic air contaminant."

Smoking is the top-ranked preventable cause of death and leading preventable cause of disease and disability in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Sophomore Claire Schroeder said she supports the idea of a smoke-free campus.

"(Smoking) affects other people because they have to breathe in what you exhale," Schroeder said. "I personally don't enjoy walking to class behind someone who's smoking a cigarette, and I think it's a good idea to try to encourage people to stop smoking on Mizzou's campus."
Smoking of e-cigarettes will be banned on all MU properties as well, according to the policy outlined on the Smoke-Free Mizzou website.

The policy does not explicitly state any consequences or penalties for smoking on campus.

Aside from a possible added stigma against smokers and assumed social pressures, senior Hannah Cushman said she doesn’t see the smoke-free policy changing smokers’ behaviors.

“I don’t smoke a whole lot, but when I do, I try and stay away from groups of people, and I try to be considerate, away from doors, that kind of thing,” Cushman said. “I really don’t think (the policy) is going to stop me from doing it.”

According to the Smoke-Free Mizzou website, “all members of the university community share the responsibility of adhering to and enforcing the policy and have the responsibility for bringing it to the attention of visitors.”

But Schroeder said she would likely not approach someone violating the smoke-free policy.

“They want to go smoke-free on the campus, but I don’t really see a lot for enforcing that, other than asking (violators) politely,” she said.

For some students, the absence of strict enforcement and a vague compliance structure make it a policy with more bark than bite.

“I think it’s less from a health standpoint and more from an appearance kind of thing,” Cushman said. “I respect that they’re trying to make the campus look better and if it’s something that they can put in a brochure, then that’s fine. But for me, it seems like it’s more for appearances than anything else.”
Missouri moves to lift ban on foreign farm owners

19 hours ago • Associated Press

MU MENTION P. 2

Weeks before a Chinese conglomerate agreed to buy Smithfield Foods Inc. in the largest such takeover of a U.S. business, Missouri lawmakers quietly approved legislation removing a ban on foreign ownership of agricultural land.

The northern Missouri legislator whose amendments to a pair of larger bills helped push the plan through the Legislature and onto the desk of Gov. Jay Nixon said he wants to provide greater oversight of foreign ownership, which will be capped in Missouri at 1 percent and require state approval. The changes were approved on the final day of the legislative session.

"The law doesn't work," said Rep. Casey Guernsey, R-Bethany, citing legal loopholes that allow foreign owners to mask their assets behind domestic-based groups. "What I want to do is make it work ... It will provide a degree of accountability for an international corporation that it wouldn't have before."

Shuanghui International Holdings Ltd. announced its plans to purchase Smithfield Foods on May 29 in a deal that still requires shareholder approval and a federal regulatory review by the U.S. Committee on Foreign Investment. The deal’s expected value is $7.1 billion, including debt.

Missouri is one of several Midwest states with little-known laws passed in the 1970s amid concerns over Japanese investment that prohibit or restrict foreign farmland ownership. Smithfield Foods’ spokeswoman Keira Lombardo said the two sides "identified this issue during their discussions and it presents no obstacles to closing the proposed combination."

"Smithfield's operations do not fall under the provisions of many of the states ... and only a few of them have applicable laws that need to be satisfied," she said. "We intend to consult and work closely with appropriate state officials on this matter as appropriate after the closing."

In Oklahoma, the law limiting foreign farmland ownership exempts swine operations, said Diane Clay, an Attorney General’s Office spokeswoman. And in Iowa, the office of Attorney General Tom Miller said it
expects Smithfield Foods’ new owner to “comply with all (laws and) agreements,” including a consent decree related to livestock production by meatpackers.

“We hope to close the loop soon, whether it’s a final letter from Smithfield to us or a memo of understanding from our office to Smithfield,” said Geoff Greenwood, a Mille spokesman.

The Missouri bill awaits Nixon’s approval, and his office declined to say whether he would sign it. The offices of Attorney General Chris Koster and the state Department of Agriculture also declined to comment.

A Columbia-based group that opposes the corporate consolidation of the agriculture industry criticized Guernsey’s handling of the legislation. Language removing the foreign ban was added to two Senate bills in late April while in the House Agribusiness Committee, which is chaired by Guernsey. The underlying bills to which the amendments were added deal with farm loans and University of Missouri Extension districts.

In early May, Guernsey added an amendment while the bill was on the House floor that doubled the allowable foreign farmland ownership from half a percent to 1 percent.

“To call it a coincidence is doing a disservice to the democratic process,” said Tim Gibbons of the Missouri Rural Crisis Center, referring to the legislative votes that preceded the Smithfield sale announcement and the absence of broader debate. “These things should have been discussed. And they weren’t.”

Guernsey, a dairy and beef cattle farmer, countered that he introduced a similar bill in May 2012. He bristled at suggestions that the foreign ownership ban was lifted at the request of Smithfield, which he said is the largest employer in his five-county district and a campaign contributor of Guernsey’s.

“I didn’t even know about Smithfield until we were out of session,” he said. “Trust me, the last person Smithfield tells about any of their business decisions is Casey Guernsey.”

While Guernsey said he “can’t stand the thought of the Chinese owning our largest employer,” he’s eager to see the potential economic benefits of a deal that some observers believe was driven by greater demand among Chinese consumers for U.S.-produced food.

U.S. Sen. Roy Blunt shared a similar sentiment.

“That’s a great opportunity for U.S. agriculture and a great opportunity for American agriculture,” he said. “Once people get better food they universally do not want to go back to the bad food again. Not only is there going to be more people but there’s going to be more demand and more competition for the food that’s out there.”