MU boosts efforts to fight campus sex assault

The University of Missouri's flagship campus in Columbia announced Tuesday that it is boosting its efforts to fight sexual assault.

The university plans to hire a full-time Title IX coordinator as well as a full-time investigator. Responsibility for overseeing the school’s compliance with the federal law prohibiting sex discrimination in education had previously been handled on a part-time basis by an administrator with other duties.

Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin announced the moves Tuesday. In April, he vowed to make the school “accountable and responsible” after an independent review by an outside law firm hired by university curators faulted the university’s response to the suicide of a former swimmer who told health professionals before her death that she had been raped by several football players.

Sasha Menu Courey committed suicide in 2011 at a Boston psychiatric hospital after withdrawing from classes at Missouri. Before her death, she told health professionals bound by confidentiality that she had been sexually assaulted in 2010. The matter was not investigated by the university at the time and no one was arrested or disciplined.
The outside review determined that the Title IX coordinator and local police should have been alerted to Menou Courey’s claims in November 2012 after a public records request by her parents produced documents alluding to a possible attack. The Title IX coordinator also should have been told about the possible assault nine months earlier when athletics department employees learned about it in a local news story, the review concluded.

The school initially said it didn’t act sooner because neither Menou Courey nor her parents sought a police investigation and didn’t respond to a request for information. The case has since been referred to Columbia police.

**Loftin’s move comes after University of Missouri system president Tim Wolfe issued an April executive order requiring all university employees other than those legally bound by confidentiality to report such claims to the Title IX coordinator.**

Loftin appointed Linda Bennett, an associate education professor, as the interim Title IX coordinator. The chancellor said he hopes to have the two hires complete by the start of the fall semester in late August.

MU residence halls added to regular inspection cycle

By Joe Guszkowski
June 10, 2014 | 5:29 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — MU's auxiliary buildings — residence halls, dining halls and student unions — will be subject to regularly scheduled building assessments by an outside firm, the university has decided.
These buildings will be added to a cycle of "facilities condition assessments," which are done every year by a Georgia firm called ISES Corp., MU Campus Facilities Manager of Communications Karlan Seville said in an email Wednesday.

Details on when the first group of auxiliary buildings will be assessed are still being worked out.

The firm has inspected MU's educational and general buildings since 2001, Seville said. An architect and engineer from ISES look at about 20 percent of educational and general space every year, completing the entire campus every five years.

Residence halls, dining halls and other auxiliary buildings had not been included in those assessments.

"This puts every building on a regular inspection cycle," MU spokesman Christian Basi said.

The university decided in early March to include the auxiliary buildings in ISES assessments.

The building assessments are a way to "determine what needs to be renewed, what needs to be repaired, and what needs to be altered," according to ISES' website.

"The facility condition inspection is designed to help the owner identify what his long-term financial requirements are," said Dan Harrison, executive vice president of ISES. "It's not a structural analysis of a building."

MU buildings are not subject to regularly scheduled structural inspections, according to previous Missourian reporting.

Harrison said that if a structural issue is observed during the assessment, ISES would recommend that a structural engineer come take a closer look. Formal structural inspections are more in-depth and expensive than the facility condition analyses done by ISES, he said.

Regular structural inspections of buildings are not a common practice, said Frankie Minor, director of Residential Life.
"Structural inspections are done at the time when the certificate of occupancy is issued," he said. After that, the department relies on observations by occupants or staff, who are in the buildings daily, to determine if a more detailed inspection is necessary.

Residence halls and other auxiliary buildings have been assessed by various outside firms in the past, just not as part of the five-year cycle.

Except for Laws, Lathrop and Jones halls, which are slated for replacement, all of MU's residence halls have been rebuilt or renovated within the past five to 10 years. Their conditions have been well-documented, Minor said in an email, with ISES assessments completed in 2009 and 2013.

Formal inspections of various other auxiliary buildings were done during the following years:

- 2000: The condition of MU's 19 residence halls were assessed as part of the Residential Life Master Plan, which sought to create more space for a projected surge in enrollment, according to the Department of Residential Life's website. Further assessments took place in 2005 and 2012 as the plan was updated.
- 2007: MU hired Mackey Mitchell Architects to assess the University Student Apartments — its four graduate and family housing complexes — as part of the Graduate and Family Housing Master Plan. The goal was to assess the conditions of the buildings and find out what issues needed correcting, according to the plan.
- 2013: ISES completed facilities conditions assessments for the MU Student Center, Memorial Student Union, A.P. Green Chapel and the MU bookstore distribution warehouse on Rock Quarry Road, said Tracy Schultz, assistant director of student support services.
- 2014: MU hired the engineering firm Trabue, Hansen and Hinshaw Inc. to do structural and life safety inspections of every campus building in the wake of the walkway collapse at the University Village apartment complex in February in which Columbia firefighter Lt. Bruce Britt died. Britt's family has filed a wrongful-death lawsuit against the university.
Wolpers Hall, Johnston Hall and the new hall being built south of Discovery and Responsibility halls will receive ISES analyses in the 2015 fall semester, said Harriett Green-Sappington, associate director of residential life facilities planning.

Wolpers is in the midst of renovations and houses a mechanical room that serves Johnston, so the halls will be assessed together, she said.

In addition to those assessments, workers doing routine maintenance in campus buildings are trained to notice issues that might call for further inspection, Basi said in February.

Residents warned of gas line break at University Village

By Marisa Tesoro
June 10, 2014 | 6:38 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — An MU-run apartment complex slated for demolition had a gas line break Tuesday.

Shortly before 1:30 p.m., the office manager of University Student Apartments for MU warned University Village residents that a gas line break had occurred at the complex and told residents to stay away from the area where Ameren Missouri officials were working to fix it.

MU and Ameren gave conflicting accounts of what caused the gas line break. Bryan Daniels, an Ameren spokesman said that a third-party contractor who was working in the area for the university had cut the line. But Christian Basi, a spokesman for MU, said "the city accidentally cut the line" and saw that it was repaired.

Two Ameren trucks were in the area shortly before 2 p.m. Tuesday to fix the gas line break. Most of the work was concentrated behind Building 704, in the southwest portion
of the apartment complex. That building is unoccupied, according to previous Missourian reporting.

University Village will permanently close by June 30 and will be demolished shortly thereafter. The buildings' structural integrity came into question after part of a walkway collapsed at Building 707 in February and caused the death of Columbia firefighter Lt. Bruce Britt, who was responding to a structural emergency there.

An MU housing plan from 2008 recommended University Village be vacated and demolished by 2011.

College presidents express support for Common Core

By KIMBERLY HEFLING

NO MU MENTION

WASHINGTON (AP) — Higher education leaders in 33 states on Tuesday announced the formation of a coalition in support of Common Core education standards rolling out in most states.

The more than 200 college presidents and state higher education leaders say the K-12 standards represent a significant improvement over most states' standards. They say they are needed to tackle the high rate of students needing remedial help in college, and that the higher education community has a "clear and compelling" stake in the debate.

"These standards are good for our students, our states and our country," said Nancy Zimpher, chancellor of the State University of New York. "We must have students that are college- and career-ready in order for the United States to continue to compete and win in the 21st Century global economy."
Zimpher, in a statement, said the formation of the coalition is a call to action and she urges all colleagues in higher education to "stand up and make their voices heard on Common Core."

The coalition said that about half of all students going to 2-year college and 20 percent going to a 4-year institution need remedial help. Only a small number of these students later graduate.

John Morgan, chancellor of the Tennessee Board of Regents, says higher education leaders have been working to address this, but "we believe Common Core standards, with their focus on critical thinking and problem solving, can help improve student success."

The standards spell out what math and English skills students should master at each grade. They were adopted on a state-by-state basis but have faced push-back. Governors in Indiana, South Carolina and Oklahoma have signed legislation to repeal them.

The federal government has offered incentives to states to adopt career and college ready standards such as Common Core. That has led to accusations of federal intrusion. There have also been complaints that the standards are untested and that they have not been properly implemented.

College Leaders Sign On to Support Common Core Educational Standards

By Dan Bauman

More than 200 higher-education leaders have created a new organization to voice their support for Common Core, the controversial state-based educational-standards system.

Members of the Higher Ed for Higher Standards coalition announced on Tuesday their intention to reverse anti-Common Core sentiments in their respective state capitals, as well as to work toward the successful adoption of Common Core standards. Members of the group hail from more than 30 states and consist mostly of administrators at public colleges and universities.
In the view of Nancy L. Zimpher, chancellor of the State University of New York system, Common Core represents an opportunity to set national standards for public-school education. "My fear is, if we start throwing in the towel now on Common Core, we won’t have another moment like this again," Ms. Zimpher said.

Designed in 2009, the Common Core standards were adopted in 2010 and 2011 by 45 states and the District of Columbia with bipartisan support. But recently, support for the reforms has slipped as controversy has arisen over the standards and how they were put in place.

In recent weeks, two governors—Mary Fallin of Oklahoma and Nikki Haley of South Carolina, both Republicans—signed laws ending adoption of the reforms in their states. Indiana’s Board of Education formally abandoned the benchmarks in late April. Common Core maintains support from the Obama administration. Ms. Zimpher is also a proponent of the president’s college-rating plan and has proposed the adoption of similar measures within the SUNY system.

Common Core and the controversy surrounding it were certainly on the minds of top college administrators when they convened this spring for a series of meetings. As conversations about Common Core carried over from meetings of the National Association of System Heads, the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, the idea for Higher Ed for Higher Standards was conceived. The new coalition is a project of the Collaborative for Student Success, which receives funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The Gates foundation has spent millions of dollars promoting Common Core.

Coalition members plan to focus on their own state capitals, where the group’s organizers hope the voices and reputations of college officials will help reverse legislative animosity toward the benchmarks. Ms. Zimpher said that progress in New York has already been made by forging partnerships with the governor, teachers, and other Common Core supporters. The coalition will work to educate lawmakers and the public further on the benefits of and misconceptions surrounding Common Core, she said.
With no formal body to direct action, it will be up to coalition members to plan among themselves and lobby their respective state lawmakers.

**Ready for College?**

Members of the group say they see Common Core as a potential solution to the problem of remedial education in higher education. Strong American Schools, an education-policy group founded by the billionaires Bill Gates and Eli Broad, has estimated the annual cost of remediation at $1.9-billion to $2.3-billion for community colleges and $500-million more at four-year colleges. Some studies have found that as many as 50 percent of students at community colleges, and 20 percent of students at four-year institutions, require remedial courses. Organizers of the coalition believe that the educational reforms can alleviate some of those problems and narrow the college-preparation gap.

Administrators are not without their own concerns about the standards, however. In an op-ed published on Tuesday in *The Chronicle*, Chancellor William E. (Brit) Kirwan of the University System of Maryland, Chancellor Timothy P. White of the California State University system, and Ms. Zimpher argue that better assessments must be put in place to measure the quality of Common Core. "The truth is, most states’ current high-school tests are not rigorous enough to provide us this information, so we in higher education often ignore them," the chancellors wrote.

But public colleges and universities face their own challenges with Common Core integration. According to a survey conducted by the Center for Education Policy at George Washington University, education agencies in 16 states reported that working with public colleges to enact Common Core standards posed a "major" challenge. Published in September, the survey also found that public colleges in 27 states were having difficulty adapting teacher-training programs to the benchmarks. State education agencies also reported that colleges in 18 states were resisting the reforms in other ways.
Missouri offers aid to students at risk of ‘summer melt’

Missouri has a new summer program designed to help high school graduates stay true to plans to enter college come fall.

According to university researchers, many students — particularly low-income and first-generation to college — abandon post-secondary plans in the first few months after they graduate from high school.

This phenomenon is known as “summer melt.” As many as 40 percent of students who graduate with a college acceptance letter, financial aid award letter and a paid deposit fail to enroll in college.

To counter this, the Missouri College Advising Corps is opening a college connections center for the Kansas City area to assist students and increase their likelihood of entering college in the fall. The center, at the Metropolitan Community-College Penn Valley campus Humanities Building, Room 29, is available through Aug. 1, Monday through Saturday, free of charge to students from Missouri and Kansas, with funding from the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation.
WASHINGTON -- A bipartisan pair of Congressional lawmakers on Tuesday introduced a resolution in the House of Representatives opposing the Obama administration’s college ratings system. The president, meanwhile, defended the proposal as a necessary tool for students.

The resolution, by Representatives Bob Goodlatte of Virginia and Michael Capuano of Massachusetts, Republican and Democrat, respectively, criticizes the ratings system as “reductionist” and warns that the government’s ratings would “carry an image of validity that will mislead” prospective students.

“The administration’s proposal to rate postsecondary institutions through an oversimplified federal rating system that is not supported by postsecondary institutions, statute or by the House of Representatives, will lead to less choice, diversity and innovation, and should be rejected,” the resolution says.

Goodlatte previously circulated an email to colleagues that said he’s seeking ways in the current budget process to block the administration from developing the rating system.

Senator Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, the top Republican on the Senate’s education committee, said in an interview with Inside Higher Ed on Monday that he would support an effort to prevent the Education Department from developing the ratings system. But he said that such Congressional intervention likely wouldn’t be
necessary.

“I expect that the president’s proposal for a college ratings system will flop on its own face.” Alexander said. “We haven’t seen it yet and we probably won’t ever see it because it’s impossible to do it the way they’re planning to do it with 6,000 autonomous institutions” of higher education across the country.

The administration has said that even without any funding from Congress, it plans to produce a draft of the plan for public comment by this fall.

During a question-and-answer session on Tumblr, Obama on Tuesday acknowledged that there is “some controversy” surrounding the proposal, which is said to be a personal priority of his.

“A lot of colleges and universities say if you start ranking just based on cost and employability, et cetera, you’re missing the essence of higher education and so forth,” Obama said. “What we’re really trying to do is just to identify: here are some good bargains; here are some really bad deals. Then there’s going to be a bunch of schools in the middle that there’s not going to be a huge amount of differentiation.”

“What we are trying to do is to make sure that students have enough information going into” college, he continued, so that “they don’t end up in a school that is pretty notorious for piling a lot of debt on their students but not really delivering a great education.”

Obama also criticized “traditional rankings systems” like those published in U.S. News & World Report for rewarding high-cost institutions. His plan would instead focus on outcomes, he said, though he referred to it as an attempt to “develop a ranking system.”

Administration officials, including Education Secretary Arne Duncan, have repeatedly insisted that their goal is to develop a ratings system, not a ranking system.
Many higher education leaders, especially those representing private colleges, however, have dismissed such a rhetorical distinction as meaningless, arguing that it will not be difficult to discern a hierarchical ranking of institutions from the data-based judgments that the government publishes about colleges. If the government doesn't do the sorting itself, they say, others will do so.

Congressmen Introduce Resolution Opposing College-Rating System
June 11, 2014 by Andy Thomason

Two U.S. congressmen introduced a resolution on Tuesday that opposes the Department of Education’s controversial plan to design a ratings system for colleges and universities.

Rep. Bob Goodlatte, a Virginia Republican, and Rep. Michael E. Capuano, a Massachusetts Democrat, also issued a joint statement calling the department’s proposal, which much of academe has greeted with skepticism, “misguided.”

Under the plan, an institution’s federal financial aid would be tied to its rating, which would be based on several factors, including affordability and student outcomes. Education Secretary Arne Duncan has said that, even if the agency doesn’t receive the $10-million from Congress that it requested to fund the project, it would still move forward with the plan.

President Obama mentioned the ratings system on Tuesday during a Tumblr Q&A about student-loan debt, saying the proposed system would help push colleges to be more affordable.
White House Doesn’t Know How Much Expanding Loan Program Will Cost

By Kelly Field

White House officials aren’t sure how much President Obama’s plan to expand the most generous income-based repayment program will cost, but they’re confident the proposal will be worth it.

In a conference call with reporters on Tuesday, Cecilia Muñoz, director of the Domestic Policy Council, said calculating the cost of the expansion is tricky because the administration doesn’t know how many of the five million borrowers it expects to qualify for the benefit will actually enroll in the Pay as You Earn plan.

"Some of it depends on how many borrowers ultimately take up the option," she told reporters. "But there are clear economic benefits," to borrowers and the economy at large.

"Ultimately, we believe it’s money well spent," she said.

Ms. Muñoz said the Education Department would come up with an estimated cost when it writes rules to carry out the policy change.

In his budget for the 2015 fiscal year, released in April, Mr. Obama proposed extending his signature Pay as You Earn repayment plan to all borrowers. The administration projected that such a change would cost $7.3-billion over five years.

Under the latest plan, announced at a White House event on Monday, borrowers with older debt will be eligible to participate in the Pay as You Earn program. The
expansion does not include reforms of the program proposed in the 2015 budget, but Ms. Muñoz said they would be considered as part of the rule-making process.

June 11, 2014

What’s Out: Student Debt. What’s In: Free College.

By Goldie Blumenstyk

Student-debt relief plans are all the rage these days in Washington, but a more-radical idea is also gaining some ground: making college free.

In 2013 the idea was aired in a much-discussed book by a faculty-labor activist in California. Then this year it was enacted for community colleges as the Tennessee Promise, and promoted in a different form as two years of free college by a University of Wisconsin professor in an attention-grabbing proposal presented publicly at a Lumina Foundation event and privately at the White House.

Next week a new coalition called Redeeming America’s Promise will unveil its free-college proposal—a call to create an American Promise Scholarship program that would provide federally funded grants to allow students to complete degrees at two-year and four-year colleges. The scholarship amounts would be roughly equal to the average price of public-college tuition.

The coalition’s proposal would also require participating colleges to charge students no more than the amount of the scholarships, in effect creating a cap on college prices.
Like the earlier proposals—from Robert Samuels, president of the union that represents lecturers and librarians at the University of California, and Sara Goldrick-Rab, an associate professor of educational-policy studies and sociology at the University of Wisconsin at Madison—the coalition’s proposal would pay for the costs of free college largely by reallocating federal money that now funds other educational programs, such as tuition tax breaks.

Paying for college is "the No. 1 financial concern of anybody with children in America," said Morley Winograd, the group’s founder and president, and a onetime top adviser to former Vice President Al Gore. So the coalition, he said, wants to start a national conversation about college, "sort of like the conversation that Horace Mann started" that led to universal elementary and secondary education.

The coalition includes nearly two dozen other former government officials and policy advocates, many of them alumni of the Clinton administration, along with former members of Congress and chiefs of staff for Democratic governors. It also includes Common Sense Action, an organization for the "Millennial" generation; a former governor of Michigan, James J. Blanchard; and a former head of the Association of Private-Sector Colleges and Universities, Harris N. Miller. Some prominent Republicans have also signed on, but they are not due to be identified until the coalition’s news conference, next Tuesday in Washington.

**Focus on the Millennials**

Redeeming America’s Promise formed about a year ago with a group assembled by Mr. Winograd.

The participants had a common concern, Mr. Miller said: "whether we were providing for our children and grandchildren the same educational opportunity that our parents provided us."

It was a particularly resonant concern for Mr. Winograd. He is a co-author of several books on the Millennial generation, those born from 1982 through 2003, who as a
group are now paying a bigger share of the costs of college than did their predecessors and who are borrowing more to cover those costs.

Mr. Winograd had studied earlier examples of free higher education, such as the City University of New York prior to the mid-1970s, and philanthropic programs that guarantee free college tuition to grade-school children, like the Kalamazoo Promise. He proposed that the coalition develop an idea that could counter the problem of economic immobility, and saw education as the key.

Other solutions, like student-debt relief, "seemed to be nibbling around the edges of the problem," said Mr. Miller.

The coalition’s founders were also mindful of intergenerational issues. Repeatedly in its proposal, the group states that its plan would neither require additional federal taxes nor "further burden future generations by financing these proposals by increasing the nation’s overall debt."

Zakiya Smith, strategy director for Lumina and a former policy adviser in President Obama's White House, said the emergence of these free-college proposals in the past year reflected the tenor of the times. "People are just resentful of the increasing costs and amount of debt," she said.

While she doubts that the recent proposals, or much anything of substance, could gain traction in the current partisan political climate, Ms. Smith said she appreciated that proposals like Ms. Goldrick-Rab’s, for example, highlighted that the costs of going to college include not just tuition but also necessities like food, transportation, and child care. "Those are the real barriers," she said.

Mr. Samuels, who argued his big idea in Why Public Higher Education Should Be Free (Rutgers University Press, 2013) and in an essay for The Chronicle, said the prevalence of student debt and studies showing its effect as a drag on the economy may be making more mainstream an idea that seemed otherwise outlandish even a few
years ago. "It’s affecting more and more people," he said.

Mr. Winograd cited a more pragmatic reason that the idea could fly. By 2016, Millennials will make up 30 percent of the adult population, and by 2020, 36 percent. And while they are diverse demographically, they share many political beliefs, including, he said, faith in a more-activist government. In other words, they form a bloc of voters that politicians will want to please.

Mr. Winograd said the financial underpinnings of the coalition’s plan have also passed muster with outside reviewers, including the Bipartisan Policy Center, a Washington-based research organization.

**Raising Concerns**

Still, the proposals aren’t universally popular. For example, Ms. Goldrick-Rab’s idea—described in a paper, "Redefining College Affordability: Securing America’s Future With a Free Two-Year-College Option," written with Nancy Kendall, a colleague at Madison who is also an associate professor of educational-policy studies—would pay for two years of community college or public four-year college, plus stipends and work-study jobs to cover living expenses. But it would do so by reallocating federal funds that now go to support students at private and for-profit colleges. Supporters of those institutions have not exactly warmed to that idea.

Mr. Samuels recently saw his proposal attacked in a book review by Laura W. Perna, a professor in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania, and Kata Orosz, a Ph.D. student there. They questioned his data and his logic. "We do need a recalibration" of the balance between what students pay and what governments pay for higher education, Ms. Perna said in an interview. That’s an argument that needs to be made, she said, "but we have to be careful how we make it."

The Redeeming America’s Promise proposal, too, has raised concerns among those who have seen it. In fact, some of the group’s early members decided not to sign the final proposal for fear that it would hamstring colleges because of its requirement that
colleges not charge more in tuition than the cost of the scholarships. The scholarships would run about $2,000 a year for community colleges and about $8,500 a year at four-year colleges. Only students with high-school GPAs of at least 2.75 could qualify for the four-year grants.

Other countries with free tuition "tend to have very exclusive systems," said Robert M. Shireman, executive director of California Competes and a former official in the U.S. Department of Education. With the coalition’s proposal, said Mr. Shireman, who was not part of the group but did see a copy of its plan, "there is a serious potential of undermining access" because public colleges might not be able to serve that many students at that price.

When California cut funding for community colleges a few years ago, he noted, the colleges shut out tens of thousands of students because the institutions couldn’t afford to serve students on what they were paying in tuition. "We need to make sure we’re not just looking at price but supply," Mr. Shireman said.

Mr. Winograd said he believed colleges would come up with other sources of funds. "They are finding other resources now," he said.

Some Millennial groups that have seen the proposal disliked that it was open to for-profit colleges, Mr. Winograd said. They felt that such institutions had "ripped off a lot of members of their generation," he said. Both Mr. Winograd and Mr. Miller said the group had decided not to exclude for-profit institutions, or private nonprofit colleges, even though they doubted many of them would choose to participate.

Mr. Miller, who noted that he had not worked for the for-profit-college association for three years, said the proposal, which also calls for loans of up to $10,000 to be paid back based on income, was aimed at public colleges. "I would think that for-profit schools, especially the ones that are expensive, would find this very objectionable," he said.
**Uncertain Prospects**

What’s next for the plans is unclear. Ms. Goldrick-Rab said she could not comment on how the White House had responded to her plan, and Ms. Smith, of Lumina, said the foundation wasn’t going to champion that proposal or any of the others recently presented to Lumina, but would incorporate some of the ideas into future grant-making.

Mr. Winograd said he hoped the Redeeming America’s Promise’s proposal, which has already gathered more than 1,800 "likes" on Facebook, would be considered by candidates in the 2016 presidential race and perhaps even as part of the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, which is now under way.

For Adolph Reed, a University of Pennsylvania professor of political science who has been campaigning for broad-scale, free college on and off for at least a dozen years, the enthusiasm rings familiar. Working in conjunction with unions and other groups, Mr. Reed published articles on the topic in Dissent and other advocacy journals, and estimates he gave about a hundred talks on behalf of the idea. For most of that time, he said, people found it an "eminently reasonable idea" but just far enough outside the "consensus of thinkable" that the campaign never really took off.

The idea is "as viable now as it was 12 years ago—maybe more so," said Mr. Reed. But with a new mainstream group now preparing to champion the idea, Mr. Reed noted that it takes more than a "good idea" to make something a reality. "If there’s not a political interest that has the capacity and the will to agitate around it," he said, "then it will just have its 15 minutes in the news cycle."

But if he is skeptical, he’s also excited. After just a few minutes of conversation, in fact, Mr. Reed was sounding a lot like a man readying a revival of his campaign. "I’d be up for it," he said.