Gov. Jay Nixon vetoes record number of bills

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JEFFERSON CITY • Gov. Jay Nixon used his veto pen to set a personal record this year following a legislative session marred by showdowns over tax cuts, school choice and revenue estimates.

Nixon, a Democrat, vetoed 33 bills — the most in a single year since he took office in 2009. His total is just two short of the most vetoes of any Missouri governor after a single legislative session, set by former Gov. John Dalton, a Democrat, in 1961.

Nixon also line-item vetoed about 120 items in the budget for fiscal year 2015, which began July 1.

Lawmakers are allowed a final say on the vetoed bills. The Republican-led Legislature will return to the Capitol in September for a chance to override him. Each chamber needs a two-thirds vote to do so.

Republicans control 108 of the 163 House seats and 23 of the 34 Senate seats, making them veto-proof in the Senate but one short in the House.

Senate Majority Leader Ron Richard, R-Joplin, found some of Nixon’s vetoes surprising but said lawmakers have not yet talked about how to approach the large number.

“Nixon’s got his own opinions,” Richard said, adding that lawmakers would take the bills “one at a time.”

Nixon’s high tally of vetoes follows a session fraught with political turmoil.

Legislators already have overridden Nixon’s veto of a $620 million tax cut, ignored his call for Medicaid expansion and demanded students in unaccredited districts have the option to transfer to private, nonreligious schools. Then, they passed a bevy of tax breaks for restaurants, dry cleaners and power companies, to name a few, which drew Nixon’s derision.

The Legislature also fought with Nixon over revenue growth projections, holding a more conservative figure than the governor for both last fiscal year and the current one. It turns out both sides were wrong for the fiscal year that ended June 30, as revenue dipped 1 percent — $79.4 million — and put more pressure on budget issues.
After the session ended, Nixon issued a flurry of vetoes of high-priority Republican bills, such as the school transfer bill and a 72-hour waiting period for abortions. He also axed the 10 tax break bills and vetoed $144.6 million of general revenue from the current fiscal year’s budget.

*He withheld an additional $641.6 million from the budget, including about $144 million in education funding that he says will be restored if the Legislature sustains his vetoes of the 10 tax break bills.*

Nixon’s increasingly bitter battles with Republicans show a turn toward the more liberal stance of the national Democratic Party and may signal a desire in the governor for higher office, said David Robertson, a political science professor at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

“He could be setting the stage to play a role in the presidential campaign next election,” Robertson said.

Nixon has dodged questions about his next political move, but he told Politico at a National Governors Association meeting this weekend the Democratic field of presidential hopefuls would benefit from a “voice in the heartland.”

Despite the vetoes, Nixon did approve a number of bills passed by the Legislature this past session.

*He signed a bill limiting patients’ out-of-pocket costs for cancer-fighting pills to $75 a month after meeting their deductible. He also signed legislation requiring public universities to establish performance criteria — used to determine the amount of extra money an institution would receive when the state can increase college funding — and a bill lifting the ban on food stamps for drug felons, if they meet certain conditions.*

Additionally, he signed a bill requiring the state to evaluate and adopt new standards and assessments to track student performance.

The governor allowed two other measures — the first criminal code overhaul in decades and a bill allowing casinos to extend lines of credit to patrons if they have at least $10,000 and are not intoxicated — to become law without his signature.

Now that all the bills are off the governor’s desk, lawmakers are gearing up to consider a slew of veto override votes.

Lawmakers spent months developing what they considered a fix to the school transfer law, which had required unaccredited districts to pay for the tuition and transportation costs for students to transfer to better schools. But the addition of a private, nonreligious transfer option was a no-go for Nixon, who all but threatened a veto before the measure even landed on his desk.
Bill sponsor Sen. David Pearce, R-Warrensburg, made it clear he would attempt an override in the Senate, where the measure passed with bipartisan support 28-3, more than enough for an override. But it gets tricky in the House, where the bill passed 89-66 — 20 votes short.

Pearce said some lawmakers may change their votes given the political climate since May.

“I think Nixon vetoing a record number of bills also sends a political signal that the governor is not interested in supporting a lot of the legislation,” Pearce said.

Legislators might have more luck overriding Nixon’s vetoes of the 10 tax break bills, commonly referred to as “Friday Favors” by the Nixon administration. The bills would provide tax breaks to data storage centers, power companies, fitness centers, restaurants and farmers markets, among others, which supporters say will help boost the economy and create jobs.

Nixon, however, says the bills would drop state and local revenue by $776 million each year, with St. Louis’ losing potential at about $20 million. Since May, the governor has toured the state denouncing the tax breaks and their potential impact.

Both the House and the Senate have enough votes to override Nixon’s vetoes on eight of the 10 bills. The bills providing tax breaks for data storage centers and personal seat licenses at stadiums were short in the House.

An override of a 72-hour waiting period for an abortion might not be simple. The measure’s lack of an exception for victims of rape and incest drew criticism from Nixon, because it was “wholly insensitive to women who find themselves in horrific circumstances.”

Bill handler Sen. David Sater, R-Cassville, immediately responded in a statement with a vow to override because abortion “is an irreversible and permanent decision, and taking the time to think about the consequences is not unreasonable or a burden.”

The House passed the bill 111-39 — enough to override — but the Senate’s party line vote of 22-9 was one short of the 23 needed to override. Sen. Mike Cunningham, R-Rogersville, was absent for the vote.

Nixon vetoed 29 bills last year, 14 bills in both 2012 and 2011, five in 2010 and 23 in 2009 — his first year in office.

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New tailgating experience comes with amenities — and a price

By Rachel Jelinek
July 14, 2014 | 7:47 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — A spot right next to Memorial Stadium, live music, a buffet line and a beer tent.

These are some of the features planned for Truman’s Terrace, a new MU tailgating area at the southeast corner of Memorial Stadium where the Mizzou Amphitheater used to be.

Food and non-alcoholic beverages will be included with the price of admission to the area. No personal coolers will be allowed.

"The purpose is that everything is provided to make it easy for people," Missouri athletics department spokesman Chad Moller said.

Levy Restaurants, MU’s caterer for athletic events, will provide a buffet. Fans can expect food geared toward the time of the game — a breakfast buffet for morning games and a dinner menu for later games, athletic associate Brittani Price said. It has not been determined whether it will be an all-you-can-eat buffet or what foods will be on the menus.

It all comes with a price, of course.

Two different memberships will be offered. An individual season pass will cost $200, while the tailgate package will vary per game and by the size of the party.

For the first three games, the tailgate package will cost $4,000 for a tent of 25 people or $8,000 for a tent of 50 people.
The University of Georgia and Vanderbilt University games will cost $6,000 for a 25-person tent and $12,000 for a 50-person tent. The last two games against the universities of Kentucky and Arkansas will cost $5,000 for a tent of 25 people or $10,000 for a tent of 50 people.

Although parking will not be available for those with an individual membership, members with a tailgate package will be allowed one parking pass per tent, Price said.

There will be several entrances to the tailgate area along with direct access into the stadium, both Price and Moller said. Only tailgaters with both a Truman’s Terrace membership and a football ticket will be able to access the site.

Fans can enter the terrace two hours before every football game and one hour afterward.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Engineering students from Saudi Arabia participate in internship's first year

By Lauren Rutherford
July 15, 2014 | 6:00 a.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — Crowded around a 3-D printer's small viewing window, students from Saudi Arabia watched as the design they made virtually in a lab next door became tangible. Their impression is that 3-D printing is all the rage in the United States, and they joked that all the buildings at MU were made that way.

The 22 students from Saudi Arabia are interning with MU's College of Engineering for its inaugural partnership program with King Abdulaziz University. The six-week program trains the visiting students in a series of hands-on labs and projects. It is one of three international programs that the college launched this year.
Most of the Saudi Arabian students have one year left in a five-year engineering program at their home institute in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

"This group is from different engineering departments — mechanical, electrical, chemical, computer science. The way (King Abdulaziz University) wants us to train them is to train them in multidisciplinary systems," said Ahmed Sherif El-Gizawy, professor and director of the Technology Center at MU and the international program's lead professor. "We form the teams from different backgrounds to work together to understand system design."

El-Gizawy said that working closely with people in other disciplines is similar to working in the industry.

"It's a big deal because we take different emphasis areas of engineering and expose them to software that they'll use in the real world," MU lab engineer Amer Krvavac said. "They learn things that would be useful in the professional world."

El-Gizawy said they are working ahead of expectations. "Some of the designs that take us three weeks only take them one week," he said.

Jason Shelby, an MU lab engineer who has been working closely with the group, expressed the same sentiment. Shelby is helping them build unmanned aircraft, from first designs to final product.

"The students are at a pretty high level," Shelby said. "We don't have to hold their hand through the entire process."

Students who applied for the program were ranked based on their grade point averages and an English proficiency test as part of the application process. For its first summer, the program received 150 applicants and accepted 24. Only 22 were able to get travel visas.

Krvavac said the students participate in a series of labs — using computer software to design and produce prototypes, writing programs to run assembly lines, the do's and don't's of 3-D printing, and data acquisition, for example — to learn different skills. Each lab has a project at the end, such as applying data acquisition work to test fuel
pumps in the school’s basement, and students are put into small groups to work on them.

El-Gizawy assembled a training crew of eight MU graduate and undergraduate research students with experiences in systems design to help instruct and train the Saudi Arabian students.

Both the program and the students are a reminder that math and engineering skills cross all barriers.

"I was expecting to see a little bit of conflict of cultures. We do things completely different," El-Gizawy said. "I didn't find this. I found that everyone on the American side or the Saudi side enjoys these different cultures and exchanges. It enriches everyone's experiences."

Krvavac said there hasn't been much of a language barrier between the students and himself. Rather, it's the everyday American abbreviations, like USB drive versus flash drive, that create confusion. Krvavac said working with the students has helped him improve his English and be more conscious of abbreviations and acronyms in language.

Faisal Omar Bahdad said that in their free time, the students enjoy hanging out downtown and on campus in the engineering library and at the MU Student Recreation Complex.

"I think they bring a unique perspective," said Jessica Trimble, student services coordinator in the College of Engineering. "There are a lot of different cultures that are brought on our campus. It makes you look at things that you see every day in a different way."

Two other summer internship programs are also in their first year at the College of Engineering: one with students from India and the Big Data Analytics Summer Experience with students from China, Hong Kong, the United States, Denmark and Finland. Each program lasts four weeks.

All three groups — the Big Data experience group, India group and Saudi Arabia interns — are at MU now. Trimble takes all three groups on outings to experience Missouri
They've visited the Capitol in Jefferson City, which Trimble said they thought was amazing, and toured the Mark Twain museum and cave in Hannibal.

Sometime before they leave, Trimble plans to take the group to Perche Creek and to the Lake of the Ozarks to ride the Tom Sawyer cruise and visit Ha Ha Tonka State Park.

Trimble said the bus rides are always fun, with the students singing songs from their home countries and laughing together. On the Fourth of July, the international students went to the top of Turner Avenue parking garage to watch the fireworks, which Amar Khairy Abideen called amazing but short.

Abideen said what he misses most about home is his family and the food.

"I think that it's important (to have a relationship with King Abdulaziz University) because there is a goal as not only our university, not just our city, not just our nation, but our entire world to fill a need for more engineers," Trimble said. "And if you have collaboration between all of those different countries, then everybody together is working toward that same goal."

To El-Gizawy, getting the students familiar with other cultures is just as important as the material learned in lab.

"The USA is now dealing with a global economy where we have to deal with different countries in the world," he said. "We need to train our students not only for engineering science, but how to deal with these multicultural things in a friendly way so that everyone feels they benefit."

'Ban the box' legislation aims to reduce recidivism through employment

By Alan Burdziak
Prohibiting employers from asking on job applications whether a person has been convicted of a crime will help ex-offenders get past the initial screening process and help them find employment, the top factor in reducing recidivism, said Second Ward City Councilman Michael Trapp.

Trapp also is one of two co-chairs of the Mayor’s Task Force on Violent Crime, which recently proposed the idea of “banning the box” in the city of Columbia. City staff have been directed to draft the legislation and send it to the Columbia City Council, which will debate and refine the measure as it deems necessary. It’s unclear when the issue will be in front of the council.

Trapp and others on the task force support the ban. At this point, it’s unclear whether the bill will affect public- or private-sector employers or both and whether it will bar employers from asking about only felony or any convictions. The task force, created last year after a series of high-profile shootings and other violent crime in Columbia, began meeting in August. It has until mid-November to finalize a report and submit recommendations to the council.

So far, progress is inching along, and the group has made a handful of minor recommendations, which it has called “low-hanging fruit,” that can be done quickly. Last week, the task force agreed to have two public forms on the proposal, likely next month — one at the Activity & Recreation Center and one planned by the Boone County Offender Transition Network. Dates haven’t been scheduled.

Ex-offenders, Trapp said, often become discouraged when they can’t find employment because of their records, and that, in turn, can lead to a relapse into a life of crime. Trapp also works as a program manager at Phoenix Programs Inc., which offers assistance for people with substance abuse problems, and has more than 20 years’ experience in social work.

“When people get employment, it ties them into the conventional economy, it helps give them structure, it reduces free time, it gets them involved in something positive and it gives them a paycheck,” Trapp said.

Employers wouldn’t be banned from using background or credit checks as a factor in choosing whom to hire, but they wouldn’t be able to conduct either or to inquire about criminal histories until an interview with the applicant.

S. David Mitchell, a University of Missouri School of Law professor who studies offender re-entry, collateral consequences of convictions and felon disenfranchisement, first told the task force of the idea to “ban the box” when he gave a presentation to the group in January.

Detractors, Mitchell said, question whether ex-offenders are deserving of jobs and opportunity and say it could lead to an increase in discrimination lawsuits aimed at employers.
“What I think folks often miss is if we don’t give them the opportunity ... then we’re going to push people back into the underground economy and into recidivism,” and it will incur future costs in the justice system, Mitchell said.

Some employers might also fear the extra time it takes to find viable applicants because they can’t use the application to decide whether to disregard an applicant based on a criminal conviction.

Many small business owners in downtown Columbia already don’t use background or credit checks to determine whom they will hire, Osama Yanis, owner of Coffee Zone at 11 N. Ninth St., said, and nor does he. He prefers to interview people and see how they interact with customers and make a decision based on their attitude and countenance, he said.

“Everybody makes mistakes,” Yanis said. “Everybody has a history. I’m not going to judge them on their record.”

Twelve states and 67 cities, mostly major metropolitan areas, across the United States, have passed similar legislation, according to the National Employment Law Project. Those include Kansas City; Baltimore; Boston; Charlotte; Chicago; Detroit; Indianapolis; Oakland, Calif.; San Francisco; Seattle; and Washington, D.C. California, Colorado, Hawaii and Illinois have some sort of statewide ban. “This isn’t a new concept,” Mitchell said, and it helps put ex-offenders on equal footing with others. “Hiring folks and giving them a second chance is nothing new.”

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**Summit on Sexual Assault**

*July 15, 2014*

By Jake New

**NO MENTION**

HANOVER, N.H. -- A leading forensic consultant urged representatives from more than 60 colleges and universities gathered here Monday to acknowledge that they’ve made mistakes in handling campus sexual assaults and to apologize publicly to student survivors.
“We must apologize for causing that harm,” David Lisak, the consultant and clinical psychologist, said. “And that apology must mean something.”

Lisak is one of the many speakers discussing sexual assault this week at a summit hosted and organized by Dartmouth College -- an institution that is no stranger to criticism about how it has addressed sexual violence. The college is one of 67 institutions under investigation by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights for possible Title IX violations related to sexual assaults.

Student unrest about a variety of issues, including campus sexual assaults, culminated in protests on the Dartmouth campus this year, and student groups warned prospective students via advertisements on social media that Dartmouth had a "rape problem." Perhaps partly as a result, applications to the highly selective college have fallen 14 percent -- even as its fellow Ivies draw more applicants each year.

Declaring "enough is enough," Phil Hanlon, who became president of Dartmouth last summer, promised in April to rein in the excessive drinking and sexual misconduct he said was taking place on campus. In June, Dartmouth toughened its sexual misconduct policies, making expulsion the mandatory punishment for certain types of sexual assault.

“I consider being Dartmouth's president to be the pinnacle of my career, but there’s a few aspects of this job I wouldn’t wish on anyone,” Hanlon said Monday. “That’s learning that a student has been assaulted or harmed.”

Rather than addressing campus sexual assaults directly, the first sessions of the weeklong summit largely focused on the broader context in which colleges must deal with sexual crimes – the federal regulations governing how colleges react to sexual assaults, as well as the larger culture that normalizes gender violence.

Catherine Lhamon, the assistant secretary who oversees the Education Department's Office for Civil Rights, and Anurima Bhargava, from the Department of Justice's division of civil rights, fielded questions from the audience in an hourlong question-and-answer session. Many of those who submitted questions expressed confusion about how to adequately comply with Title IX and the Clery Act, the federal law that requires colleges to release information about crimes that
Many of the questions focused on what role institutions are required to have in adjudicating sexual assault cases, with some attendees saying they didn't believe campus judicial systems were ever designed to address misconduct as serious as sexual assault.

"I resist pretty hard the idea that schools don't have a role in this," Lhamon said. "They absolutely do. They did when I was in college, and they will when my kids are in college. This is fundamental to the role of education. But it is necessarily different from what is the criminal justice role."

Other educators and administrators were concerned with honoring student privacy while obeying requirements to report sexual assaults. Lhamon said that colleges should make it clear to students who they can talk to and expect confidentiality, and who is required by law to report the crime. "If the victim told the Title IX coordinator, then the victim doesn't have a choice," she said.

'A Toxic Environment'
Outside the Q&A session, the bulk of Sunday's and Monday's presentations explored a more abstract concept than federal regulations: the media that students consume. Robin Thicke's song "Blurred Lines," with its raunchy music video, was a popular example of entertainment that the presenters said "normalizes acquaintance rape."

“Sexual assault on college campuses is a public health problem that affects all of us,” said Jean Kilbourne, a media critic and filmmaker. "We need to pay attention to the environment. Just as it’s difficult to be healthy physically in a toxic environment, it’s the same with sexual assault in an environment that is culturally toxic."

Kilbourne has been studying advertising and its messages for decades; she said she believes advertising has never been more problematic in its depiction of sexuality and violence. Women are constantly depicted as objects, as being in danger, or as disparate body parts, she said. Grown women are infantilized, young girls are
sexualized, and men are often depicted as controlling and even violent.

When those depictions are targeted at college students to sell products like alcohol, Kilbourne said, the message can be dangerous. “Marketers create a toxic cultural environment on college campuses that make sexual assault more likely,” she said.

In Sunday’s opening session, which focused on the telling of rape jokes, Gail Stern, who develops programs and curriculums about sexual violence, outlined many of the same issues discussed Monday. At one point, Stern stood in front of a large Venn diagram, with one circle labeled “things that are funny” and another labeled “rape.” They did not intersect.

Colleges must make it clear that rape jokes have no place on a college campus, Stern said, reminding the audience of some particularly egregious incidents, including a pro-rape chant that was shouted by St. Mary’s University students during the college’s annual “Frosh Week.” It had been a tradition for five years. Colleges should also make sure that any artists, speakers and entertainers brought to campus aren’t promoting similar messages, she said.

“Anyone that is not in alignment with your message is in contradiction with that message,” Stern said.

Sut Jhally, a media critic and communications professor at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, compared colleges’ growing awareness of the issue to “getting fish to see the water.” It’s slow, but the good news is that more people in higher education are starting to “see the water,” said Jhally. The bad news? Colleges lack the political will to pursue any substantial change, he said.

“No one has been prepared to take up that challenge,” Jhally said. “If universities wanted to do it, they have the power to change the culture on their campus. If they can change one campus, then it will be easy to change others. But that requires political will.”

It also requires money.
Lisak, the forensic consultant, said the idea for this large meeting was in the works for more than two years, but it couldn’t actually come to fruition until Dartmouth was willing to both host and pay for it. Another institution will have to step up in a similar fashion in order to organize the next summit, Lisak said, so that educators can share their findings from this week. The University of Virginia organized a similar summit in February.

Institutions also need to increase their funding for sexual assault prevention, he said, and not just rely on temporary grants. Such grants are helpful for getting initiatives started, Lisak said, but colleges need to find a more permanent funding source. Many colleges can find that money within existing budgets, he said, if they rethink their priorities.

“Campus sexual assaults are our problem,” Lisak said. “It is our problem to solve.”