Gov. Jay Nixon turns focus to education in State of the State address

By Marie French mfrench@post-dispatch.com 573-556-6185

Note from the MU NEWS BUREAU: For a full text of Governor Jay Nixon’s State of the State address, click the following link: http://governor.mo.gov/news/archive/gov-nixon-delivers-2014-state-state-address-0

NO MU MENTION

JEFFERSON CITY • Democratic Gov. Jay Nixon is calling for an additional $493 million for education at all levels during his State of the State address tonight.

Of that, $278 million would go toward K-12 education in order to move toward completely funding the state’s foundation formula for public schools. Nixon is also pushing for tripling funds for grants to preschools, freezing tuition at public universities and increasing scholarship money for Missouri high school graduates.

“This is the test – and this is the year – to get serious about fully funding our schools. Our local schools will put these dollars to work in a big way for our kids and communities,” Nixon said according to prepared remarks.

Nixon’s proposed budget includes more money because he’s working with higher revenue estimates than House Republican leaders anticipate. The difference between projected revenue increases by House Republicans and the governor for the 2015 fiscal year may amount to over $200 million.

“Our growing economy, combined with our sound budget management, affords us this unique opportunity to invest in our students’ future – our state’s future,” Nixon said.

House Budget Chairman Rick Stream, R-Kirkwood, has said his committee will stick with the more conservative estimates and cut back anything over that from the governor’s proposal.

House Speaker Tim Jones, R-Eureka, has previously said that while additional funding for education may be part of fixing Missouri’s schools, he also wants to see some reforms regarding teacher evaluations and school choice. Jones has also repeatedly called out the governor for not supporting a tax cut. Nixon vetoed a large tax cut bill last session and, based on prepared remarks, appears poised to do so again if the Republican-controlled legislature succeeds in getting another to his desk.
Nixon pointed out his track record of not raising taxes and of signing a bill to phase out the state’s franchise tax. He also touted Missouri’s position as the sixth-lowest tax state, according to the Kauffman Foundation.

“But here’s what I won’t do: I will not support anything that takes money out of our classrooms,” Nixon said. “The people of Missouri said they expect their elected leaders to support public schools, because they know that education is the best economic development tool there is.”

**Nixon called for higher-education funding based on performance measures, with a focus on science, technology, engineering and math field. He also called for $20 million to educate mental health professionals at community colleges and four-year universities.**

“From teaching a child with autism how to interact with peers, to helping law enforcement respond to individuals in mental health crisis, these health professionals will help keep our communities safe – and make sure all Missourians have the opportunity to live up to their God-given potential,” Nixon said.

**That’s part of a continued focus on mental health issues.**

He announced that this year there will no longer be a waiting list for in-home Medicaid services for Missourians with developmental disabilities. Nixon also asked for additional funding for a range of mental health initiatives, including funding to replace Fulton State Mental Hospital, Missouri’s only maximum security psychiatric facility.

While the bulk of the focus was on education and mental health, Nixon also called for ethics reform, workplace protections for LGBT individuals, a fix to the school transfer law and increased infrastructure funding.

Toward the end of his speech, Nixon also called for lawmakers to expand Medicaid in Missouri, something Republican leaders in the state have made clear isn’t likely.

“By standing still, we’re making the things we don’t like about Obamacare even worse, forcing Missourians to bear all the costs of this law – and reap none of the benefits,” Nixon said. “Right now, hundreds of thousands of these working Missourians can’t afford to get the basic health services they need to lead healthy, productive lives.”

In the GOP response, Jones criticized the governor’s calls for new spending.

"We already have too many tax-and-overspend, out-of-touch, career politicians in our nation’s capital. We don't need one here standing in the way of hard-working Missouri families and businesses who want nothing more than the opportunity to grow and succeed," Jones said.
Nixon wants more money for schools, spurns GOP tax cut

By Virginia Young vyoung@post-dispatch.com > 573-556-6181

JEFFERSON CITY • With state revenue growing at a healthy clip, Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon implored legislators Tuesday to make a massive investment in public education rather than parcel out surplus money as a tax cut.

In the most strident State of the State speech he has given since becoming governor in 2009, Nixon said that when elected officials go door to door during campaigns, they routinely promise to invest in schools and teachers.

“Well, you know what? It’s time to put our budgets where our campaign brochures are,” Nixon, a Democrat, told a joint session of the House and Senate.

The governor called for a $278 million increase for K-12 public schools, the first step in a two-year process to fulfill the state’s promise to fully fund the school aid formula passed in 2005.

He also gave an impassioned defense of public school teachers, urged that Medicaid be expanded to cover 300,000 low-income adults and said it was time to outlaw discrimination against lesbians and gays in the workplace.

Nixon castigated legislators for their perennial attempts — fueled, in part, by mega-campaign donor Rex Sinquefield of St. Louis — to cut teachers’ pay, reduce their retirement benefits or take away job protections such as tenure.

“That simply needs to stop,” he said.

Nixon’s speech, streamed online and delivered to a packed House chamber, showed his increasing emphasis on themes that could improve his standing among Democrats.

Term limits will prevent Nixon from seeking a third term as governor in 2016, but his name has been bandied about as a potential candidate for U.S. Senate against Republican Roy Blunt, or as a potential contender for the vice presidency or a Cabinet spot if a Democrat wins the White House.
In all, Nixon’s proposed $28 billion budget would increase education funding by nearly $500 million. Big infusions of cash would go to performance-based funding for colleges and universities, college scholarships, preschool funding, Parents as Teachers and school transportation, among other areas.

Republicans, who control both the House and Senate, were quick to criticize the foundation of the governor’s spending proposals.

For the budget year that begins July 1, Nixon is counting on 5.2 percent growth in general revenue, the main pot of tax money the Legislature controls. House and Senate budget leaders project growth at 4.2 percent.

“It’s easy to say you have a balanced budget when you just make up the number you’re balancing to,” Sen. Ryan Silvey, R-Kansas City, posted on Twitter during the speech.

The differing revenue estimates — along with Nixon’s inclusion of projected savings from shifting costs to the federal government by expanding Medicaid — result in a huge budget gulf between the governor and the Legislature.

Legislators will have to cut $214.5 million from his spending blueprint if they stick to their lower growth estimate, according to figures provided by Nixon’s budget director, Linda Luebbering.

They also would have to cut $94 million that Nixon’s budget spends as a result of shifting some health care costs to the federal government through Medicaid expansion.

What’s more, legislators want to use the improvement in state revenue to provide an income tax cut.

Nixon fought back on that issue, too, saying that Missouri was already a low-tax state — “sixth-lowest in the nation,” according to him — and that a tax cut “experiment” would jeopardize education funding.

Last year, legislators failed to override his veto of an income tax cut, which would have cut the top income tax rate and the corporate income tax rate. It also would have exempted from state income taxes half the business profits reported on personal income tax returns.

Republicans said they wouldn’t give up on their push to cut income taxes, which they say would increase productivity and help Missouri compete for jobs with neighboring states.

In a tweet, House Majority Leader John Diehl, R-Town and Country, said: “Hearing lots of ways to grow government tonight ... . Far less about growing opportunity by returning increased revenues to taxpayers.”

House Speaker Tim Jones, R-Eureka, who gave the official Republican response, attacked Nixon’s plans as “big government.” Jones reiterated his agenda for economic growth in Missouri: a substantial tax cut, a “right to work” bill diluting the power of labor unions and medical malpractice reform, among other efforts.

“It’s really unfortunate that this governor’s only solution to our problems is to throw more money at our problems,” Jones said. “I did not hear one substantial policy solution.”
For example, the governor did not propose a fix for unaccredited school districts or underfunded highway construction, Jones said.

Democrats applauded Nixon’s focus on education and Medicaid expansion. Senate Minority Leader Jolie Justus, D-Kansas City, said: “I think the governor was spot-on when he laid out his vision.”

Nixon said his budget continued making government smaller and smarter by cutting 81 state government jobs. That would bring the total number of state jobs he has cut to 4,611 since he took office.

Taking the biggest hit next year: the Family Support Division in the Department of Social Services, which is slashing in-person help for people applying for social programs as online applications are ramped up.

The news wasn’t all bad for state employees. They would get a 3 percent cost-of-living raise, restoration of matching funds for a deferred compensation program and flat health insurance premiums.

And some agencies would expand. The Children’s Division, for example, would gain 23 employees to improve services and train and retain caseworkers.

The governor also proposes a $198 million bond issue to build a new state mental hospital to replace an antiquated one in Fulton. Because the state’s “full faith and credit” would not be pledged to repay the bonds, voter approval would not be needed.

Nixon ballyhooed the state’s economic recovery, noting that Missouri has added nearly 44,000 jobs in the last year and the state’s unemployment rate has dropped to 6.1 percent, from 8.6 percent when he took office five years ago.

He ticked off recent wins on the job front, such as General Motors’ decision to build the GMC Canyon pickup in Wentzville and a new automotive supplier that will provide 150 jobs in Warrensburg.

“In every corner of our state, wages are up, personal income is up and unemployment continues to fall,” Nixon said.

A special session last month that approved tax incentives for the Boeing Co. didn’t result in Missouri’s winning the aircraft jobs, but Nixon said the effort had still been worthwhile: “We all know that if you want to win, you’ve got to compete.”

But in most of the speech, he was more critical about the Legislature’s role.

One line in his speech drew enthusiastic applause from Republicans: “We all know there are problems with Obamacare, and Washington’s implementation of it has been abysmal.”

Then Nixon followed with, “But rejecting Medicaid won’t fix any of those things.” Democrats heartily applauded that line.

On other subjects, the governor asked legislators to rein in tax credit programs that lack “a solid return” and urged them to reinstate campaign contribution limits.
Those who oversee public colleges and universities also got some advice from the governor, who urged no tuition increases, “Not a single penny.”

Nixon’s budget includes $17 million for a new loan program for Bright Flight scholars, the state’s top-scoring graduates who agree to stay and work in Missouri, and an additional $8.6 million for Access Missouri scholarships, which help needy students.

Marie French and Alex Stuckey of the Post-Dispatch contributed to this report.

Missouri lawmakers back Nixon's proposals on education funding, mental hospital

Tuesday, January 21, 2014 | 10:54 p.m. CST; updated 11:49 p.m. CST, Tuesday, January 21, 2014

BY ABBY JOHNSTON, CASEY BISCHEL, SCOTT DELHOMMER

No MU Mention

JEFFERSON CITY — Legislators and interest groups had mixed reactions to Gov. Jay Nixon’s State of the State speech Tuesday night, but education and a new maximum-security mental hospital in Fulton were supported across party lines.

Nixon said this is the year the legislature will “get serious” about fully funding Missouri schools, proposing a $493 million increase to the existing budget. While Nixon’s rallying cries brought Democratic representatives to their feet, Republicans said they pushed this funding in past sessions.

“While the governor has tried to withhold $150 million for the last five years, we’ve toed the line, and I’m glad he’s come over to our way of thinking on that one,” said Rep. Caleb Rowden, R-Columbia.

Charles Smith, president of the Missouri National Education Association, also supported Nixon’s education proposal “to fully fund Missouri’s classrooms, increase student access to broadband, and to increase investment in Missouri’s preschoolers.”
House Budget Chairman Rick Stream, R-Kirkwood, however, pointed out the irony of the governor's promises as he continues to hold onto $134 million from the last fiscal year.

"You just listened to the governor promise hundreds of millions of dollars to at least half a dozen different state programs, the money for which House and Senate economists have agreed that we do not have," Stream wrote in a news release.

Instead, House Speaker Tim Jones, R-Eureka, suggested that a lower tax burden and less regulations would stimulate the economy. The Republicans, he said, would work hard to pass significant tax reform.

Rowden, along with his colleagues Rep. Chris Kelly, D-Columbia, and Sen. Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, said the governor’s proposed budget is not balanced, despite the governor’s claims. This disagreement comes from the differing revenue projections from the governor’s office and the legislature.

“The moral of the story is he is proposing a budget that is far, far out of balance,” Rowden said. “He’s spending $1.1 billion in new money from last year’s budget where the legislature will probably end up spending $400 (million) to $450 million.”

Kelly, Rowden and Schaefer agreed in principle on the governor’s proposal to build a new state mental hospital in Fulton, but they said Nixon’s proposal is unconstitutional.

“He’s asking us to issue a bond without the vote of the people,” Kelly said. “I believe that to be unconstitutional. I don’t think we can go into debt.

“I’ve been trying to get it funded for six years,” he said about construction of a new Fulton hospital. “I’m glad he’s there, but he’s late to the party on that one. I think we should fund it with a bond. I think we should ask the people.”

Schaefer said the General Assembly proposed using some of the surplus from last year to build the hospital without using a bond, which the governor rejected.

“I would prefer to just simply write a check and build the Fulton hospital,” Schaefer said. “I would like to get the governor on board with that. If not, we’ll look at putting it in the bond proposal.”
The governor also proposed expanding Medicaid in line with the Affordable Care Act, in which the federal government will pay 100 percent of the new cost for the first three years in the states that agree to the Medicaid expansion. In following years, the federal government will pay 90 percent of the cost, leaving the state to pay the remaining 10 percent.

Schaefer believes that paying that 10 percent after three years will be too big of a burden on the state, and the government would be forced to take the money out of education, an issue the governor stressed in his speech.

“In a minimum, we know that after three years we’re committed to spending at least a couple hundred million dollars that can only come from public education,” Schaefer said. “It’s the only pot of money big enough.”

Despite Kelly’s other misgivings on Nixon’s speech, Kelly agreed with Nixon’s proposal to expand Medicaid.

“I thought the governor hit the Medicaid issue right on the nose,” Kelly said. “The entire business community in Missouri agrees with him. The entire health and education community all agree on the Medicaid expansion. The only people against it are the right-wing extremists.”

Nixon finds little Republican support for budget full of new spending during State of the State

By Rudi Keller
JEFFERSON CITY – Gov. Jay Nixon presented a legislative program heavy with new spending proposals in his State of the State address on Tuesday night, but it immediately ran into heavy opposition from the Republican-dominated legislature.

The GOP side of the packed House of Representatives chamber showed its rejection of most of Nixon’s program by its silence – on more than two dozen occasions, Democrats applauded and cheered while GOP lawmakers stared at Nixon.

Nixon, however, didn’t spend the hour in front of lawmakers offering compromises. Instead, he pointed to Republicans’ most cherished proposals – a big tax cut for business that he vetoed last year and efforts to relax laws giving teachers job security.

Money spent on education is an investment in the future of the state, Nixon said. “But there are those who feel that instead of fully funding our schools, we should pull money out of our classrooms in order to experiment with our tax code,” Nixon said.

In the budget proposal that accompanied the speech, Nixon proposed increased spending on public schools, both in direct aid to classrooms and additional money for student transportation, testing and Internet access. Overall, he proposed $336.1 million in new spending on schools, with $278 million for the foundation formula, the state’s basic school aid program.

The state is spending $3.07 billion on the foundation formula this year, or about $550 million less than the formula would require if fully funded. Nixon proposed an operating budget of $27.7 billion in the coming year, an increase of $2.9 billion over the current year.

For higher education, Nixon proposed the largest package of state aid since fiscal year 2010 as part of $128.2 million in new spending proposals. The plan includes an extra $45.7 million for the University of Missouri, split among general budget support, money for science, technology, engineering and mathematics programs and a one-time grant of $12.2 million for educating mental health professionals.

Nixon also proposed $8.6 million more for Access Missouri scholarships and $17 million to expand the Bright Flight program to include a loan that would be forgiven for students who stay in the state after they graduate.

The spending proposals were greeted with skepticism by House Republican leaders during a news conference after Nixon’s speech. Speaker Tim Jones, R-Eureka, said Nixon wanted to grow the size of state government and accused him of spending far more than would be available.

“It is really unfortunate that this governor’s only solution is to throw money at problems,” Jones said.
Nixon and lawmakers enter the detailed work on the budget with a basic disagreement – how much money the state will have in the treasury. House Budget Chairman Rick Stream, R-Kirkwood, said the difference is $310 million in general revenue.

He could not point to any large item he would cut from Nixon’s proposal, Stream said. “The House and Senate are not going to spend more than we think is going to come in.”

State Rep. Chris Kelly, D-Columbia, said he welcomes almost all the proposals Nixon made in his speech and budget. But the dispute over how much money to spend means that any claims that the budget is balanced – either from Nixon or the GOP leadership – is political posturing. “That is a big failure, and it is not just a big failure by the governor but by the House and Senate budget leaders.”

The funding for colleges and universities comes with a request from Nixon that there be no tuition increases in the coming year. Budget Director Linda Luebbering said no formal agreement exists, but all the four-year universities have agreed to the deal.

The education funding proposals back promises Nixon made in the weeks leading up to the legislative session with dollar amounts. The extra revenue, coming in a rush after years of restrained budgets, is due to an expanding economy with strong job growth and increasing consumer confidence, Luebbering said.

Nixon based the budget proposal on estimates of $428 million of new revenue to spend plus $146.4 million in surplus funds and $97 million from savings from Medicaid expansion. The Republican-dominated legislature has been cool to the idea of expanding Medicaid to accept federal funding under the Affordable Care Act.

In his speech, Nixon said expanding Medicaid made sense and saved the state money. He pointed to reform efforts in Arkansas and other states and said Missouri should follow suit. That brought applause from Rep. Jay Barnes, R-Jefferson City, who chaired an interim committee that worked on a proposal to overhaul Medicaid and expand coverage to poor working adults.

“I challenge each of you to explain why it makes more sense to pay for Medicaid in other states, than it does to reform it in ours,” Nixon said.

There are others on the Republican side who are open to the proposal despite opposition from many of their colleagues. “I’m all for the discussion on Medicaid reform, and if we can find the right reform and save the right amount of money and take advantage of those federal dollars, I’m not opposed to that,” Rep. Caleb Rowden, R-Columbia, said.

Nixon briefly addressed several non-budget items, calling on lawmakers to pass a tough ethics and campaign finance law, find a way to address transportation needs, outlaw discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity and develop a “comprehensive energy plan” for the state.
Nixon also found one issue where the GOP leadership was willing to work with him – rebuilding Fulton State Hospital. The budget also proposes borrowing $198 million for construction of new facilities for Fulton State Hospital and paying those bonds back through appropriations.

His financing plan, however, is opposed by Kelly, who wants to use voter-approved bonds. Nixon does not want to ask voters for permission to borrow the money.

“I think those are issues on which we can come together,” Jones said.

He added, however, that Nixon and Kelly need to settle their differences first.

*Ashley Jost of the Tribune contributed to this report.*

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Gov. Nixon in State of the State speech: 'Get serious' about education

Tuesday, January 21, 2014 | 9:07 p.m. CST; updated 12:46 a.m. CST, Wednesday, January 22, 2014

BY CASEY BISCHEL

**No MU Mention**

JEFFERSON CITY — Gov. Jay Nixon highlighted education as a priority in his Tuesday night State of the State speech, saying his budget would nearly triple the state preschool budget and increase K-12 funding by $278 million.

“This is the year to get serious about fully funding our schools,” Nixon told the General Assembly.

He said his plan would put Missouri on the path to fulfilling the education formula next year. The governor’s budget increases education funding by $493 million.
He also called on public universities to freeze their tuition rates.

Nixon also talked about education funding in terms of job creation. By the end of the decade, two-thirds of jobs will require some kind of advanced degree, he said.

Nixon's budget allocates $22 million for the Science, Technology, Engineering and Math, or STEM, initiative. The funds would be used to purchase equipment, expand lab space and produce more college graduates in science fields.

Nixon said he also wants to provide community colleges $20 million to educate 1,200 mental health professionals.

Transitioning to health care, Nixon proposed a bond that would fund a new mental health facility in Fulton. Nixon said the Fulton State Hospital is underfunded and has dangerous work conditions.

Nixon also said he wanted to restrict campaign contributions, pass ethics reform, and pass legislation to end workplace discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender residents.

Nixon’s expected Medicaid expansion drew loud applause. Although he acknowledged the troubled rollout of the Affordable Care Act, he said that by not doing anything, Missouri isn’t making the program any better.

Because Missouri did not expand Medicaid, residents have paid $115 million since Jan. 1 for other states to expand their own programs while getting nothing in return, Nixon said. With a disparity in costs and benefits, he challenged Congress to reflect on how Missouri cares for people unable to afford normal health insurance.
Missouri College Advising Corps plans to double in size over next two years

Graduates steer high schoolers toward college.

By Ashley Jost

Tuesday, January 21, 2014 at 2:00 pm Comments (3)

Missouri College Advising Corps, headquartered at the University of Missouri, last week took part in the Higher Education Summit at the White House, where it committed to doubling its size in the next two years.

The program places recent MU graduates at high schools where many students don't go on to college. The graduates act as advisers to encourage the high school students to pursue a college degree.

Right now, the program has 25 advisers at 26 schools in places such as St. Louis, Kansas City and rural south-central Missouri. The goal is to expand to 50 advisers in 52 schools by 2016.

Beth Tankersley-Bankhead, executive director of Missouri College Advising Corps, said the plan is to add partner schools in the current service areas but also to add schools in central, southeast and southwest Missouri. Eventually, she hopes the program can expand to northern Missouri, too. "It is so important to have a near-peer — recent college graduate — role model that is available in the school all day each day," Tankersley-Bankhead said.

Missouri College Advising Corps, which is part of the National College Advising Corps, is housed on the MU campus and gets its funding from MU and private donations. Tankersley-Bankhead said since the program started in 2008, MU has provided about $1 million.

The program's operating budget this year is $1.3 million, the majority of which comes from partner donors such as Bank of America, AmeriCorps, the Kauffman Foundation and the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation, among others. The Missouri program began with a $1 million grant from the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation, an organization that aims to benefit low-income students with their education.
This is the first year the program is seeking funding through the University of Missouri System, Tankersley-Bankhead said. The UM System is seeking $3 million to fund the advising corps' expansion over the next two years.

Tankersley-Bankhead also has applied for $524,000 from AmeriCorps. The program could receive about $750,000 total, including additional grants, if the application is approved, Tankersley-Bankhead said.

Tankersley-Bankhead said advisers receive a $32,000 package that includes their benefits, pay and a $5,500 education award that comes from AmeriCorps. Advisers' salaries could be paid for by multiple sources, including MU if the budget appropriation for the coming years were to pass with the $3 million funding.

She said the White House summit — which highlighted similar programs and the administration's push to expand college opportunities for students from low-income families — "indicates there's national-level policy attention" on the issue of at-risk students making it to college.

Kofi Oyirisi, an MU graduate and second-year adviser at McCluer South-Berkeley in north St. Louis County, said his experience thus far has been rewarding.

"I think for me, the most important thing is I can tangibly see the results of the work that I'm doing," he said. "I can see how my work is directly serving the kids and how, without me, things may have been drastically different."

Oyirisi, whom the students called Mr. O, told the story of a student last year who was considered a troublemaker. He said he talked to the student about sports and other topics, and over time they discovered he had an interest that led him to a community college in Iowa.

The student thanked Mr. O during his graduation ceremony.

This article was published in the Tuesday, January 21, 2014 edition of the Columbia Daily Tribune with the headline "Advising corps aims high after summit in D.C.: Graduates steer high schoolers toward college."

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Posted in Education on Tuesday, January 21, 2014 2:00 pm.
Fracking articles mislead

Stories not accurate portrayals of study.

By GREG WALCHER

Tuesday, January 21, 2014 at 2:00 pm

News articles, however well-meaning, sometimes lead readers to inaccurate conclusions. Occasionally, the headline is to blame; often, the reporter, who cannot be expected to be an expert on every conceivable topic, lacks the time and resources to dig deeply into the story.

Such is likely the case with an article published in the Tribune ("Chemicals used in 'fracking' can disrupt human hormone function, MU researchers say," Dec. 16, 2013). The article notes that more than 100 chemicals used in fracking are "known or suspected endocrine disrupting chemicals" (EDCs) that have been linked to health concerns. But the Tribune, as well as other media organizations, apparently failed to read the University of Missouri study carefully and to recognize its limitations.

Perhaps the worst journalistic offense involving the MU study occurred in a recent post on National Geographic's website. The author, Sandra Postel, writes that the researchers found evidence of EDCs in water near fracking sites in western Colorado (my home), leading her to issue the following caution: "The new findings add urgency to calls for moratoriums on fracking," she asserts, "and regulations and monitoring put in place to safeguard water supplies and public health."

There's little doubt that Postel's article rang alarm bells among fracking opponents, but the study's findings do not justify her call for a moratorium. For example, the Missouri researchers did not establish any link between fracking and the presence of the EDCs other than that both were found in the same state. No chemical identification tests were conducted to determine whether the EDCs found in the Colorado River were related to anything used in the energy business in that area.

In fact, there is nothing unusual about finding EDCs in the Colorado River. As the EPA's website explains, human hormones, pharmaceuticals, household detergents and other products in effluent from licensed sewage plants deposit EDCs in surface water every day. Nor are they unusual or dangerous at the levels found in the MU paper.
A wastewater treatment specialist commenting on Postel's article wrote that the levels were "between nondetectable and the minimum recommended acceptable levels as researched by the EPA." As he explained, "The parts per billion figures listed in the study … are way below the estimated EDCs generated by discharge from Waste Treatment Facilities caused by people throwing prescription medications down their toilets at home."

Second, Postel's article attempts to bestow credibility on the "Halliburton loophole," a bizarre claim that former Vice President Dick Cheney and his oil industry friends exempted fracking from the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA). The Tribune article also mentions the exemption.

But Postel goes further: She asserts that in the absence of federal regulations, "states have been slow to fill the regulatory gap."

She is wrong on both counts. There is no Halliburton loophole making fracking "exempt" from the SDWA. This important law, first passed in 1974 and updated several times, has never contained language applicable to fracking, making it impossible to exempt from it something that was never in it. Fracking is regulated under many other federal and state statutes, including strict regulation in Colorado.

In fact, a 2009 study by the Ground Water Protection Council found that across the nation, state regulations are "environmentally proactive and preventive." So much so that the council warned that new "national regulations on oil and gas exploration and production would be costly to the states, duplicative of state regulation, and ultimately ineffective because such regulations would be too far removed from field operations."

By ignoring these facts, National Geographic and the Tribune have done a disservice to their readers. Both articles fan the flames of fracking fear-mongering but provide nothing of substance to the nation's vitally important energy policy debate.

When conducted carefully in compliance with existing regulations, fracking provides an effective way to develop America's own energy resources and increase our energy independence. It also is building a stronger economy throughout the nation.

Greg Walcher is CEO of the governmental relations consulting firm Natural Resources Group LLC of Washington, D.C.

Editor's note: The Tribune's Dec. 16 article accurately reflected the conclusions of the MU study.

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Posted in Oped on Tuesday, January 21, 2014 2:00 pm.
MU needs proactivity, education on gender identity

By Shannon Greenwood

At the end of last semester, something important caught my eye. You might have noticed it, too, while filling out your course evaluations.

The form sheets were different.

In “Section 1: Student Information,” there was a change so subtle that if you were not aware of its significance, you may have easily overlooked it. The third line read “I am… .” The options were “male,” “female,” “transgendered” and “prefer not to answer.”

_Transgendered._

When I first saw that line, my pencil froze. The second time I saw that line, I crossed out the ‘-ed’ in a silent protest.

Today, I choose to no longer be silent.

The impact of gender identity as an option included on our university’s course evaluation forms is beyond words. It shows us inclusivity is valued at the University of Missouri, but it also shows us that a lack of knowledge currently prevails.

“Transgendered” is not an appropriate term to describe the transgender community in any context. It can be seen as offensive and exclusionary. Its usage puts a strong division between our transgender students and their cisgender counterpart, and not in a way that promotes equality, but in a way that lessens transgender students’ value.

According to the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, leaders in promoting accurate representation of the LGBT community in the media, the use of the word “transgendered” is problematic.

“The adjective transgender should never have an extraneous ‘-ed’ tacked onto the end,” GLAAD’s media reference guide states. “An ‘-ed’ suffix adds unnecessary length to the word and can cause tense confusion and grammatical errors.”
In choosing this rhetoric, MU has shown an evident lack of education about the LGBT community and the issues it faces.

Despite this, I don’t doubt our university’s commitment to the transgender and queer communities on campus. I have seen it in Josie Herrera, a genderqueer senior who ran for homecoming king this year. I have seen it Shane Stinson, an openly transgender man who was featured on the university’s homepage. I have it seen it in gender-neutral bathrooms, in Black & Gold Drag Shows, in our LGBTQ Resource Center.

But what I haven’t seen is gender identity being included in our university's non-discrimination policy. Instead, all I can see is the crossed-out ‘–ed’ on my course evaluation sheet.

We must demand our university be proactive in its approach, and that does not start or end with altering of evaluation forms. It begins with gender identity being added to the university's non-discrimination policy, and what should follow is a comprehensive education on the transgender community.

In the fight for equality, we can no longer give out A's for effort. We cannot continue to be satisfied with what our university is doing for its LGBT students when not all are benefiting. We must push for more because our transgender students deserve a seat at the table, and better yet, they deserve a guarantee that they are considered equal.

Descendant of MU founder atones for family's slave-owning past

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BY RICHARD WEBNER

COLUMBIA — It was 39 lashes for Tony, a slave who served as a janitor at MU.

One day in early 1861, he was brought to a meat market near the county courthouse, where a constable stripped him to the waist, bound his hands with rope and raised him up.

Each lash of the whip marked Tony's back with a blister or blood, a witness recalled decades later. The number of lashes came from chapter 25, verse three of the Book of Deuteronomy, which sets a limit of 40.
Tony had been charged with dousing a set of mules with acid, causing severe burns. The mules belonged to a man who had accused Tony of stealing a hog. The acid was traced back to the university's chemistry lab, and only Tony and a professor had the key.

In the 1850s and 1860s, the university used at least two slaves as janitors. Both were owned by relatives of MU President James Shannon, an ardent supporter of slavery.

MU has come a long way since slaves labored in its halls. Integrated in 1950, it now has more than 2,000 African-American students. It has had a black president and is home to a Black Studies Department and a black cultural center.

"We are a lot farther along than in past years," said MU Deputy Chancellor Mike Middleton, who was greeted with a racial slur shouted from a car when he arrived at MU as a freshman in 1964. "People grow, become more aware."

But no one can recall the university ever issuing a public apology for exploiting slaves or for taking tens of thousands of dollars in donations from slave owners, including most of the money that raised its iconic columns. It’s possible that MU wouldn’t be in Columbia if not for the wealth generated by slave labor, an examination of letters, speeches, books, government records and newspaper articles suggests.

The man who brought the university here, James Sidney Rollins, earned the moniker "father of the University of Missouri" for his tireless promotion of MU in the state legislature. He was also one of Boone County’s largest slave owners. Now, his great-great-grandson, Clay Mering, is on a quest to atone for the enslavement of 34 people forced into labor on Rollins’ farm in Columbia.

In 2008, Mering created the James S. Rollins Slavery Atonement Endowment to fund research in MU’s Black Studies Department. He had to argue with the MU News Bureau to keep the reference to slavery in the endowment’s name because employees were worried it would draw bad press.

For Mering, a 58-year-old nursing assistant and former architect from Tucson, Ariz., the whole point was to start a conversation about his ancestor’s role as a slave owner. "I don’t know if anything I set up could right the wrong, but I guess the idea is to get people talking," he said.
An ancestor's shadow
The Mering children grew up with constant reminders of their famous ancestor. Their house was full of artifacts from Rollins' life: his stately portraits, books from his personal library, a handwritten autobiography he never finished, a set of rocking chairs with elaborate stories behind them.

Three generations after his death, Rollins was still a frequent topic of conversation, especially with Mering's grandmother. She idolized him, holding grudges against his political enemies from the mid-19th century.

"This guy lives on. It’s sort of oppressive sometimes," said Ellen Mering, Clay Mering's sister, who works as a nurse in Tucson. "Our house was sort of a museum."

It takes an extraordinary person to leave such an impression so long after death. Rollins was such a person, with a sterling career that included several terms in the Missouri legislature, four years as a congressman and 16 years as president of the MU Board of Curators.

In all those positions, he pursued a mission to transform Missouri from a frontier territory into an educated, modern state crisscrossed with navigable rivers, telegraph lines and railroads. A key part of his vision was a strong public university that would act as a force for development, training engineers to build bridges and railroads, teachers to spread education across the state and farmers to introduce modern crop-growing methods.

"It is our system of education, embracing both the elementary and the higher, that is to make us a great and intelligent people," he said in a speech to the Missouri legislature. After his election as state representative in 1838, Rollins sponsored a bill awarding the university to whichever county raised the most for its construction. That county, he decided, would be his own Boone County.

Rollins and his father led a campaign for donations, ending up with $117,000. According to census records, at least 384 of the 872 contributors were slave owners, with 1,836 slaves among them. They gave more than $61,000 of the total — probably much more because the list of donations didn't specify the amount of most of them.
Boone County it was. The cornerstone for Academic Hall was laid in 1840. Three years later, students were walking through its columns on their way to class.

Rollins promoted the university relentlessly in the legislature. A bill for a teacher's college. A bill for an agricultural school. A bill making the school free for all Missourians. A bill to bring it back to life after four years of neglect during the Civil War. Bill after bill for more funding.

After his retirement from the legislature, he served as the university's rudder in 16 years as president of the Board of Curators. Over the decades, he supported it with gifts of land, donations of thousands of dollars, and hundreds of books.

It's no wonder that, at a ceremony in 1872, a professor gave him the title he's been known by ever since. It's etched in Latin on a bronze plaque at the north entrance of MU's campus: "father of the University of Missouri."

**Rollins, the slave owner**

Rollins' contributions were a point of great pride in the Mering family. Growing up, Clay and Ellen Mering heard all about it. But there was another aspect of Rollins' life that wasn't talked about as much around the dinner table: the 34 slaves he owned.

When the topic came up, their grandmother would brush it off. "Well, he never had a black mistress," she would say.

The Mering children got a different point of view from their father, a professor who taught classes about African-American history. They carried some guilt from Rollins' ownership of slaves.

"He had slaves, and I think our family has probably indirectly prospered from that," Ellen Mering said.

For all the talk of slavery in Rollins' letters and speeches, there's almost no record of what kind of master he was — except his own description of himself as a "kind master" here and there in his writings.

There's just one written account from a slave, Hamp Harney, Rollins' carriage driver. It offers the opposite view.
In 1897, Harney was having trouble getting a pension for his service in the Civil War. He served as a cook in the Union Army — earning Rollins a $300 bounty — but 30 years later, he was struggling to prove it.

He sent a letter to the U.S. Pension Office to clear up the matter. In it, he explained there were no records of his service because Rollins made him change his name to "James." Thus, his service records list him as "James Harney."

Harney described how his master became enraged when he resisted the new name.

"He beat me for two years until I would answer by the name he gave me," Harney wrote. "The last beating he gave me about my name was in the garden. He beat me with a pole and would have killed me but for my mother."

Starting a conversation
A humdrum workday ended with a momentous decision for Clay Mering.

In early 2007, he was reading the news on his computer at the Tuscon architecture firm where he worked when he spotted two articles about slavery. Al Sharpton had learned that his ancestor was owned by Strom Thurmond's ancestor. And the Virginia legislature was considering apologizing for the state's role in slavery.

The articles took hold of Mering's thoughts. His mind started humming with reflections on his great-great-grandfather, slavery and atonement.

"I thought, you know, I'd like to think about some action," Mering said.

After some contemplation, he decided that the best way to do that was to create an endowment fund at MU to draw attention to his ancestor's ownership of slaves.

He called the university to set it up. Its proceeds, he decided, would go to the Black Studies Department to be used in research about slavery and other African-American issues.

Mering pledged $25,000. Ellen Mering gave $5,000, and another sister, Sally, chipped in a couple thousand.

"I was just celebratory. It spoke to me, right off the bat," Ellen Mering said.
The name chosen for the endowment made its purpose clear: "The James S. Rollins Slavery Atonement Fund."

That didn't sit well with the university. Employees at the MU News Bureau asked Mering to remove the references to slavery and atonement in the name. They also wanted to limit distribution of the news release, bypassing most Columbia news outlets and publicizing it only in Mizzou Weekly, the black-studies newsletter, MU’s website and an African-American newspaper in St. Louis.

"Unfortunately, often our local media tend to focus on the negative or sensational aspect of any news story," news bureau Executive Director Mary Jo Banken wrote in an email to Mering. "I think it is highly likely that if we were to include your reason for donating your gift in a press release, the media would focus on the fact that the university's founder at one time owned slaves."

Clay and Ellen Mering were flummoxed by the university's request. In a series of emails and phone calls, they threatened to withdraw the endowment unless it kept its name and was promoted in Columbia.

"They wanted a little blander name for it," Ellen Mering said, adding that she would not have contributed to one that disguised its purpose.

In the end, the news bureau complied with the Merings' wishes. The name stayed the same, and it was promoted in a news release.

Five years after the exchange, Banken said she was just doing her job. She was also concerned about the media's portrayal of Clay Mering and Rollins, she said.

"Our mission, of course, is to promote positive news stories about the university so we get positive coverage," she said. "If I had the same thing in front of me today, that’s what I would do."

The endowment has funded 24 research projects since its creation. It isn't a large one, Mering acknowledges. When he created it, he donated the minimum amount necessary. It raises about $1,500 a year for the Black Studies Department.
Students have used it to research a wide range of topics: the experience of black soldiers in the Civil War, the role of music in rebuilding New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, U.S. foreign policy in the Congo, the influence of Richard Pryor's stand-up comedy on African-American politics.

Often, students use the endowment for airfare to present their findings at conferences, fulfilling Mering's mission to create conversation.

"It's a way of making a gesture to address my family's involvement in slavery and to continue the examination and the conversation — to acknowledge that the problem of slavery didn't end in 1865, but there were and continue to be after-effects," Mering said.

One of the recipients, Angellar Manguzo, grew up in a small village in Zimbabwe. When she came to study at MU, she said, she found it hard to assert her identity as an African and was the victim of negative stereotypes about Africans and African-Americans.

"When I came to the U.S., one thing I realized was that I was black — something I had never put into consciousness," Manguzo said.

She decided to apply for the endowment to study how African students adjust to life in the U.S. She discovered, among other things, that the experience led the students to see themselves as Africans, while they previously associated with a particular culture on the continent.

**The unlikely emancipator**

On an August afternoon in 1853, Rollins was acting as a defense lawyer for Hiram, a slave accused of attempted rape, when a lynch mob burst into the courthouse.

The mob slipped a noose around Hiram's neck and marched him down Broadway to the end of town at Flat Branch. Rollins followed, cutting off the noose on the way only to have the mob replace it with another.

They stopped at a wooded grove near the creek, where Rollins and other prominent citizens tried to calm them down. In a stroke of luck, the noose broke during an attempt to hang Hiram. Finally, the mob relented and returned him to jail. Two days later, after he confessed, the mob returned and lynched him.

This is one of at least two instances in which Rollins defended a slave in court.
Rollins' views on slavery were complex. In one letter, he said he had the "misfortune" of being a slave owner. As a politician, he opposed the spread of slavery into new states and didn't hesitate to pick the Union side in the Civil War.

"Slavery cannot be defended either upon moral or religious grounds, or upon principles of natural right or political economy," he once wrote.

Yet 34 slaves toiled on his homestead in Columbia. He once sold four slaves on the steps of the courthouse — one of them 12 years old, another 17 — as part of an estate sale. Rollins' conflicted stance made him a major player in the story of the 13th Amendment, which abolished slavery. When the amendment came to the House of Representatives in 1863, Rollins voted against it. By January 1864, the Senate had passed it, but President Abraham Lincoln was two votes short in the House.

Lincoln set his sights on the slave owner from Boone County.

"This is my chief hope and main reliance to bring the war to a speedy close," Lincoln wrote Rollins. "It is going to be very close. A few votes one way or the other will decide it."

When, at their next meeting, Rollins gave his support for the amendment, the president jumped out of his chair to give him a hearty handshake. Rollins shared his knowledge about the views of other Missouri congressmen and promised to try to change their minds.

In an impassioned speech to the House explaining his change of heart, Rollins stressed that ending the war and preserving the Union were the reasons for his vote. "If I could save this Constitution and this Union by preserving the institution of slavery in its present status in the various states, I would do it most cheerfully," he said.

**Understanding the past**

James Rollins was an educator. A lawyer. A politician. A father. A slaveholder. A good man?

He created an institution that has educated hundreds of thousands. He devoted his life to building a prosperous Missouri. He also held people in bondage for decades of their lives. He might have performed acts of striking cruelty.
Taking it all into account, Rollins' great-great-grandchildren have conflicted views of him. Ellen Mering takes pride in his efforts in education, but she feels guilty about his ownership of slaves.

"He had slaves that contributed to the wealth of his generation that filtered down to ours," she said. "It feels mixed to me, complicated and yucky."

Even after putting so much effort into atoning for Rollins' sins, Clay Mering admires his ancestor.

"He was a good man, but he was a slave owner," Mering said. "He was a complicated man."

Mike Middleton, who believes he is descended from slaves, offered a generous assessment of Rollins' character, refusing to judge him for following the ethos of his time.

"If you blame an individual for not standing up to that sort of system and not rejecting it wholeheartedly, it would sort of be expecting too much of human beings," he said. "I don’t think everyone participating in slavery was a bad person. Perhaps I could say they didn’t know any better, they were going along with the crowd."

Middleton has a lot of experience defying the crowd. He stood up against racism while an undergraduate at MU and as its first black law student. He said he doesn't like to think about the way African-Americans were treated here a century before he arrived. "I try not to dwell on that ugly history," he said. "I try to move forward and make this society one that's fair in how it treats human beings."

He added, "Looking back is always good, but looking forward is more important."

Clay Mering keeps looking back.

When he has free time from his nursing school classes and his part-time job at a nursing home, he continues his exploration of his family's past. He's spent hours researching the descendants of Rollins' slaves using genealogical websites and government records.

He doesn't know much about them — mostly just their names, occupations and addresses. Some of them stayed in Missouri; others moved to Florida, Michigan, Colorado. They became laborers, farmers, cooks, truckers. A military man. A teacher.
In a giant Microsoft Word file, he has drawn their family trees. Some branches reach all the way to the 1980s and 1990s, but none to the present day. His search is limited by a lack of records. The names of most of Rollins' slaves are nowhere to be found, and the most recent census records available are from 1940. He dreams of tracking down some who are living. But what would he do if he found them?

"That's a good question. I haven't worked that out," he said. "I might call them up, and they wouldn't want to talk to me. I'm guessing they would, though."

**Medicaid expansion is a no-brainer**

Timothy McBride

As the 2014 legislative session begins, and Missouri again considers a number of important economic incentive packages, it is worth reviewing what opportunities Missouri has failed to capitalize on.

Last year, Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon called the Legislature into an extraordinary special session to pass an incentive package with the purpose of luring Boeing to place a plant here to build new 777X planes.

In an era when it seems partisanship has paralyzed the Congress and state legislatures, it is remarkable that in a session that lasted less than a week, the Republican-led Legislature overwhelming passed the Democratic governor’s package of $1.7 billion in incentives for Boeing.

Of course the reason the Legislature did this, and the governor proposed the incentives, was because it was projected that these $1.7 billion in incentives would lead eventually to a projected 8,000 jobs in a period when Missouri and other states are still struggling to replace the jobs lost during the Great Recession. It was certainly logical that the governor put together this package and notable that the Republican majority partnered with Democrats in the Legislature agreed to this so quickly.

Now that Boeing’s union has caved in to the corporation’s demands, this noble effort will not lead to more employment in Missouri.
What is perplexing however is why the Legislature will not act on another proposal that would lead to more job creation for less state funds.

Last session, the governor proposed to expand the state’s Medicaid program under the new health reform law (the Affordable Care Act, also called Obamacare). House Republicans responded with a proposal authored by Rep. Jay Barnes, R-Jefferson City, that would have reformed Medicaid and expanded coverage (albeit to fewer people than proposed by Gov. Nixon). Rep. Barnes’ proposal — which in an improved form will be considered again this session — failed to pass the House, and was never considered in the Senate.

**Tragically for Missourians struggling to find employment, the governor’s proposal would have created **24,000** jobs, according to a University of Missouri estimate. What is worse, failure to pass a Medicaid expansion has already contributed to significant job losses in Missouri, as hospitals and health providers have eliminated positions or laid off over 700 people across the state since the end of the last legislative session.**

In addition to economic benefits of a Medicaid expansion, in the first year 260,000 people in Missouri would gain health insurance through Medicaid (eventually more than 300,000 would gain coverage). Yet, because of provisions of health reform law, the costs of covering these people would be entirely borne by the federal government for fiscal years 2014-16, and the state would pick up only 10 percent of the costs after that.

All this suggests the Medicaid expansion proposal is a no-brainer, even though the direct costs of insuring these individuals would eventually rise to a little more than $100 million annually or about $447 million over the 2014-2021 period. However it is important to note that because of savings in the rest of the state’s budget and new revenues flowing into the state (because of the new jobs), the proposal to expand Medicaid would in fact reduce the state’s budget by $587 million over the 2014-21 period.

Could someone explain to this health economist why the Legislature thought it was a good idea to allocate $1.7 billion to attract 8,000 jobs, but does not think it’s a good idea to attract 24,000 jobs while also insuring 300,000 currently uninsured low-income people in the state, all while reducing the size of the state’s budget?

*Timothy McBride is a professor at the Brown School, Washington University. He also serves as Chair of the MOHealthNET Oversight Committee for the State of Missouri, a body that oversees the Medicaid program.*
Editorial: New ResLife security efforts a step in the right direction

Unlocking security in dorms is not as simple as turning a key and locking exterior doors.

After a string of thefts, vandalism incidents and assaults, all main doors in residence halls will require swipe access. Main doors refer to the second set of doors in new halls and exterior entrances on older residence halls that do not have the 24/7 lock system. **The MU Department of Residential Life is implementing this policy immediately. Previously, exterior doors on all residence halls locked at 11 p.m.**

Though we applaud ResLife’s efforts and find the new policy a step in the right direction, more preventative action needs to be taken to ensure the safety of those living in residence halls. Do not get us wrong, there are tons of benefits to locking all the main doors (like reducing the number of solicitors in the buildings), but there are still many ways an intruder could enter the building. Side doors function similarly to those in the lobby in that all an intruder has to do is wait until a resident shows up to swipe his or her card (granted someone waiting outside is a bit more suspicious). Yes, many buildings are set to be redesigned to mirror the likes of Schurz, but crime in Columbia and on campus will not stop while we wait for renovations to occur.

Locking the main doors may be enough to deter those looking to cause trouble, locking doors does not change the actions of residents. Whether it is forgetting to turn the key or slipping a magnet onto the door frame, there are too many instances of unlocked doors. Many students at MU come from small towns where everyone knows everyone. Behaviors assuming that home is safe carry through to college and later on to off-campus living. This can be detrimental when the first set of protection (locked doors in the lobby) fails. Anyone who has lived in a residence hall knows that it is easy to enter most residence halls whether an exterior door is locked or not. When both barriers are breached, students are left vulnerable to crime.

Residence hall security measures at other universities range from guest check-ins to required ID swipes to take the elevator. We encourage ResLife to borrow the policies of other universities. If they can do it, we can too.

But at what point do safety measures cross the line? Implementation of front desk check-ins and approval forms for guests are a bit extreme, but more security cameras and swipe-access doors could amp up security without hindering students. In community living, security trumps privacy, especially when student safety is involved. No solution will be perfect, but the act of working toward one is progress in itself.

Part of this solution-in-progress is changing the way students view safety. MU emphasizes that campus is secure, but this creates an unrealistic perception of safety. Columbia used to be a small
midwestern town. With this comes the perception that crime is low, but as business booms and the city sprawls, the Columbia crime rate proves this untrue. Even the societal norm of holding doors open for those behind you can be the favor that ends in theft or worse.

We need a campus culture change. Students do not need to be afraid, but they must be aware. Whether it be knowing the faces of those who live on your floor or staying vigilant while walking at night, awareness is key, and Summer Welcome is essential to its implementation. Freshmen, and those new on campus, do pay attention to what is emphasized during orientation. If awareness of surroundings and safety in residence halls is heavily discussed, students will be more likely to deem these actions important.

At the same time, the responsibility of student safety is not solely the responsibility of the university. Students need to step-up. More, stronger security measures will only make it seem prison-like. ResLife has the resources and the authority to educate, but safety is ultimately up the actions of those living in residence halls. It is fairly simple: Lock your doors and do not open doors for strangers. It is common sense, really, but the midwestern spirit of courtesy and kindness makes it seem harsh and rude.

To those living on campus, know your community and be aware of those on your floor. Trust your floormates but be vigilant. Talk with your roommate about locking your door and inviting guests over. It is a double edged sword. This is a homey environment, but it is not your home. But with effort from both sides, on-campus abodes can be safe and secure.

New ResLife door security policy introduced

By Kevin Graeler

All residence halls will now have restricted access at all times, according to the newly amended campus policy announced Dec. 13 by the Department of Residential Life.

―While we recognize the minor inconvenience to students, it is in the students’ best interest we change the existing policy to enhance the safe and secure environment we currently provide,‖ Director of Residential Life Frankie Minor said.

Minor said the input of several organizations was taken into consideration before arriving at this decision. The Residence Halls Association, which represents all students who live in residence halls, was consulted. The MU Police Department also provided full backing of this decision.
“(This set of changes) also follows the natural evolution of changes to security trends we all experience in our day-to-day lives,” Minor said.

Residential Life also turned to research to see how other universities handle these security issues in Missouri and across the country.

“We chose to ‘up the safe factor’ of our students, as many other educational institutions have,” Minor said.

Ten of the residence halls on campus already have restricted access.

In the halls with restricted access, doors to each building’s living areas are locked permanently and only residents can gain access with their ID cards. Non-residents are permitted access to the desk, classrooms and dining facilities, while a staff member is on duty at the front desk. The remaining exterior doors are locked around the clock, according to a Residential Life news release.

The 11 residence halls affected by the new policy will only undergo minor changes, according to the news release. Instead of the main entrance doors being open during the day while staff members are at the front desks, the doors will always be locked. This is to ensure that no strangers are able to wander into the residence halls.

“Students in these 11 halls were previously able to vote for a 24/7 locking procedure if they wished to,” Minor said.

But now, he said, the decision has been taken out of their hands.

Freshman Mark Boyd, who lives in Hatch Hall, said he is not sure whether these changes will prevent all strangers from entering residence halls, but he said he appreciates what the Department of Residential Life is doing.

“I feel safe because I watch my surroundings,” he said. “Either way, someone will be able to get in. I’m pretty sure strangers get in all the time.”

Freshman Brian Lambert, who lives in Hudson Hall, said he is concerned this new policy will inconvenience residents.

“I think this will be effective to keep strangers out, but (it) might be a nuisance to have to swipe three times to get to our rooms,” he said.

There are signs posted within each residence hall recommending that students not let others in when they are entering through main entrances, unless they are certain the student lives there.

“If a person looks out of place, I’m not going to let them in,” Lambert said.
MizzouRec starts off the semester with improvements, renovations

By Covey Eonyak Son

As waves of students return from winter break, more than 32,000 are anticipated to work out at the MU Student Recreation Complex in the first week alone.

This year’s attendance is estimated to have a 10 percent increase over last year’s 29,914 students who used MizzouRec within the first week, spokeswoman Jennifer Seris said in an email.

Many of these students may notice some changes when returning to the complex this semester, as the facility underwent a series of improvements and maintenance projects over the break. MizzouRec closed its doors for two weeks from Dec. 21 - Jan. 3 to complete the various improvements.

All hardwood flooring in the complex — in ten basketball courts, five racquet sport courts and three TigerX studios — have been stripped, branded and refinished, Associate Director of Membership Emily Bach said.

The newly resurfaced basketball court floors were among the first things that impressed freshman Spencer Tompkins.

“They were really plain and slippery (before), and now they (have more) grip,” he said.

Bach said the preventative maintenance will help maintain the integrity of the floors.

“The (resurfacing and resealing) make a safer play surface and activities surface by keeping the courts in good condition,” she said.

Junior Lee Banov said the improved floors give the courts a more professional feel.

“The new paint job on the basketball courts is really cool and gives the courts the look of a real stadium,” he said.

New flooring was also installed at the Jungle Gym, Brewer Fieldhouse and the Legends room.

Twenty new rims were installed on the basketball courts as well, Bach said.
“The rims are a lot better, too,” Tompkins said. “Some of the older rims were getting bent from people dunking on them, and now they’re a lot cleaner and newer.”

Additional improvements, such as 96 new lockers large enough for storing backpacks, were made to the Jungle Gym, Bach said.

“The new lockers in the Jungle Gym, which (are) a big bonus for our users, are going to be a more secure location in the jungle gym,” she said. “If items are left unsecured, we will be picking them up and taking them away from that space because the intent is not to create more surfaces for students to put items that are unsecured.”

More than 30 pieces of new, additional equipment — including elliptical machines, bikes, TreadClimbers and WoodWay Curves — were installed in the cardio area of the Jungle Gym, Bach said.

Although these new machines may benefit some users, freshman James Packard said he was concerned about the reduction in space available within the Jungle Gym.

“There are some elliptical machines that now (cut) into the machine area,” he said. “I’m not sure I like that so much because it makes the machines much closer and cuts down on the space at the machines.”

Increasing accessibility and security at the west entrance of the facility was another focus of the winter break renovations, Bach said. The west entrance is the side adjacent to Stankowski Field.

“That location is now focused on member-only access,” Bach said. “Individuals who come to the west desk will need to have active membership with their credentials. If they don’t have the appropriate credentials, we cannot let them access the facility from that side.”

The Rothwell Club also saw major renovations, which includes 40 additional lockers, TV reinstallation, new quartz benches, countertops, sinks and fixtures.

At Truman’s Pond, a new retaining wall, sidewalk and fencing were installed, and tiles near the 50-meter pool were repaired or replaced.

New athletic branding in the Mizzou Aquatic Center is still in the process of being installed, Bach said.

The upgrades will have no impact on student fees and will hopefully enhance students’ workouts at the MizzouRec, Bach said.

“We’re always striving to enhance the student experience on campus, and hopefully with th