Local reaction mixed to Gov. Nixon’s education funding proposals

By Rudi Keller and Ashley Jost

Wednesday, January 22, 2014 at 2:00 pm

JEFFERSON CITY – Gov. Jay Nixon's budget proposal that provides an 8.2 percent boost for the University of Missouri and $278 million more for public schools drew support from Boone County lawmakers, but area Republicans said they don't think the state can afford the whole package.

Nixon's proposal for higher education provides increased support in three ways. Nixon asked lawmakers to approve $42.1 million increase for basic aid, with the amount of new money for each school dependent on achievement in five areas. He also asked for $22 million to support science, technology, engineering and math, or STEM, programs and $19.8 million for an initiative to train mental health professionals.

The UM System, which received 47 percent of the money allocated for colleges and universities during the current fiscal year, would receive 54.6 percent of the new funding Nixon proposed.

Those proposals will be difficult for the legislature to approve, said Rep. Caleb Jones, R-Columbia. Legislative budget leaders and Nixon disagree on how much money will be available next year, he noted.

"If we're going to be successful as a state and have a balanced budget and actually move Missouri forward economically, we need to be at the tip of the spear, not the rear guard and making up fuzzy numbers about our budget doesn't help," Jones said. "Spending $1.1 billion more than we did last year is not a successful way to move our state forward, nor is it realistic."

Nixon also proposed increased student aid, including the addition of a forgivable loan through the Bright Flight scholarship program. Budget Committee member Rep. Caleb Rowden, R-
Columbia, said he thinks the core budget increase for the university and the new Bright Flight program are both likely to win approval.

"I actually think that's realistic, what's being proposed for Mizzou, a 5 percent bump, some Bright Flight dollars — we can make that happen," Rowden said.

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," Kelly said.

Kelly and Nixon also disagree on how to finance reconstruction of Fulton State Hospital. Both want to borrow the money, but Nixon doesn't want to make a bond issue dependent on a statewide vote. Kelly applauded when Nixon proposed the work at Fulton State Hospital, but that doesn't mean he likes Nixon's financing plan, he said.

"For six years I have been trying to build Fulton, and I am glad the governor is interested," he said.

Nixon again called on lawmakers to accept federal support to expand Medicaid. Rep. Stephen Webber, D-Columbia, said he hopes Republicans will accept the proposals, discussed by interim committees in the fall, to overhaul the Medicaid system and expand coverage.

"The quickest way to save general revenue dollars is to get the enhanced matching money for Medicaid," he said.

This article was published in the Wednesday, January 22, 2014 edition of the Columbia Daily Tribune with the headline "Locals like some Nixon proposals: Schools could see an increase."

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Posted in Local, Politics on Wednesday, January 22, 2014 2:00 pm.
Nixon finds little Republican support for budget full of new spending during State of the State

By Rudi Keller

Wednesday, January 22, 2014 at 2:00 pm Comments (3)

JEFFERSON CITY — For the first time in his tenure, Gov. Jay Nixon went to the General Assembly Tuesday night with a list of big budget initiatives that made just about every group dependent on state government happy.

What did not change for the Democratic governor, however, is the criticism leveled at his proposals by Republican leaders. They didn't like the size of his spending proposals, his opposition to their big tax cut ideas and his renewed call to expand Medicaid coverage to working adults.

Nixon proposed a $27.7 billion budget for state operations and an additional $337.4 million for construction projects. The budget proposal includes $336.1 million in new spending on public schools, with $278 million allocated to the foundation formula, the state's basic school aid program.

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

"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 said.
During his speech, 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," he said.

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. House Budget Chairman Rick Stream, R-Kirkwood, said the difference is $310 million in general revenue.

Nixon made several proposals in addition to his budget plan but gave few details on exactly what he wanted from lawmakers. Nixon asked for:

- Expanded coverage for working adults under Medicaid. The Affordable Care Act offers states federal aid to pay for the expanded coverage through 2016, with the state paying a small share, no more than 10 percent, afterward. Nixon called for expansion and reforms but did not specify the exact changes he wanted. Republicans have argued for more managed care coverage and a program that resembles private insurance.
- A "robust discussion" of the state transportation programs and how to fund them.
- A "comprehensive energy plan for the state."
- Limits on campaign donations and new ethics rules for public officials.
- Legislation to protect Missourians from discrimination based on sexual preference or gender identity.

While Republicans said they will cut back on Nixon's spending proposals and dismissed his legislative program as vague, Democrats had mixed reactions.

House Minority Leader Jacob Hummel of St. Louis called it Nixon's "best speech ever. It is nice to have money in the budget."

But Sen. Jamilah Nasheed, D-St. Louis, said the spending proposals are excessive.
"He's got a big Christmas tree with a lot of gifts, and he doesn't know how he is going to pay the debt," she said.

This article was published in the Wednesday, January 22, 2014 edition of the Columbia Daily Tribune with the headline "Nixon asks for more spending: Governor makes schools priority."

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Posted in Local, Politics on Wednesday, January 22, 2014 2:00 pm.

Editorial: Want to compete? Education needs more than $493 million

15 hours ago • By the Editorial Board

NO MU MENTION

It's Missouri State of the State quiz time. Who said this:

“Now, I am pleased to present my legislative initiatives for better schools, a stronger economy, better health care and other important needs.”

If you guessed Gov. Jay Nixon, the Democrat who gave his sixth State of the State speech on Tuesday, you would be wrong.

It was Gov. Matt Blunt, a Republican, giving his first State of the State speech on Jan. 25, 2005.

There is a certain similarity to these things, regardless of who gives them. The governor, regardless of party, says the state of the state is strong, even when it isn't. He proposes new money for pet projects. Members of his party cheer, and the opposing party sits on its hands.

So it was Tuesday evening, when Mr. Nixon pushed many of the same themes Mr. Blunt pushed in 2005. This time around, Republicans are criticizing the speech as being too heavy on spending. In fact, if the state had invested more over the last eight years, Mr.
Nixon might not be trying to address the same old problems. But that would have involved tax increases. And no matter what party a Missouri governor represents, tax increases are bad. Very bad. Worse than perpetual mediocrity.

Mr. Nixon’s biggest and most important promise Tuesday was to get the state about halfway toward fully funding the $600 million shortfall in the formula that determines how much Missouri spends on K-12 education. He wants $278 million more this year and more next year to fill the gap. In all, he wants to spend $493 million on education this year, including K-12, higher education and early childhood education.

Republicans who instinctively call such proposals “big government” spending, as many did Tuesday night and Wednesday morning, need to remember something:

It’s their formula.

In 2005, under the leadership of Mr. Blunt and a Republican-controlled Legislature, lawmakers rewrote the so-called “foundation formula.” Having written it, they proceeded to ignore it. The biggest share of the blame lies with the Great Recession, which robbed all states of needed revenue as the economy contracted. But plenty of blame lies with Mr. Nixon, who appears to be working from Mr. Blunt’s notes when talking about “holding the line on taxes.” The rest of the blame lies with the Republicans in the Legislature who talk about funding education, but talk is as far as it goes.

Mr. Nixon on Tuesday night challenged lawmakers to come up with $278 million more for elementary and secondary schools. The response should have been simple: That’s not good enough.

Unfortunately, they are too stuck in their tax-cut fueled ideological race to the bottom that they can’t see an opportunity to gain the political upper hand.

Nearly everything Mr. Nixon pushed for Tuesday night is right out of the business community’s playbook: a focus on early childhood education, more funding for both local schools and colleges and universities, an expansion of Medicaid that would feed the state’s health care industry with federal dollars and actually save about $94 million in the state’s budget.

These are ideas, that at various times, have been championed by Republican governors such as Mr. Blunt and, before him, John Ashcroft and Christopher “Kit” Bond. More funding for Parents as Teachers? That’s a Republican standing ovation line. Or it used to be anyway. Putting low-wage workers on state Medicaid rolls as called for in the Affordable Care Act? Toward the end of his term, Mr. Blunt proposed nearly the same thing.

The problem in Missouri, besides a partisan divide that leaves us blind to our own state’s history, is that nobody in charge will actually acknowledge the two largest obstacles to fulfilling the bipartisan promise to fund education. One: Missouri is, and
has been for decades, among the lowest-taxed states in the nation. Two: Education budgets always come in second to funding corporate tax credits.

Mr. Nixon actually bragged about both of those issues Tuesday night. He said: “Missouri’s a low-tax state — sixth lowest in the nation — and we like it that way.”

No, governor, the school children of the state do not like the fact that its leaders won’t fulfill their promises to them. The working poor of this state do not like being shut out of the health care system or access to food stamps or child care services, or the ability to meet with a social services worker face to face because you keep cutting jobs from the state payroll.

“We all know that if you want to win, you’ve got to compete,” Mr. Nixon said of the failed effort to bribe Boeing to build its new 777X airliner in St. Louis. To “compete” for that business, the Democratic governor and his Republican cohorts promised Boeing up to $2.4 billion in state tax breaks. In a hastily called special session, an overwhelming bipartisan majority of Missouri lawmakers found the will to offer an incredibly profitable company $2.4 billion.

But they won’t fully fund schools for the kids in their communities.

It’s shameful. So pardon us if we don’t stand and applaud at the $493 million in new funding Mr. Nixon promises for students from preschool to graduate school. Yes, the Legislature should fund it. It’s the right thing to do. But unless the state escapes from its status as the sixth lowest-taxed state in the nation, it will be but a drop in the bucket forgotten the next time the economy falters.

Until state lawmakers and the governor can come together to find the full $600 million to fully fund the K-12 formula they are currently shorting, without gutting other strapped state programs, then they are hypocrites of the highest order. They want to be patted on the back for not doing what they were sent to Jefferson City to do.

**Here’s the reality:** Between 1970 and 2006, Missouri ranked 47th in the nation — that’s fourth-lowest — in combined local and state tax burden, according to the Public Policy Research Center at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. Even with full funding today, Missouri’s schoolchildren will get less than most of their peers in other states. With inflation, the money will buy less than it would have two decades ago.

When it comes to competing for the title of a state that truly funds a first-class education for its children, that fulfills the promise the constitution and state statute makes to them, that understands that the best economic development tool is quality schools, Missouri fails miserably.

The numbers don’t lie. Yet every single year, a governor of one party or the other stands before the Legislature and proudly declares himself the latest version of the Education Governor.
Adding $493 million to education funding efforts is a nice gesture.
But it barely even gets us to the starting line.

Obama targets college sexual assault epidemic

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama shone a light Wednesday on a college sexual assault epidemic that is often shrouded in secrecy, with victims fearing stigma, police poorly trained to investigate and universities reluctant to disclose the violence.

A White House report highlights a stunning prevalence of rape on college campuses, with 1 in 5 female students assaulted while only about 1 in 8 reports it.

"No one is more at risk of being raped or sexually assaulted than women at our nation's colleges and universities," says the report by the White House Council on Women and Girls.

Nearly 22 million American women and 1.6 million men have been raped in their lifetimes, according to the report. It chronicles the devastating effects, including depression, substance abuse and a wide range of physical ailments such as chronic pain and diabetes.

The report says campus sexual assaults are fueled by drinking and drug use that can incapacitate victims, often at student parties at the hands of someone they know.

Perpetrators often are serial offenders. One study cited by the report found that 7 percent of college men admitted to attempting rape and 63 percent of those men admitted to multiple offenses, averaging six rapes each.

Obama, who has overseen a military that has grappled with its own crisis of sexual assaults, spoke out against the crime as "an affront on our basic decency and humanity." He then signed a memorandum creating a task force to respond to campus rapes.
Obama said he was speaking out as president and a father of two daughters and that men must express outrage to stop the crime.

"We need to encourage young people, men and women, to realize that sexual assault is simply unacceptable," Obama said. "And they're going to have to summon the bravery to stand up and say so, especially when the social pressure to keep quiet or to go along can be very intense."

Obama gave the task force made up of administration officials, 90 days to come up with recommendations for colleges to prevent and respond to the crime, increase public awareness of each school's track record and enhance coordination among federal agencies to hold schools accountable if they don't confront the problem.

Records obtained by The Associated Press under the federal Freedom of Information Act illustrate a continuing problem for colleges in investigating crime. The documents include anonymous complaints sent to the Education Department, often alleging universities haven't accurately reported on-campus crime or appropriately punished assailants as required under federal law.

_In September 2013, the Missourian reported that just one MU student was expelled for a sex offense, and one other was suspended in 2012. Victims must report assaults to the Office of Student Conduct for action to be taken._

_The article said, "Although dozens of sex offenses were reported to campus counselors and police last year, only those two students faced punishment from the Office of Student Conduct."_

A former Amherst College student, Angie Epifano, has accused the school of trivializing her report of being raped in a dorm room in 2011 by an acquaintance. She said school counselors questioned whether she was really raped, refused her request to change dorms, discouraged her from pressing charges and had police take her to a psychiatric ward. She withdrew from Amherst while her alleged attacker graduated.

Among the federal laws requiring colleges to address sexual assault are: Title IX, which prohibits gender discrimination in education; the renewed Violence Against Women Act, which was signed into law last year with new provisions on college sexual assault; and the Clery Act, which requires colleges and universities to publicly report their crime statistics every year.

The Education Department has investigated and fined several schools for not accurately reporting crimes. Most notably was a 2006 case at Eastern Michigan University, in which the government eventually fined the school a then-record $357,000 for not revealing a student had been sexually assaulted and murdered in her dorm room.
Violent crime can be underreported on college campuses, advocates say, because of a university's public-image incentive to keep figures low or because crimes can occur off campus and instead investigated by local police. Other times, schools put suspects before a campus court whose proceedings are largely secret and not subjected to judicial review.

Students Active for Ending Rape, a nonprofit group that works with student activists to push for sexual assault policy changes on their campuses, said in a report last year that schools often do not fully address the problem.

The report gave more than 80 percent of college policies a grade C or below, an F to nearly one-quarter and said one-third don't fully comply with the Clery Act.

The White House report also declares that the criminal justice response to sexual assault broadly is too often inadequate and lays out a goal of increasing arrest, prosecution and conviction rates without any specific targets.

The report blames police bias and a lack of training to investigate and prosecute sex crimes for low arrest rates and says the federal government should promote training and help police increase testing of DNA evidence collected from victims.

The report mentions sexual assaults in the military — last month, Obama directed the Pentagon to better prevent and respond to the crime within its ranks or face further reforms. White House officials say they want to set the example by turning around the sexual assault problem in the military.

"I've made it clear I expect significant progress in the year ahead," Obama said.
WASHINGTON -- The Obama administration had already been considered unusually tough on campuses that fail to address sexual assault, with the U.S. Education Department’s Office for Civil Rights opening and settling more Title IX investigations at colleges than ever before.

Many college administrators have said that they of course want to protect students – both victims and alleged perpetrators – as best they can. But they’ve also complained that OCR doesn’t fully understand the practical and cultural issues involved in addressing sexual assault on campuses, particularly when it comes to judicial affairs processes, and that OCR’s lack of transparency and clarification has created confusion regarding exactly what the office expects of them. Now, much of that appears poised to change.

In a news conference announcing the formation of a White House Task Force on Protecting Students from Sexual Assault, Obama vowed to “work with” – not just dictate to – campus officials in a new initiative that appears to take federal enforcement another step further.

“We’re going to work with colleges and universities and educational institutions of all kinds across America to help them come up with better ways to prevent and respond to sexual assault on their campuses,” Obama said, “and then we’re going to help them put those plans into practice.”

But the intimate collaboration might stop there. While the task force will “consult with external stakeholders” including administrators and student groups, there is no official seat at the table for campus officials. Those spots are reserved for federal officials.

“My hope and intention is that every college president who personally has not been thinking about this is going to hear about this report and is going to go out and figure out who’s in charge on their campuses of responding properly, and what are their best practices, and are we doing everything that we should be doing,” Obama said. “If you’re not doing that right now, I want the students at the school to ask the president what he’s doing or what she’s doing.”
If the government is going to clarify what exactly it wants campuses to be doing – beyond the general policies outlined by OCR in its 2011 “Dear Colleague” letter – that’s a good thing, said Chris Loschiavo, associate dean of students at the University of Florida and president of the Association for Student Conduct Administration. But actually including the practitioners would be even better, she said.

“I think there are opportunities here to partner with people who work with these issues on the ground level on a day-by-day basis,” Loschiavo said. “If it’s another group to tell institutions, ‘You’re not doing good enough,’ I don’t know how helpful that’s going to be.”

The Dear Colleague letter prompted policy reviews and changes at many institutions, but also flummoxed campus officials who are trying to balance student safety and justice with federal expectations. The letter laid out blanket expectations for all universities, regardless of size or location, but since then OCR has been silent save for resolution agreements with individual institutions, which the office is quick to point out are legally binding only for the campus in question – even at the University of Montana, where OCR referred to the agreement as a “blueprint” for colleges nationwide.

“It would be important for [the task force] to understand the challenges that are faced in trying to control the student populations and to combat this sexual assault issue,” said Ada Meloy, general counsel at the American Council on Education. “I would hope that any best practices that they come up with would be workable.”

The task force also promises to “improve transparency of the government’s enforcement activities,” “build on the federal government’s enforcement efforts to ensure that educational institutions comply fully with their legal obligations,” “increase the public’s awareness of an institution’s track record in addressing rape and sexual assault,” and “enhance coordination among federal agencies to hold schools accountable if they do not confront sexual violence on their campuses.”

According to a White House memorandum released Wednesday, the task force has 90 days to provide Obama with proposals and recommendations regarding effective
policies, prevention and response efforts, improved federal enforcement transparency, and better coordination of agencies such as Education, Justice and Health and Human Services, all of which can play roles in campus assault investigations. Within a year, the memo says, and annually after that, the task force will report to the president on implementation efforts.

A new report (not specific to colleges) released in conjunction with the task force’s formation, which singles out assault on campuses as “a particular problem,” does not contain much if any new information on the issue: it notes that one in five college women has been sexually assaulted in college, that most are assaulted by acquaintances who are repeat offenders, and that alcohol often fuels dangerous situations.

But the issue has drawn new levels of scrutiny from the public and government, fueled in part by aggressive activism by students who, prior to the federal Dear Colleague letter, didn’t know they were guaranteed rights under Title IX and who’ve been taking their campuses to task for failing to deliver.

“I think probably the biggest legitimate criticism I hear from institutions is that, ‘We don’t know what’s expected of us; it has not been clearly articulated,’ ” said S. Daniel Carter, director of the VTV Family Outreach Foundation’s 32 National Campus Safety Initiative. “From what I’ve seen, colleges and universities are hungering for guidance on how they can better protect their students and respond when something happens.”

The task force’s charges are not exactly groundbreaking – the Campus SaVE Act, enacted last March, stipulated that campuses be more transparent with crime data and that the Departments of Education, Justice and Health and Human Services would collect and disseminate best practices.

The Campus SaVE Act is part of the Violence Against Women Act, whose implementation is being discussed at Education Department negotiated rulemaking meetings this month. The rulemaking committee does include a number of campus officials (including Carter), and one of them, Dickinson College General Counsel Dana Scaduto, is hoping that whatever comes out of these various efforts, it’s all consistent with OCR’s Title IX guidance.
“It’s going to be important so that colleges and universities can fully understand their obligations,” she said.

Loschiavo, for one, is trying to get ASCA a formal seat on the task force.

January 23, 2014

Obama Promises Governmentwide Scrutiny of Campus Rape

By Libby Sander

Washington

President Obama pledged on Wednesday to develop a "coordinated federal response" to address campus rape and sexual assault, calling for more-transparent enforcement of applicable laws and greater emphasis on developing effective campus policies to prevent and respond to sexual assault.

Although "an inspiring wave of student-led activism" has spurred more students to report such assaults, Mr. Obama said during remarks at the White House, colleges need to do more to keep students safe. Government agencies can help them come up with better policies and put those ideas into practice, he said.

The White House Task Force on Protecting Students From Sexual Assault, which the president created on Wednesday in a memorandum to executive departments and agencies, will lead the new effort. Its objectives are to:
• Provide colleges with evidence-based best practices for preventing and responding to rape and sexual assault.
• Make sure institutions "comply fully" with their legal obligations in the area.
• Increase the transparency of federal enforcement.
• Broaden public awareness of individual colleges' compliance with relevant laws.
• Facilitate coordination among federal agencies involved with the issue.

The group's membership will include the U.S. attorney general and the leaders of several other cabinet-level agencies, among others, and it is expected to submit recommendations to the president in 90 days. A full report on putting those recommendations into effect is due in a year, and will be produced on an annual basis after that.

"My hope and intention is that every college president who has not personally been thinking about this is going to hear about this," Mr. Obama said, "and figure out who is in charge on their campus of responding properly, and what are the best practices, and are we doing everything that we should be doing."

"And if you're not doing that right now," he concluded, "I want the students at the school to ask."

Mr. Obama's scrutiny comes at a time when students are driving the debate over how colleges should prevent and respond to sexual assault. Over the past year, activists and rape survivors across the country have publicly faulted colleges—which are legally required to respond to reports of sexual assault—for what they see as inadequate responses. In many cases, the students have filed federal complaints under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the law meant to bar sex discrimination at institutions that receive federal funds.

Last summer the students found an audience in Washington. A group of activists met in July with officials from the White House and the Department of Education to ask for stricter and more-transparent enforcement of Title IX among colleges and collaboration among federal agencies in doing so.
Their words appear to have resonated. On Wednesday morning, Dana Bolger, a recent graduate of Amherst College and a leader in the student movement, received a phone call. To her surprise, it was Tina Tchen, executive director of the White House Council on Women and Girls, calling to thank Ms. Bolger and other activists for their work and to alert them to the president's announcement. (The council also released a broader report on Wednesday, "Rape and Sexual Assault: A Renewed Call to Action.")

"I feel that our pleas have been heard," Ms. Bolger said in an email. "That said, we're still waiting to hear details, so it's difficult to know now what kind of difference these efforts will make."

'A Unique Moment'

For Holly Rider-Milkovich, the president's remarks—and the fine print of his memorandum—represented an unusual turn of events.

"I do not know of another president who has spoken out directly on this issue, and who has tasked his brightest minds … to put their attention to providing best practices and guidance and greater clarity of information to college campuses," said Ms. Rider-Milkovich, who is director of the Sexual Assault Prevention and Awareness Center at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. "It's a unique moment."

"I was as surprised as everybody," she added.

Ms. Rider-Milkovich said she was most enthusiastic about the directive to provide colleges with "promising practices," grounded in evidence, for preventing and responding to sexual assault. A dearth of research in those areas, she said, makes it hard for campus officials to know that they're using the most-effective approaches when it comes to, say, conducting an investigation of a report of sexual assault, or levying sanctions when a student is found responsible.

Alexandra Brodsky, a law student at Yale University, attended the meetings in Washington last summer. She was not sure then whether the students' requests would
register with federal officials and yield tangible results. By Wednesday those feelings had evolved.

"I'm really excited about this," said Ms. Brodsky, who survived an attempted rape as an undergraduate at Yale and joined 15 classmates and alumni in filing a Title IX complaint against the university in 2011. Still, she felt cautious. "This could end up being just another administrative body," she said. "The task force isn't an end in itself. We haven't ended the violence just because Obama mentions it."

But among survivors, who often feel as though their experiences are brushed off, the impact of the president's talking publicly about campus rape can't be underestimated, she said. The trauma such students experience is often trivialized by friends, family members, professors, and college presidents, she said. "And now Barack Obama is on TV recognizing us," she said. "That's pretty huge."

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The Chronicle of Higher Education

January 22, 2014

Public-University Group Offers Alternative to Obama's College-Rating Plan

By Kelly Field

Washington

NO MENTION

Rather than rate colleges, the Obama administration should hold them accountable through expanded disclosures and tightened standards for receiving federal student
aid, the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities argues in a response to the president's college-affordability plan.

In a letter sent on Wednesday to Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, M. Peter McPherson, the association's president, writes that public colleges support Mr. Obama's "call for transparency and accountability" but fear that a ratings system "would be extremely difficult to structure in a way that will accomplish the president’s goals."

"We are concerned the government’s best efforts will produce some misleading information," he writes, "and perhaps create perverse incentives."

Instead, the association suggests, the federal government should judge colleges based on a trio of risk-adjusted outcome measures: retention and graduation rates; employment and continuing-education rates; and loan-repayment and default rates.

Colleges in the bottom tier of performance would face a loss or reduction of eligibility for Title IV student aid, the association says, while those in the top tier would be rewarded with additional federal dollars. In addition, the government would publish colleges' student outcomes, along with their average net price by income.

The proposal builds on recommendations in the association's year-old report, "Federal Student Aid: Access and Completion." That report, which was part of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's Reimagining Aid Design and Delivery project, called for the creation of a "student risk index" that would take students' demographics into account when evaluating college outcomes. The report also proposed tying federal aid to colleges' risk-adjusted loan-repayment and default rates, and providing additional per-student aid to colleges with high adjusted retention and completion rates.
The Association of Public and Land-grant Universities on Wednesday took issue with certain parts of the Obama administration's proposed college ratings system -- but recommended an alternative approach that embraces some of its key principles, including linking colleges' performance to how much student aid money they receive.

While praising the goals of the Obama administration's rating system, the group's president, Peter McPherson, said in a letter to Education Secretary Arne Duncan that the ratings system would produce “misleading information and perhaps create perverse incentives.”

Instead of developing ratings, McPherson said, the Education Department should expand the types of information it provides to consumers on its College Scorecard. He suggested four key metrics: graduation rates (as measured by the voluntary system that APLU developed with other higher education groups rather than the current federal data that captures only full-time students attending college for the first time); loan repayment and default rates; average net price by income; and the rate at which graduates are employed or pursue advanced degrees.
The APLU also said it supports linking colleges’ performance in three of those four areas—graduation rates, loan repayment and default rates, and employment/enrollment in advanced education—how much federal student aid money they can receive. *An earlier version of this paragraph incorrectly stated that the APLU supported tying federal student aid to all four metrics; in fact, it does not support using the average net price figure for such purpose.)*

“There should be consequences for the very bad performers and rewards for excellent performers,” the group writes in its 10-page list of recommendations on the ratings plan.

But, McPherson said, the government needs to first weight those metrics with a “student readiness index” to enable fair comparisons between colleges that serve different populations of students. By contrast, he said, the Obama administration’s current plan to group colleges into “peer groups” in a ratings system would be extremely difficult not provide students with appropriate information to compare colleges.

After adjusting for the type of students that a college serves, McPherson said his organization “could envision institutions then being placed into something as simple as three performance tiers.” Colleges in the bottom tier would have to partially or fully withdraw from federal student aid programs, he said, whereas top-tier institutions could be rewarded with additional federal funds, such as the Pell bonus described in the Obama plan.

The APLU’s recommendations on the college ratings system are likely to put its public university members at odds with some other sectors of higher education. The linking of large amounts of federal aid to college performance on any metrics has been considered by some in higher education as a line not to be crossed. Private college presidents and their representatives in Washington, in particular, have said they strongly believe that federal student aid should follow a student wherever he or she chooses to attend college.

The American Council of Education has also said that it would "be vigilant in working to prevent tying the receipt of aid to metrics, which could have a
profoundly negative impact on the very students and families the administration is trying to help."

Notably, however, the APLU does continue to share the concern of many other higher education groups in rejecting the use of graduates' earnings data by the government for either informational or evaluative purposes. It says there are "reasonable" concerns with using earnings data, but recommends using employment rates that measure graduates "for some time" after graduation.

The Education Department is currently soliciting feedback on how it should develop a college ratings system. Officials will also hold a public “technical symposium” on the ratings plan on February 20.

New Presidents or Provosts: Albany College of Pharmacy/Health Sciences, Baker U., Brock U., Cleveland State CC, Mount Mercy U., U. of Missouri-Columbia, U. of Nebraska Medical College

January 23, 2014
Doug Lederman

- Gregory Dewey, provost at the University of La Verne, in California, has been named president of Albany College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, in New York.
- Jeffrey Gold, chancellor and executive vice president of biosciences and health affairs and executive dean of the College of Medicine at the University of Toledo, in Ohio, has been chosen as chancellor of the University of Nebraska Medical Center.
- Laurie M. Hamen, vice president for enrollment management, athletics and student affairs at North Central College, in Illinois, has been appointed as president of Mount Mercy University, in Iowa.
- R. Bowen Loftin, president of Texas A&M University, has been named chancellor of the University of Missouri at Columbia.
- Neil McCartney, dean of the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences at Brock University, in Ontario, has been promoted to provost and vice president, academic there.
- Lynne Murray, vice president for development, international and alumni relations at Gallaudet University, in Washington, D.C., has been chosen as president of Baker University, in Kansas.
- William Seymour, vice president for institutional advancement at Jackson State Community College, in Tennessee, has been selected as president of Cleveland State Community College, also in Tennessee.

High-ranking officer speaks at MU Veterans Clinic opening ceremony

Thursday, January 23, 2014 | 6:00 a.m. CST; updated 6:34 a.m. CST, Thursday, January 23, 2014

BY CAROLINE BAUMAN

COLUMBIA — When Shawn Lee was deployed to Baghdad in 2004, his first battalion sergeant major taught him everything he needed to know about true leadership and service.

Now an MU law student, Lee introduced his former sergeant, Command Sgt. Maj. Christopher Greca, as the first speaker for the new MU Veterans
Clinic. The Wednesday afternoon event celebrated the clinic's opening this month at the Hulston Hall Courtroom.

Greca, the highest ranking noncommissioned officer in the U.S. Army Forces Command, said the American public is obliged to help the many veterans who struggle when returning to civilian life.

"Little clinics like this one make veterans understand that they are not forgotten about," Greca said before his speech. "The legal advice is just a small percentage; what it's really showing is that people care."

The clinic is staffed by six MU law students who receive class credit for their work. Law School attorneys supervise the students as they help veterans who were denied disability benefits or did not receive as much as they expected.

The clinic held its first class this week and has received mid-Missouri cases as well as referrals from the Veterans Pro Bono Consortium Program in Washington, D.C., said Angela Drake, supervising attorney and instructor at the MU clinic.

"We really operate like a mini-law firm," Drake said. "We plan to reach out to local service officers, so as many local veterans as possible know that we're here to step in with legal abilities."

Greca, a 28-year veteran, said major changes lie ahead for U.S. armed forces in size and structure.

"We're going to get smaller, and as we get smaller, more people will transition out of the Army, and they will be your neighbors," Greca said. "They're not looking for handouts, just opportunities."

MU law student and veteran Daniel Hartman, who attended the event, said he was one of the first to support creating the clinic.

"When you leave the service, there are so many challenges," said Hartman, who said he led a 40-soldier infantry platoon in Baghdad from 2007 to 2008. "Some have bills that piled up, others wrestle with substance abuse, and so many need legal help and don't know where to turn. This clinic is able to assist those veterans who come on hard times."
Lee, who plans to take the clinic course in the summer, said Greca’s visit was a huge opportunity for future leaders at the Law School to learn about those they serve.

"We may only be able to address a few cases per year," Lee said. "But, we’re creating lawyers with a passion to go out and make significant changes."

Veterans Clinic inquiries may be directed to Angela Drake at 882-7630 and drakea@missouri.edu.

Majority of Violence Task Force members absent from meeting

Wednesday, January 22, 2014 | 9:48 p.m. CST
BY TIMOTHY MAYLANDER

COLUMBIA — When is a meeting not a meeting? When more than half of the members of the group don't show up.

The Mayor's Task Force on Community Violence was scheduled to meet Wednesday evening, but when only seven of the task force's 15 members attended, no official meeting could occur.

Because the task force was created by city government, it must maintain a quorum — or a majority of members present — in order to hold a meeting, according to its establishing legislation.

Without a quorum, the task force was not able to discuss any of the four items of old business on its agenda and could not make formal recommendations based on its guest speaker's presentation.

Task Force Co-chair and Fifth Ward Councilwoman Laura Nauser said that not officially meeting won't slow down the task force or cause it to get behind schedule.
"I don't think it's going to have a very big impact that we didn't have a quorum this evening," Nauser said. "We'll have to be cautious as we move forward and make certain that we do always have a quorum because we don't want this to happen again."

Although no official meeting occurred, the task force members in attendance heard from the group's scheduled speaker, S. David Mitchell. An associate professor of law at MU, Mitchell spoke about ex-offenders and the re-entry process as it pertains to community violence.

Mitchell made three recommendations based on data collected on Boone County ex-offenders re-entering communities.

**Ban the box**
The easiest change for a local government to make, Mitchell said, would be to stop employers from asking if an applicant has been convicted of a misdemeanor or felony on a first application.

Mitchell said allowing businesses to do that creates a stigma around convictions that is just as barring to future success as the conviction itself. He said that question could be asked on a second interview if it is relevant to the employment sought or ideally not at all.

Task force members seemed receptive to the idea, though they can't take action on the issue directly. They could make a recommendation to the Columbia City Council, however.

“I think the 'ban the box' is some pretty low-hanging fruit," Task Force Member Dan Hannekin said. "Whether or not the city embraces it, I don't know. But I certainly think that's an obvious one."

**Expungement**
The next important issue is addressing how convictions are removed from a person's criminal record, a process known as expungement, Mitchell said. Without that process, it is very difficult to overcome a conviction and obtain employment, especially for juvenile offenders, he said.
“It is necessary to increase the number of offenses that are eligible for expungement," Mitchell said. "To carry the stigma of a conviction from a juvenile going forward is to carry a burden that is so difficult to overcome that it may be forcing folks into underground economies."

The data showed one of the largest groups of ex-offenders re-entering communities is between 25 and 34 years old, which are also an individual’s prime earning years. Mitchell said that without expungement, ex-offenders are not able to obtain well-paying jobs and often return to crime to supplement or create their income.

While expungement is a state and federal issue, Mitchell suggested that if enough communities prompted the state to take action, it would be a good start.

**Post-release stability**

The final area of emphasis for Mitchell was increasing pathways to economic security for ex-offenders who are re-entering communities. Specifically, Mitchell said that communities need to provide more transitional housing and allow ex-offenders to stay in those facilities for months instead of weeks.

He also suggested that communities need to provide physical and mental health care for ex-offenders, as the data indicated those needs were going unserved. Those costs are being passed down to communities in other ways, he said.

When asked about specific programs that would be useful, Mitchell focused on the value that an ideal program would provide to both the ex-offender and the community.

"The key to preventing, on some levels, violence in the community and helping ex-offenders get back is you gotta make sure the other options are options those individuals want," Mitchell said. "There’s gotta be something more, more than just the platitudes that we have been giving, more than just the rhetoric. That is not enough."

The task force is scheduled to meet again on Feb. 12.
Smaller than light itself

By CADE CLEAVELIN of the University of Missouri Undergraduate Research Office

**Wednesday, January 22, 2014 at 2:00 pm**

If you had to pick just one tool to aid you on your scientific journey, an ordinary microscope would be a smart choice. As early as the 16th century, microscopes have helped scientists delve deeper and deeper into the busy microscopic world where life is carried out.

**Some objects, however, are so small they don’t even reflect visible light, forcing researchers such as Nathan Frey, a University of Missouri physics student from St. Charles, to examine them in a much more creative way.**

“Because the proteins we look at are so small — maybe a few nanometers across — we have to use what’s called an atomic force microscope (AMF),” Frey explained. “Think of it as reading Braille. Instead of light, we’re getting tactile feedback.”

Atomic force microscopes use a tiny needle to “feel” across the surfaces of molecules. The same way you can know the size, shape and texture of an object with just your finger, AMF generate images of a protein based on how the needle bumps along its surface. The needle is similar to that of a record player but much smaller. The tip is only a single atom wide, making it the sharpest object ever made!

“When you run the probe over a protein, you know the size and shape of the thing you hit, and that’s what we’re interested in,” Frey said. “Ultimately, what we get is a kind of photograph, but taken in a much more sophisticated way.”

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Posted in **Editorial Archive** on **Wednesday, January 22, 2014 2:00 pm**.