MU-commissioned study says hotel, conference center possible

By Ashley Jost

Monday, January 19, 2015 at 2:00 pm

A consultant’s study has found the city could more than sustain a hotel and conference center near the University of Missouri campus.

MU commissioned the study by PKF Consulting USA, a national consulting firm, conducted from July to November last year. PKF recommended a 200-room hotel and 30,000-square-foot conference center near campus.

MU hired the firm for about $35,000, but the final cost hasn’t been tabulated, MU spokesman Christian Basi said.

When compiling the report, the firm interviewed an array of area groups, including city and county leaders, the Columbia Chamber of Commerce, Regional Economic Development Inc. and the Columbia Convention and Visitors Bureau, “to gather data on current and future area growth and the demand for lodging and meeting facilities,” according to the executive summary. The consultant also surveyed MU faculty and staff and interviewed representatives from existing meeting facilities on and off of MU’s campus.

Basi said PKF reviewed six potential sites and determined that the area near Cliffview townhomes and the MU maintenance facilities site, adjacent to the Hampton Inn & Suites on Fellows Place, is the best location for such a facility.

MU wouldn’t undertake a project itself, Basi said.

“The university has no intention of building, owning or operating a conference center but sees that having one near the campus could be beneficial,” Basi said. The consultants said interviewees agreed a “full-service, nationally branded franchise” would have to operate the facility for it to succeed. PKF recommended Embassy Suites, Marriott and Sheraton as possible brands.

Amy Schneider, director of the Columbia Convention and Visitors Bureau, said that particularly during MU’s football season, conference space for large groups that want to host a meeting in
Columbia might be available, but there aren’t typically enough rooms in any one hotel to accommodate such groups.

“It’s just like anything else that you’re bringing in town: The concern is if you do, can you sustain it?” she said. The report estimates that the hotel and conference center, if operating by 2018, could generate $2.5 million in revenue in its first year alone and grow to $3.7 million by 2022.

Columbia Mayor Bob McDavid said while he “can’t imagine the city being involved in any at-risk money on a venture like this,” he supports the idea and would be behind the recruitment effort and infrastructure planning.

Dan Atwill, presiding commissioner for Boone County, said although the county doesn’t have much of a place to get involved, he supports more growth in the community and was interviewed by the consultants.

“I think they were looking as much for attitude in the community as they were for hard facts,,” Atwill said. “If they had a real focused issue, it was, ‘Will the community support this?’”

Heather Hargrove, general manager at the Holiday Inn Executive Center, said she hasn’t read the full report but that the hotel has 310 rooms and 40,000 square feet.

Hargrove said many of the types of events mentioned in the report are “all stuff we can hold here.”

Basi said some MU administrators have started meeting with community groups to discuss the recommendation.

KBIA and Concert Series transition to new roles

By Amy Wilder

Saturday, January 17, 2015 at 12:00 am

KBIA-FM and the Concert Series, two entities housed at the University of Missouri, have parted ways after a decades-long partnership in which they shared resources and some employees.
“The Concert Series will continue to operate under MU Operations,” said Karlan Seville, spokeswoman for MU Operations. As of Jan. 1, National Public Radio member station KBIA began reporting to the School of Journalism.

In October, MU announced it had purchased the license for 90.5 FM, formerly KWWC-FM — Stephens College is retaining ownership of its call letters and will operate online only — pending approval from the Federal Communications Commission. 91.3 FM KBIA will transition its daytime programming to news only and will play classical music overnight, while 90.5 will offer daytime classical music.

“This will drive us to become more of a newsroom people can depend on, and with that we will also be updating our website more frequently,” Mike Dunn, KBIA general manager, told the Tribune in November.

The Concert Series, which has been in existence for 108 years, began as an annual performance by the St. Louis Symphony and expanded over time, Seville said, to include a wide range of performing arts. For more than two decades, Dunn served both the Concert Series and KBIA.

“When they split off and went to the journalism school, it made sense that he go with KBIA,” said Seville. Nathan Anderson, who began working for the Concert Series in 1997 as a work study student and most recently served as Assistant Director, is now the manager of Concert Series and Event Production Services.

Seville said MU Operations Vice Chancellor Gary Ward’s goal is to work to further the academic mission of the Concert Series, “and so we try to work with faculty and students, as much as possible. The Concert Series has always worked with the school of music and offered a few concerts, the Chancellor’s Concert and the MU Choral Union — so we’re going to continue that and also expand. We’ll now be working with the MU School of Music to do the Show-Me Opera performance, and we’ve started talking to the theater department, and will do one theater performance a year through the Concert Series.

“In addition to that, we’ve been talking to Missouri Contemporary Ballet, and we plan to do two of their performances through the Concert Series each year.”

She said the Concert Series will continue to feature national and international touring musicians and performers, but is streamlining offerings, shifting the balance of programming to include more local acts, in response to feedback by patrons and donors.

“It’s important people understand that, although we’re making some changes, we’re not taking away what they consider the Concert Series to be,” Seville said. “We’re trying to kind of please everybody, and provide something for everyone.”
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

MU Counseling Center will offer 24-hour support
Monday, January 19, 2015 | 6:31 p.m. CST
BY SARAH ROTHBERG

COLUMBIA — The MU Counseling Center has set up 24-hour support for MU students with a phone service provided and operated by a company called ProtoCall.

ProtoCall is a "seamless, dedicated service tailored directly for MU," David Wallace, the director of the Counseling Center, said.

The service will be offered for the first time to students at 5 p.m. on Tuesday. The goal is to provide students with counseling when the main office is closed.

ProtoCall offers licensed staff trained in crisis management and can talk to students in need or provide information for MU campus services. MU will pay $850 a month for the service.

This arrangement allows for 50 students to call per month. Wallace said other large universities who use the same plan generally don't exceed that number. He added that MU will upgrade the service if more than 50 students call in a month.

Although there are already places students can turn to, such as the Residential Life staff, MU police and Student Life, "this just adds another level of support," Wallace said.

Like the rest of the counseling offered by the Counseling Center, it will be free and available for all students.

"It's a fantastic service," Wallace said.

He said MU Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin asked that an after-hours service be established to make sure students have counseling and mental health support when the Counseling Center is closed.
When the center reopens, staff receives a list of all those who called and check on who needs follow-ups.

To use the after-hours phone line, students can call the center’s normal number at 882-6601.

**UM curators question supplemental fee increases**

By Ashley Jost

Friday, January 16, 2015 at 2:00 pm

The University of Missouri Board of Curators has concerns about supplemental fees for the 2015-16 school year, particularly at the system’s Columbia campus.

The curators held a special teleconference Thursday morning to discuss updated tuition and fee proposals ahead of the Feb. 5-6 meeting where they will vote on the rates.

Curators in December were promised an update on increases in supplemental fees — charges assessed on students in certain programs or colleges on the four campuses. Since then, UM System President Tim Wolfe said his staff worked with campus budget officers to understand why the increases are necessary and to make sure they have been spent appropriately.

The proposed fee increases are “justified,” Wolfe told the board. In a letter to curators last week, he said the number of supplemental fee proposals, “including those that increase greater than the rate of inflation and new supplemental fees,” was reduced from 25 to 18. Five of those apply to graduate and professional students only.

Discussion Thursday morning largely centered on the $90-per-credit-hour increase to the undergraduate course fee for 310 students in the Sinclair School of Nursing. The annual estimated average impact per student is $880.

Judith Miller, dean of the MU nursing school, said because the college doesn’t charge lab fees for students, like most nursing schools do, it lacks a revenue stream that would help meet the college’s needs. She explained the college tried to maintain an 8:1 student-to-faculty ratio, which has increased to 10:1 because of the lack of resources.
MU Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin said limited facilities are constraints.

Curator David Steelman said he was concerned about adding more cost to students through fees but noted he thought it was justified for the School of Nursing, considering the 100 percent employment of graduates who don’t immediately pursue graduate school. Those employed alumni average around $40,000 annual starting salaries. Steelman, a new curator, had his appointment confirmed by the Missouri Senate on Thursday morning.

Other proposals at MU include a $5 increase to the supplemental fee for the College of Arts and Science, bringing the fee to $30 per credit hour for 9,691 students. The fee will apply to only 2000-level courses and higher, Dean Mike O’Brien told the curators, which is about half of the total classes taught by the college.

Though state law mandates tuition increases stay at or below the Consumer Price Index, that statute doesn’t restrict colleges from increasing supplemental fees.

“As I look through how these fees are being distributed and the spread between the highest increase and the lowest increase, it does seem to be supportive of the idea that different programs may cost ... different amounts and maybe ought to be priced differently,” Curator John Phillips said. “But, I think it’s a Band-Aid approach to do it through fees as opposed to differential pricing on tuition. So, I sound that alarm, and I guess we’ll talk more about it in February.”

At the December curators meeting, administrators suggested a 1.8 percent increase for in-state undergraduate tuition for all campuses except St. Louis, where a 9.1 percent increase was proposed because of a fee for a new recreation center approved by a student referendum.

The proposal has changed. According to the board documents, administrators are now using a 1.2 percent tuition increase for planning, but the final CPI was expected to be released by the state on Friday.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

MU Urgent Care clinic closes for relocation

Friday, January 16, 2015 | 4:24 p.m. CST
BY AiLin Li

COLUMBIA — MU Health Care's Urgent Care Clinic will close at 5 p.m. Friday. It will re-open at 8 a.m. Wednesday at its new location in the South Providence Medical Park building at 551 E. Southampton Drive, according to an MU Health Care news release.

The clinic was located inside the University Physicians Medical Building at 1020 Hitt St.
During the clinic's temporary closure, individuals seeking after-hours medical care can visit:

- Mizzou Quick Care clinics inside Hy-Vee grocery stores at 25 Conley Road, 405 E. Nifong Blvd. and 3100 W. Broadway, which are open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday and from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. on weekends. Mizzou Quick Care clinics are open to everyone 2 years and older.

- Pediatric Urgent Care located at MU Women's and Children's Hospital at 404 Keene St., open from 5 to 9 p.m. Monday through Friday and noon to 6 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday.

- Emergency Care at University Hospital and Women's and Children's Hospital, both open 24 hours a day.

MU Students Stage Die-In at Student Center

Watch this story: http://mms.tveys.com/PlaybackPortal.aspx?SavedEditID=51c9232a-3551-4f81-a65b-d0428e3cc50
FAA says ok to flying drone at MU research center

Watch this story on KSDK-TV (NBC) – St. Louis, Mo.
Link to video: http://mms.tveyes.com/PlaybackPortal.aspx?SavedEditID=aaed0dc2-73ce-474d-87bc-a091653b8bff

Watch this story on KCTV-TV (CBS) – Kansas City, Mo.
Link to video: http://mms.tveyes.com/PlaybackPortal.aspx?SavedEditID=22606656-3adc-4ef6-91e0-9c2c612c05aa

COLUMBIA, MO (AP) -- Federal officials have signed off on university-backed drone research in south-central Missouri.

The Federal Aviation Administration granted an application to use airspace at the University of Missouri's Wurdack Research Center for research and economic development projects. The 1,200-acre center is located 45 minutes southeast of Rolla, along the Meramec River.

Dusty Walter, superintendent of the school's research center, said he was contacted by the Missouri University of Science and Technology and Saint Louis University's aviation program about "how great the air space is" at Wurdack. He said they asked if they could collectively
apply for a waiver from the FAA to use the airspace with a specific unmanned aircraft system, or drone, provided by SLU.

"There is certainly a keen interest in using what you would call a UAS, or drone, because it gives you a different perspective on the landscape, and you can use different lenses to look at plants or address cattle and their movements," Walter said.

Walter said a number of organizations are interested in utilizing the technology for research, including computer software developers and companies that work with photo lenses. Some of that engineering work is also of interest to partners from Missouri S&T.

Damon Lercel, assistant research professor at Parks College of Engineering, Aviation and Technology at SLU, said the specific drone being used at Wurdack is the "Maveric," which weighs 2.6 pounds and has a 29.5-inch wingspan. It is made by Prioria Robotics of Gainesville, Florida.

Lercel said SLU was looking for a place to fly the drone "in order to conduct research on it," and that a partnership with MU made perfect sense because the application required involvement from a public institution.

"They wanted to do some research in aerospace, engineering and agriculture, and we obviously want research in engineering and safety-related aspects of drones, so we connected," Lercel said.

MU granted FAA approval to fly drones at research center

By Ashley Jost

Sunday, January 18, 2015 at 12:00 am

The University of Missouri received approval from the federal government to fly drones over university-owned land in south-central Missouri, the first approval the university has received for a drone project.
The Federal Aviation Administration’s approval comes after MU, the Missouri University of Science and Technology and Saint Louis University partnered on an application to use the airspace for a slew of research and economic development projects at the Wurdack Research Center in Cook Station.

Dusty Walter, superintendent of the MU research center, said he was contacted by the UM System’s Rolla campus and SLU’s aviation program about “how great the air space is” at Wurdack. He said they asked if they could collectively apply for a waiver from the FAA to use the airspace with a specific unmanned aircraft system, or drone, provided by SLU.

“There is certainly a keen interest in using what you would call a UAS, or drone, because it gives you a different perspective on the landscape, and you can use different lenses to look at plants or address cattle and their movements,” Walter said.

Wurdack Research Center is located 45 minutes southeast of Rolla, along the Meramec River. The center boasts 1,200 acres of land, 260 of which are pastures and forage production fields, according to the center’s website. The remainder of available space is forested.

“This technology is evolving and developing over time,” Walter said. “Part of this is learning about the aircraft that does the flying, but part of this is also what kind of data collection we get, whether it’s images, light spectrums for plant health, heat images if we’re talking about where cattle and livestock are located, things like that.”

Walter said a number of organizations are interested in utilizing the technology for research, including computer software developers and companies that work with photo lenses. Some of that engineering work is also of interest to partners from the Rolla campus.

Damon Lercel, assistant research professor at Parks College of Engineering, Aviation and Technology at SLU, said specific drone they are using at Wurdack is the “Maveric.” It weighs 2.6 pounds and has a 29.5-inch wingspan. It is made by Prioria Robotics of Gainesville, Fla.

“Here at SLU we were looking for a place to fly the” unmanned aircraft “in order to conduct research on it,” Lercel said. A partnership with MU made perfect sense, as the application required involvement from a public institution.

“They wanted to do some research in aerospace, engineering and agriculture, and we obviously want research in engineering and safety-related aspects of drones, so we connected,” Lercel said.

The FAA’s certificate of approval came on the second attempt, Walter said. The group’s first application requested both approval and research funds, which Walter said was denied. The second application only asked for approval, he said.

Moving forward, Walter said there are discussions at MU about a possible 3- to 5-acre plant crop rotation project that could be monitored by the drone to understand how plants are impacted by climate change, periodic drought and insects. Considering how recently they received approval to fly the drone, he said that project is still a few years out.
Man on the run after chase through MU student health center

Watch this story: http://mms.tveyes.com/PlaybackPortal.aspx?SavedEditID=b44f2809-721f-4526-9f17-a5f4eb74a0ab

COLUMBIA - Columbia Police and University of Missouri police are searching for an Audrain County man with a warrant.

On Saturday Cpt. Brian Weimer with MUPD told ABC 17 News those warrants are traffic related.

**Police say a deputy recognized the suspect at University Hospital and that is when he began running.**

**Authorities believed the suspect fled to the MU Student Health Center.**

Both Columbia Police and MUPD searched the building with a canine unit.

The suspect was not found after an hour of searching.

The hospital was not put on a lock down.

Police say the man is not considered to be a dangerous person.
Former MU professor and CNN executive dies

COLUMBIA - Former MU journalism professor and CNN executive Stuart Loory, 82, died Friday after battling cancer, CNN reports.

The Missouri School of Journalism website lists Loory as a Professor Emeritus who joined the school in 1997 after a 17-year career with CNN and TBS.

According to MU, Loory was most recently a Distinguished Fulbright Professor at the Centers for East Europe and American Studies at the University of Warsaw in Poland. He previously served as the school's first Lee Hills Chair in Free-Press Studies. Loory was also editor of Global Journalist magazine and moderated the "Global Journalist" radio show for KBIA/91.3 FM.

Before Loory joined MU's journalism faculty, he oversaw CNN bureaus in Washington and Moscow after joining the network in 1980. He later became a vice president of Turner Broadcasting, according to CNN.

"His reporting on the Cold War and what went on behind the Iron Curtain was insightful and invaluable," said KOMU 8 Interactive Director Annie Hammock, who joined CNN in 1983 while Loory was the network's Moscow bureau chief. "His stories helped provide clarifying context at a time when nuclear tensions were high."

Aside from his work in television, Loory was also a veteran of the newspaper industry. According to MU, Loory served as Moscow bureau chief for the New York Herald Tribune and White House correspondent for the Los Angeles Times during the presidencies of Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard Nixon.

MU notes that "Loory was included on Nixon's 'enemies list' of political opponents" during his tenure at the Los Angeles Times. He later served as managing editor of the Chicago Sun-Times.

According to CNN, Loory resided in Brooklyn, New York at the time of his death.
There’s nothing unusual about fresh hamburger patties being stored in a walk-in cooler, but a few racked in a cooler recently at the University of Missouri were there on a mission.

The patties were laid out in separate compartments. One batch was completely in the dark, another batch was lit with fluorescent bulbs, and a third with LED lights.

They were then monitored to see how fast they lost that cherry-red color consumers prefer when buying fresh meat.

Light and oxygen help turn the color of ground beef into an unappetizing gray or light brown. So it was no surprise that the patties in the dark stayed red the longest.

But those lit with LEDs — whose illumination is produced by light-emitting diodes — fared far better than those under the fluorescent lights, the traditional lighting found in grocery meat cases.

“My gut told me the difference was real,” said Bryon Wiegand, professor of animal science.

The life of fresh red ground beef is short. But can displaying it under energy efficient and cooler-burning LED lights help? Based on the MU research so far, that possibility is being taken seriously.
The MU research advances previous work by Kyle Steele, a graduate student at Kansas State University, who found that LEDs extended the shelf life of ground beef and other meat.

His conclusion was that the cooler operating LEDs kept the internal temperature of the meat lower and slowed the process that turns the meat brown.

The shelf life of ground beef staying red is normally three days, but under LEDs it was extended to four days.

The MU study, besides confirming that LEDs affect shelf life, is examining how LEDs perform in different situations than those tested by Steele. It’s also doing more research to determine whether there’s something else about LEDs other than their cooler temperatures that keeps hamburger red a longer time.

The Missouri Beef Industry Council is plowing money into the MU study, which is entering a second phase in which more hamburger will be tested in meat cases typically used by grocery stores. The trade group calls the research so far “extremely encouraging.”

Discolored hamburger can still be safe to eat, but the appearance makes it tough to sell. It’s either discounted for a quick sale or sent to a rendering plant and turned into a product that can be used in dog food.

The beef industry says $1 billion is lost annually because of discolored or spoiled meat. How much of that is due to ground beef isn’t clear, but experts say it could be in the tens of millions of dollars. That makes extending the shelf life a priority.

“It’s a significant issue to our industry,” said Mark Russell, executive director of the Missouri Beef Industry Council.

The research comes as LEDs continue to make inroads as their price declines. LED technology uses semiconductor chips to convert electricity to light. Proper engineering and coatings can produce a white light comparable to incandescent or fluorescent lights.
Compared with incandescent bulbs, they reduce electricity consumption by 85 percent. Even against fluorescent lights, which have been the main energy-efficient alternative for decades, an LED provides significant savings.

Their potential to do even more has been kicked around. A report by Oklahoma State University in 2012 found that dairy cows at one farm in the state produced more milk after LEDs were installed. Among the theories: The lights are directional and could highlight feeding troughs to encourage feeding.

But a more controlled study to confirm that benefit hasn’t been been done because of a lack of money. LEDs are slowly making inroads at dairy farms in new buildings and major renovations, but for now it’s because of the energy savings and improved lighting that can prevent accidents or other problems.

“While widespread adoption has yet to occur in the dairy industry, there is growing interest from many producers,” said David Darr, vice president of sustainability at the Dairy Farmers of America, a marketing cooperative based in Kansas City.

Grocers are buying more refrigerated meat cases with LEDs, initially for the energy savings and for the better lighting that improves the display of products. But some also are noticing that meat seems to be lasting longer, said Bruce Schneider, LED merchandising specialist for Hussman, a global leader in refrigerated display cases.

“When it comes to fresh meat it’s beyond energy savings,” Schneider said.

Jon McCormick, executive director of the Retail Grocers Association of Greater Kansas City, said area grocers have begun installing meat and other display cases lit with LEDs “across the Kansas City metro.” The cooler light is also helping in other ways such as helping prevent frost on the glass doors of frozen-food display cases.

Wiegand, of the University of Missouri, and his colleague, Carol Lorenzen, have a long interest in meat’s shelf life and have focused on ground beef.

The meat has become more expensive, which makes for a bigger economic loss when it isn’t sold. It’s also more popular because it’s easy to cook.
“We are in the second generation that does not like or does not know how to cook,”
Wiegand said.

Most meats can change color, but beef that is ground into hamburger exposes more
flesh. Beef actually starts off a bluish purple color, but oxygen binds to the pigment,
turning it bright red. Then the pigment stops accepting oxygen, which is when the color
starts changing again — to gray.

Special packaging in self-serve cases can curb the change. A mixture of oxygen and
carbon dioxide sealed into the package will extend the shelf life to 11 days. But in
packages without modified gases, and the meat displayed in those popular full-service
meat counters, it’s usually no more than three days.

That LEDs could change the math was clear in the University of Missouri tests. They
added a day to bright red hamburger, and even after a week the patties still had some
speckles of red. The fluorescent-lit patties started showing discoloring in the third day.

“I was surprised,” Wiegand said.

The meat industry has spent heavily over the last century to find ways to make meat last
longer. It wouldn’t be a small thing if another day was added to ground beef.

“It’s a huge deal,” said Betsy Booren, vice president of scientific affairs for the North
American Meat Institute.

Horse enthusiasts meet over future of Central
Missouri Events Center

By Jack Witthaus Monday, January 19, 2015 at 2:00 pm

About 100 horse enthusiasts gathered Sunday at the Peachtree Banquet Center to talk about the
future of the Central Missouri Events Center.
County Commissioners Dan Atwill and Janet Thompson helped organize the event with the equestrian community.

**In about an hourlong PowerPoint presentation, Chad Sayre presented several ideas for the events center grounds that he thinks could generate new revenue for the University of Missouri and Boone County.** One proposed building a multiuse facility that could potentially house programs for MU’s College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources, veterinary medicine training or an NCAA women’s equestrian team. Sayre’s other proposed uses included concerts, veterinary medicine facilities, rodeos and other recreational events.

Last August, voters defeated, by a 2-1 margin, a proposed eighth-cent sales tax to support the facility, other parks throughout the county and economic development. Commissioners closed the grounds Jan. 1 but kept utilities on in the main coliseum and multipurpose building. The building will be available for county government for training and other uses.

In the past four years, the center has hosted more than 175 events, including horse shows. Commissioners decided last summer to stop subsidizing the events center’s operation and presented the sales tax as a dedicated funding source. A task force that studied uses for the center recommended in its 2013 report that the county support an idea to bring a University of Missouri Extension community education center to the site. Others have suggested partnering with the university to host livestock shows and other events.

Sayre said he had not talked to MU officials about his idea and could not estimate a cost for the plan, as the project is still in the “brainstorming” phase. He asked people at the meeting to write letters to MU and the county commission about their ideas for the future of the old fairground.

On Monday morning, Sayre said he had received multiple emails about his proposals from people who attended the meeting. He said the events center’s availability presents a great opportunity for MU to expand its facilities.

“People hadn’t heard this idea” for MU involvement before the presentation, said Sayre, who donned an MU-themed jacket during the presentation.

Sayre’s presentation dominated a meeting that Thompson labeled as a discussion to gather new ideas for the event center’s future. Some attendees seemed upset that the meeting did not produce discussion to open up the grounds in the near future for equestrian-related events. At one point during Sayre’s presentation, Columbia resident Allison Clarke asked Sayre to wrap up his thoughts so other people could talk.

Clarke said after the meeting that she had some concerns about Sayre’s proposal for MU involvement. She wanted to make sure proposed uses would not “crowd out” events held at the center before it closed.

“Seems like a pipe dream,” Clarke said, “but I applaud that” Sayre “did have a dream.”
Kathy Wear drove 90 miles from Palmyra to attend the event. Wear said she’s a member of the National Barrel Horse Association and said her daughter has been participating in events at the grounds for about the past eight years. She said with the events center closed, the organization might have to relocate its events to Sedalia.

“That’s about a 4½- to five-hour drive,” Wear said.

Atwill said discussions should not be bogged down by thinking only in terms of how the events center was used in the past. “We can’t look at the facility like we once did,” Atwill said.

Atwill said he planned to bring up some of the ideas brought up at the meeting to the county commission. The commission is scheduled to meet at 9:30 a.m. Tuesday.

Editorial: A wish List for the local economy

By Jeff MacLellan

Saturday, January 17, 2015 at 12:00 am

A couple of weeks ago, I submitted a list of wishes for the nation’s economy. This is a list of wishes for the local economy, and, again, I have no influence on the outcome for any of these:

- I wish that the local education engine keeps humming like it has for the past 10 years.

**The University of Missouri has led that momentum with an average growth in students of 700 over the decade.** We have about 38,000 full-time college students when you include Columbia College and Stephens College. With part-time students, the college number swells to more than 40,000. Add to those the 18,000 students in Columbia Public Schools plus 1,000 students at Columbia Independent School, Father Tolton, Christian Fellowship, etc., and all told, we have close to 60,000 students in school. Additionally, jobs at the University of Missouri, University Hospital and Columbia Public Schools account for 15,000 of our 95,000 jobs.

Clearly, the effect of the foregoing is huge when you figure the Columbia economy provides goods and services, housing and transportation to all of the students and the employees who attend and support the educational institutions.

- I wish for a healthy and successful year for the local housing and construction industry.
The construction industry has had a banner year in 2014 and probably will set a record for the total value of permits issued at somewhere around $350 million. When you break down the numbers, the increase in construction was led by a nearly $100 million in permits for multifamily housing for a total of 655 units. That level of activity in that sector probably is not sustainable. Commercial construction also is having a good year and has a chance to set a record.

The number of homes sold through the Columbia Board of Realtors has a chance to reach the 2,000 level for the second straight year, although this year will not reach the 2,130 homes sold last year. We will have had to have sold 125 homes in the month of December to reach the 2,000 level. I would hope construction activity would exceed the $350 million level next year and that the number of houses sold in the market would be comfortably above 2,000.

I also wish there were more affordable housing in town and more single-family detached permits.

- I wish the Columbia City Council would be more balanced in its dealing with economic development and creation of a positive business climate.

A collaborative attitude of working with the private sector would be good for quality future growth. A really good example of this is the sewer bond issue approved a few years ago that provided funds for projects such as extending sewer to a great private employer like Midway USA.

Now there are efforts to use those funds for other purposes. Midway USA is an outstanding company in this community, a Malcolm Baldrige Quality Award winner and a significant employer in town. What is the city council thinking?

- I wish for continued growth in our population, which in a sense is the raw material for our economy.

Providing goods and services, transportation and housing to accommodate the growing population has been a driver for our economy. As part of this additional population growth, I wish for continued growth in better paying jobs as most of our recent job growth has been in low paying retail and service jobs, which don’t add significantly to the economy.

- I would wish for a good year for attracting high-quality businesses and opening new businesses.

In recent years, entrepreneurial activity has really picked up, and we have seen successful startups such as Beyond Meat and Nanova launched. There is good momentum in the entrepreneurial area, and I wish it continued success.

- I wish our cost of living remains 5 percent to 10 percent below the national average.
Last year, we came in about 3 percent below the average. Retirees in particular are attracted to a community that has a relatively low cost of living. Retirees are an attractive segment to communities because they pay real estate taxes without burdening the school system resources.

It will be interesting to look back next year to see how many of these wishes come true.

Columbia practices merging under Missouri Cancer Associates banner

By Jodie Jackson Jr.

Sunday, January 18, 2015 at 12:00 am

Two long-standing health care practices in Columbia have joined forces to provide enhanced treatment to Mid-Missouri.

Urology Associates of Central Missouri at 105 N. Keene St. and Missouri Cancer Associates at 1705 E. Broadway announced that they merged effective Nov. 1, 2014. The merged health-care entity — under the Missouri Cancer Associates banner — is owned by 20 physicians. Such mergers are becoming a familiar trend on the national health-care landscape as a way of maintaining independence from large hospital systems, said Debbie Barnes, practice director for the new group.

“The physicians have autonomy. They can make their own decisions regarding service and operation,” Barnes said. “I think it’s more about them running their own practice.”

She said patients won’t notice a difference.

“No one’s name on the outside is changing,” she said.

Mark Tungesvik, medical oncologist, said the merger creates “the largest and most experienced cancer center in Mid-Missouri.”

Jerrold Schermer, one of six physicians with Urology Associates, said they will continue caring for patients with needs outside of urological cancers. The center currently handles a wide range of urology conditions, including kidney stones, urinary incontinence, erectile dysfunction and infertility.
The merger is another indication that cancer treatment is a big business in Columbia. Last March, Ellis Fischel Cancer Center, part of the University of Missouri Health System, became an affiliate of Houston-based MD Anderson Cancer Network. Ellis Fischel, which opened its doors in 1940, consolidated all inpatient and outpatient cancer care in a new $50 million facility at University Hospital.

The affiliation with MD Anderson was announced a little more than two months after the $7.2 million, 32-bed Stewart Cancer Center began operation at Boone Hospital Center.

Missouri Cancer Associates physicians provide the services for the Stewart Cancer Center, across the street from their facility in the Boone Medical Plaza. MCA oncologist Joe Muscato is medical director for the center.

Barnes said the cancer associates and urology practices already had a large base of common patients. Urology’s base included patients with cancer of the kidney, bladder, prostate and other organs and body systems.

Tungesvik called the merger “a seamless fit.”

Someone with prostate cancer, for instance, usually sees a urologist first. If radiation treatment is necessary, it can be provided in the MCA building without the patient ever needing to go off-site. The transition from urologist to oncologist “makes it a lot more patient-friendly if it’s within the same group,” Tungesvik said.

All radiation therapy that requires a vault — a cement room — is performed at Missouri Cancer Associates. Imaging services — including PET/CT scans — also are done at the Broadway location.

“It’s more cost-effective. It’s more efficient,” Tungesvik said, noting reimbursement models from Medicare and private insurance companies are changing. “We’re all looking for a way to maintain a competitive advantage.”

During her time with Urology Associates, Barnes oversaw a 2008 merger that created a larger practice there. She said some of the lessons of that experience have been applied to the MCA/Urology Associates union.

“You’re becoming stronger for the future by joining forces … so we can provide the best of care for our patients,” she said. “It’s the same process here.” The goal, she said, was to provide patient care in-house — within the practice — and keep the care “as seamless as possible with easier access.”

“And hopefully we can keep that at a lower cost level for everyone,” Barnes said.

The merger also gives the practice the expertise of U.S. Oncology, a network of some 1,000 physicians who have the ability to discuss and collaborate on rare cases and new treatments.
“We have great access to that information,” said Tungesvik.

In addition to its two sites in Columbia, the new group also has a location inside the George Rea Cancer Treatment Center in Kirksville. Radiation oncologists from the group also serve locations in Marshall, Jefferson City, Hannibal, Sedalia and Lake of the Ozarks.

Ultimately, Tungesvik said, the treatment and business decisions are based on patient care. “We have a very patient-focused program,” he said. Part of that emphasis is keeping patients with one primary doctor rather than shuffling them from one physician to another. The doctor-patient bond is important, he said.

“Our emphasis is really on the dignity of each person who is coming through,” Tungesvik said. “It’s important to bond closely with patients. They become like part of our family.”

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Art for Autism exhibit to feature children's creations
Saturday, January 17, 2015 | 5:40 p.m. CST

BY MAY MA

COLUMBIA — This winter, children from MU’s Thompson Center have partnered with local artists to create something colorful.

The Thompson Center for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders is hosting the Art for Autism exhibition with help from a local art gallery and studio.

The annual event took a break in 2014 but is back this year with more than 30 pieces made by children with an autism spectrum disorder or other neurodevelopmental disorders, as well as their siblings. The exhibition begins Tuesday and runs through March 15 at the PS Gallery in downtown Columbia.

The Art for Autism program provides children with autism or other developmental challenges an opportunity to learn from area artists and create their own art. Classes are held at a local studio called Access Arts, which provides art teachers and materials, Miriam Cullimore, development coordinator at the Thompson Center, said in an email.

So far, a handful of local artists have participated, Cullimore said.
All of the artwork on display and several other pieces donated by local artists will be available for purchase at an evening auction. Proceeds go to the Thompson Center to help support the Art for Autism program.

Fundraising, however, is not the main focus, Cullimore said. "We primarily see this event as an opportunity for our kids to see their artwork on display and to allow others to appreciate it as well."

Autism affects a person’s communication skills, and art provides another means of expression, Cullimore said.

“Many people with an autism spectrum disorder are visual learners and thinkers, so creating art can give them an opportunity to express themselves with a visual media.”

The artwork will be auctioned during an evening reception at 6 p.m. Feb. 6 at the gallery.

“We enjoy partnering with programs that assist other people,” said Amy Meyer, curator and administrator at the PS Gallery. “Our goal is to make art accessible and to help people understand that art can impact and be used for things other than just the purpose of buying art.”

**ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH**

**China injects uncertainty into world of genetically modified seeds**

January 18, 2015 8:30 am  •  By Tim Barker

There is a new era in weed management fast approaching farmers.

Monsanto and competitor Dow AgroSciences are on the verge of introducing the next generation of herbicide-resistant corn, soybeans and cotton — genetically modified seeds representing hundreds of millions of dollars in research and the promise of billions in sales.

U.S. regulators have given the green light for Dow’s Enlist corn and soybeans, while final approval is expected shortly for Monsanto’s new Xtend cotton and soybean systems.
There is, however, a potential problem: China.

The marketing of new biotech seeds has long been fraught with perils of one sort or another because of the global nature of grain trading. A seed might be approved in the U.S., but that doesn’t mean other nations are ready for it.

Historically, it’s taken an extra two years to gain approvals in China, which won’t even consider a new engineered seed until it’s been approved by the originating country. But lately, the secretive nation — which happens to be the top importer of soybeans — has become something of a wild card when it comes to unapproved seeds.

“There seems to be a bit of a breakdown in the predictability of that two-year time frame,” said Nathan Fields, director of biotechnology for the National Corn Growers Association in Chesterfield. “We’re just not sure what’s happening in China.”

But what everyone does know is what happens when China enforces its rules.

That was hammered home in November 2013 when China decided, for reasons not totally clear, to test incoming corn shipments.

Regulators found traces of Viptera — a biotech seed introduced in 2010 by Syngenta of Switzerland, but not yet approved by China.

And just like that, U.S. corn’s door to China was effectively slammed shut.

In the months that followed, somewhere around 1 million tons of U.S. corn were rejected, creating havoc in global pricing. Industry estimates suggest the losses to corn growers range from $1 billion to $2.9 billion.

There are theories about why China, seemingly out of the blue, started taking a closer look at those shipments. Many in the agriculture industry suggest it was nothing more than an attempt to shed high-priced contracts in the face of falling corn prices.

“They bought a bunch of corn when it was $7 a bushel. Then prices went down and a month later, they started rejecting corn,” Fields said. “You can draw whatever conclusions you want.”

But this is one of those cases where the reason may be relatively insignificant. All that matters is what happened after China took action. It sent shock waves through an agriculture industry that’s grown increasingly reliant on bioengineered seeds. And it highlights the inherent dangers of selling seeds that lack approval in key export markets.

“The fundamental problem with this is the market uncertainty,” said Nicholas Kalaitzandonakes, director of the Economics and Management of Agrobiotechnology Center at the University of Missouri-Columbia. “How do I as a trader send a load to China if I think there’s a chance it’s going to get tested?”
POLITICAL FACTORS

To be clear, China isn’t opposed to genetically modified seeds. Like virtually every other nation, it has its own rules for determining if and when a new trait is allowed inside its borders. Things also get tricky in the European Union, where politics often cause havoc with the approvals process.

“Each country has its own timing,” Kalaitzandonakes said. “It’s become a very difficult process.”

But it’s particularly true with China, which has some unique rules, including the requirement of field trials on China’s own soil.

It has resulted in a process that’s a bit of a mystery to the industry. There are seeds that gain approval in less than two years, while others can take seven or more years. It took nearly five years before those Viptera corn seeds by Syngenta finally gained approval in December.

When asked about it, U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack told Reuters: “Their system is what it is. You get approvals sometimes. And sometimes you don’t.”

Creve Coeur-based Monsanto, for its part, is optimistic about its chances of the beating the two-year timeline for its new Roundup Ready 2 Xtend soybeans, engineered to be immune to the company’s signature Roundup herbicide, as well as dicamba and glufosinate.

Development of the seeds has been driven largely by the increasing growth of weeds immune to Roundup — generically known as glyphosate.

This new generation of herbicide-resistant seeds has drawn strong criticism from groups who worry about an increased use of chemicals in the food chain and potential health risks.

The company declined an interview request to discuss the regulatory situation in China. But during a recent conference call with analysts, Monsanto’s chief technology officer, Robb Fraley, said the company expects to have the soybean approvals in time for a commercial launch in 2016.

But what if that doesn’t happen?

Things can get tricky for companies mulling what to do with a new seed, whose patent clock is ticking, while waiting for the go-ahead in China.

SEGREGATING SEEDS

Certainly Syngenta’s earlier decision to move forward with the ill-fated commercial launch of Viptera is getting a lot of attention, with some 200 lawsuits — recently consolidated in U.S. District Court in Kansas City — filed on behalf of farmers, grain handlers and others who say they were hurt by the resulting market turmoil.

“From the very beginning, Syngenta was warned about this,” said Don Downing, a St. Louis attorney with Gray, Ritter & Graham, one of the firms involved in litigation against the seed maker. “They have an obligation to prevent this situation from happening.”
Syngenta, however, argues the lawsuits are without merit and that it strives to give growers access “to approved new technologies that can increase both their productivity and profitability.”

Still, the company is taking a different approach with its new Duracade corn, engineered to fight rootworm. The seeds still lack approval in China and the European Union. After running into market resistance, the company decided to halt Canadian sales last year and forged a deal with grain trader Gavilon, which will buy the corn from U.S. farmers and channel it to approved destinations.

Dow is taking a more cautious approach, restricting sales of its own new corn and soybean seeds, designed to be immune to its new Enlist Duo herbicide, a combination of glyphosate and 2,4-D.

The company, which has been waiting for two years for Chinese approvals, will allow farmers to grow the corn only if they plan to use it as feed on their farms. The soybeans are being offered through a small pilot program that lets farmers test them.

History, however, shows that even these more cautious approaches carry substantial financial risk.

In 2000, global demand for U.S. corn fell after a bioengineered corn — called StarLink — was detected in taco shells and chips, despite not being approved for human consumption.

The corn, developed by Aventis CropScience, was allowed to mix with regular grain at elevators and processing operations. The North Carolina company was plastered with lawsuits from farmers across the nation, and eventually agreed in 2003 to pay more than $110 million to settle claims.

Just three years after that, Bayer CropScience got into trouble when its unapproved LibertyLink biotech rice made its way into the food supply.

Demand for rice exports plummeted, with Japan and European nations banning U.S. rice. Bayer agreed in 2011 to pay up to $750 million to farmers in five states, including Missouri, along with another $270 million to other businesses suffering losses in the incident.

The problem is that the grain network simply isn’t designed around the idea of absolute segregation of different varieties of the same crop, said Bryce Knorr, senior market analyst at Farm Futures.

“The supply chain is this Rube Goldberg contraption,” Knorr said. “You have to have everybody along the line doing everything 100 percent right.”

**Cuomo: Expand safeguards against assault to private colleges**

January 17, 2015 5:38 pm  •  By JIM FITZGERALD
NEW YORK (AP) — A "yes means yes" provision and other protections against sexual assaults on campus would be expanded to New York's private colleges and universities under a law proposed Saturday by Gov. Andrew Cuomo.

The governor said the bill would combat sexual abuse "and the imbalance of power that women face across the board." It would expand policies in effect since last year at the state's public university system.

"It's worked very, very well," at the State University of New York, the governor said. "We now want to codify it as a law."

The bill would require that a woman give "clear, unambiguous, and voluntary" consent before any sexual activity. To encourage victims to come forward, students reporting assaults would get immunity from related offenses such as drug use. And victims would be offered the option of reporting an assault to state police rather than campus authorities or a local police department.

"You have my word," the governor said, that state police "will handle this professionally and will understand who the victim is."

John Beckman, a spokesman for New York University, the private college where the news conference was held, said in an email: "We believe that NYU's definition of consent is in line with the governor's proposal. ... We believe the governor is right that all colleges and universities in NYS should be looking at their practices to reduce the incidence of sexual misconduct, and ensure that sexual misconduct cases are handled swiftly, fairly, and appropriately."

Calls and emails to several other private colleges were not immediately returned. A Cornell University spokeswoman said the college was "unable to provide a comment" on Saturday.

California has had a similar law since September that applies to any college that receives state money for student financial aid. Cuomo said he felt the New York measure would "go nationwide" if it became state law.

"When you do something in the State of New York, people notice," he said, predicting it would "start a dialogue across the nation."

Former New York City Council Speaker Christine Quinn, on her first day as an adviser to Cuomo, said at the governor's news conference that "Sexual abuse and rape have become an epidemic across the landscape of college education."
Glen Caplin, a spokesman for Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-NY, who has introduced a federal bill making colleges more accountable to rape victims, praised Cuomo "for his extraordinary leadership in working to make college campuses safer."

But Caplin said accountability and transparency are needed at the federal level "because students across the country not only deserve, but are demanding, real action."

Fifty-five colleges and universities face federal investigation for their handling of sexual abuse allegations, and the Education Department says reports of forcible sexual offenses on U.S. campuses rose from 3,443 in 2011 to 4,062 in 2012.

Cuomo said he anticipated some trouble with the bill in the state Legislature, but said, "If women make their voice heard on this issue, I guarantee you it will pass. It is that simple."

"It is right, it is righteous, it is inarguable," he said.

The governor, without naming any schools, said some institutions "don't want the publicity of the attacks happening on their campus, so they do what they can to tamp it down." He said some declare a sexual attack "a private matter."

"No, it's not a private matter," Cuomo said. "It's a crime. And the woman is not complicit, she's a victim."

Let’s Give Title IX Investigations Some Teeth

January 16, 2015

**NO MU MENTION**

Writing in New York magazine, Ann Friedman declared 2014 the year that everyone began talking about sexual assault. Allegations of sexual abuse and assault against high-profile figures like Woody Allen and Bill Cosby appeared in the pages of major newspapers and on countless web sites. The Oregon Ducks chanted “no means no” after pummeling Florida State in the Rose Bowl, an attack directed against quarterback Jameis Winston who was accused of rape.

In a year when sexual assault dominated the news cycle, some survivors chose to speak up and people listened, though not often charitably. After Rolling Stone published a controversial article about “Jackie,” a student who accused members of a fraternity at the University of Virginia of gang rape, many responses were unkind, disbelieving, and downright awful. Then, when The Washington Post and other
news outlets found discrepancies in the events as written, Rolling Stone issued a victim-blaming retraction against Jackie instead of taking the blame for poor editorial judgment and lax reporting.

Even with all the talk about sexual assault, Friedman writes, “I think we’re making progress overall, but at the expense of individual survivors.” Her words are hard truth.

Like so many others, I was disturbed by Jackie’s treatment, not only by Rolling Stone but also by folks on Facebook and Twitter. Disbelief, anger, and aggression were all directed at a young woman who discussed being raped with a journalist and at anyone who defended her. I feared that the attack on her character would have a silencing effect on the reporting of sexual assault on campus. When I tweeted my concerns, I was told that I had overstated my case. I hoped I was overstating it, but I feared that I wasn’t.

At first, I was optimistic that 2014 would be the year that higher education could no longer turn a blind eye to sexual violence that happened to students on and off campus. After all, sexual assault was now a pressing issue in a broad cultural sense, so colleges and universities could no longer ignore (or hide) the problem, right? Digital media brought new visibility and a larger audience to allegations. After the Rolling Stone trainwreck, however, my optimism felt misplaced and likely naive. Talk brought visibility to the longstanding problem of sexual assault, but I wanted talk to turn into action.

Last year, there were some attempts to do just that.

In January 2014, President Obama created a task force (headed by Vice President Biden) to evaluate whether institutions of higher education complied with federal law and to make recommendations for how they should manage and adjudicate allegations of sexual assault. The administration’s Not Alone campaign launched in the same month, providing information for students and campuses on how to report sexual assault and how to respond to it. In April, the White House Task Force to Protect Students From Sexual Assault issued its first report, which begins with the commonly cited statistic that “one in five women is sexually assaulted in college.” That figure is somewhat disputed because it combines attempted rape and completed rape under the label of sexual assault. The more accurate statistic, according to the nonprofit organization One in Four USA, is found in its name: One in four college women “survived rape or attempted rape in their lifetime.” Those numbers are still staggering, and the task force recommended campus climate surveys to figure out how large a problem sexual assault is at individual institutions (this might be legislatively mandated for 2016) and prevention programs to change attitudes and behaviors on campus. There’s an explicit goal of including men in these efforts as this kind-of-star-centric PSA about consent demonstrates.

According to Know Your Title IX, institutions must have an “established procedure for handling complaints of sexual discrimination, harassment, or violence” and ensure that the “victim doesn’t have to share space with his or her assailant.” Additionally, colleges cannot retaliate against a victim nor can they recommend mediation rather than a formal hearing.

Not surprisingly, the White House task force doubles down on Title IX by encouraging effective response when a student is sexually assaulted. Students, we learn from the federal report, expect an institution to
take steps to protect and support them. Colleges and universities, however, often seek to protect their brands rather than their students who survive sexual assault. Writing about a wrestler accused of rape at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, Jessica Luther writes, “Universities can't be solely tasked with representing a victim's best interests, because those same schools have a vested interest in the outcomes of the cases that could affect their reputations and bottom lines.”

When institutions are required to adjudicate accusations, there’s a conflict of interest between protecting students and protecting the image of the institution. What colleges deem an effective response might not match with students’ (or parents’) expectations.

For example, campus officials, while they are facing more pressure to deal with sexual violence, still are hesitant to impose expulsion on the accused. The Washington Post’s Nick Anderson discovered that out of 100 institutions surveyed in 2012 and 2013, only 29 had expelled students. It is important to note that this accounts for only 12 percent of offenders in 478 sanctions against sexual assault. How can a reticence to expel alleged rapists not violate Title IX?

A recent increase in Title IX investigations in academe by the U.S Education Department’s Office of Civil Rights should not be surprising given institutions’ hesitation to kick out offenders. In May, 55 institutions were under Title IX investigation. By June, that number was 64. In October, it jumped to 85, and by December, to 90.

While more investigations are a step in the right direction, the question of what they can accomplish is another matter. The options for punishment of a violation of Title IX seems to be either the revocation of federal funding (the nuclear option) or nothing. Usually, universities resolve investigations by putting new practices in place or writing up documents about how they will better respond to sexual assault.

The vengeful side of me would like to see what would happen if the OCR decided to yank a college’s funding. Take my alma mater Florida State University, which is currently under investigation for its handling (I would say mishandling) of the rape allegations against quarterback Jameis Winston. FSU receives $425 million in federal funding, or a third of the university’s operating budget. If the OCR revoked Florida State’s federal funding, what would happen? At the very least, operations would stall as the university attempted to figure out whether it could run with such a large chunk of money gone.

The real question: Would other institutions take Title IX violations more seriously if the punishment was so punitive? I’m guessing they would. Yet that punishment is so harsh that it would irrevocably harm any universities it was levied against.

What this means is that Title IX investigations lack bite. They’re all threat and very little action. Surely, there must a be a middle ground between revocation of federal funding and creation of new documents. A college might be publicly shamed for being under investigation, but I’m not sure that’s enough.

Is 2015 the year that we give Title IX some teeth? If 2014 was the year in which we finally talked about sexual assault, I’m hopeful that 2015 is the year that all the talk can transition into action.
6 Years in and 6 to Go, Only Modest Progress on Obama’s College-Completion Goal

By Kelly Field

NO MU MENTION

Six years ago, in his first address to a joint session of Congress, President Obama set a bold, if daunting, goal: to lead the world in college completion by 2020.

At the time, the United States was tied for 12th place worldwide in the percentage of young adults with at least an associate degree. To get to No. 1, the country would have to raise its attainment rate from 39 percent to 56 percent.

Today, as Mr. Obama prepares to deliver his next-to-last State of the Union address to Congress, the nation has moved up only slightly, into a tie for 11th place, and the president’s ambitious goal looks unachievable. While the national college-graduation rate has climbed to 44 percent, the gulf between the United States and some of its competitors remains wide, and the target is moving. To catch South Korea, the current leader, the country would have to pull its graduation rate all the way up to 67 percent.

Even the president’s supporters acknowledge it: We’re not going to close that gap in six years.

"At the time, it was a ‘reach’ goal, and now it is an unreachable goal," said Robert M. Shireman, a former adviser to Mr. Obama who now leads California Competes, an organization working to improve graduation rates in the nation’s most populous state.

But that doesn’t necessarily mean the goal setting was for naught. Optimists say even the small upswing is encouraging. They predict that the nation will begin to see bigger annual gains as students who have benefited from new completion programs, created since the president’s announcement, start to graduate.

"The trend is in the right direction, and it will accelerate as these reforms take hold and scale," said Stan Jones, head of Complete College America, a nonprofit group that works with states to increase graduation rates and close attainment gaps. "If we don’t hit it in 2020, we hit it in 2025, and that’s still good."
In an interview, James R. Kvaal, deputy director of the White House’s Domestic Policy Council, said the president’s goal had "captured people’s imagination," motivating states and colleges to take steps to raise graduation rates. "It’s really resonated with higher-ed leaders and policy makers, and is driving a new focus across the country," he said.

But when asked if Mr. Obama still believed the goal was attainable, Mr. Kvaal said he hadn’t "had that conversation."

A Sense of Urgency

The idea for a national completion goal didn’t emerge from reams of research papers or months of meetings with policy experts. It emerged when two White House advisers went for a walk. One of them, Cecilia E. Rouse, said she and Heather Higginbottom settled on 2020 as the deadline because it "gave us time to achieve it but wasn’t so far out as to be uninspiring."

"It was an important but also aspirational goal," said Ms. Rouse, who has since returned to Princeton University, where she is an economics professor and dean of the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs.

The idea appealed to President Obama, who was looking for ways to strengthen the middle class and expand the economy. He made it the centerpiece of his higher-education agenda, announcing the goal just a month into his presidency, in a nationally televised address to Congress. He called low college-completion rates a "prescription for economic decline" and urged all Americans to pursue "a year or more" of higher education or career training.

"In a global economy, where the most valuable skill you can sell is your knowledge, a good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity, it is a prerequisite," the president said in the February 2009 speech. "We know that countries that outteach us today will outcompete us tomorrow."

The 2020 goal drew attention but was not entirely original. A year earlier, the Lumina Foundation described a similar goal (called "one big, hairy, audacious goal") with a 2025 deadline. And four months earlier, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation announced that it would spend several hundred million dollars over five years to double the number of low-income students who obtain a degree or credential by age 26.

Still, the president’s speech brought new focus and increased urgency to such efforts. In an interview at the time, Hilary Pennington, who was director of the Gates program, said the speech helped the American public see that "many more countries are taking this much more seriously than we are."

To lead the world in college completion, Americans would have to earn eight million more associate and bachelor’s degrees. Five million of those credentials were expected to come from community colleges, the linchpins of the president’s plan.

In the six years since Mr. Obama announced his goal, foundations, states, and colleges have spent millions of dollars on college retention and completion programs. The federal government has sent
billions of dollars to community colleges and states, and has raised the maximum Pell Grant, for low-income students, by $1,000.

There has been some progress: Enrollment is up, as are graduation rates. In 2012-13 there were 10 percent more students at four-year colleges than there were when the president took office, federal data show. During the same period, the number of degrees conferred increased by 15 percent. Public community colleges awarded 75,000 more associate degrees in 2012-13 than they did two years earlier, according to the American Association of Community Colleges.

But enrollment at community colleges, which educate about half of all undergraduates and 44 percent of low-income students, has ticked up only slightly—half a percentage point since the 2008-9 academic year—and graduation rates for the sector remain stubbornly low. And while minority students are enrolling in all institutions at higher rates, graduation gaps persist.

Meanwhile, the gulf between goal and reality is growing. According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, the share of young Americans with college degrees has reached 44 percent, five percentage points higher than when Mr. Obama announced his goal. But much of that growth actually occurred before President Obama took office. That’s because the data available when he made his speech were from 2006. The actual completion rate for 25-to-34-year-olds in 2009 was 41 percent (although that wouldn’t be known until 2011). So in fact, we’re up just three percentage points.

In the meantime, other countries haven’t stood still. South Korea, the world leader, checks in at 66 percent in the latest completion data; Japan is at 59 percent.

Measuring the Competition

But does it really matter that the United States is not No. 1? After all, many of the countries that outrank the United States have much smaller economies. Some may be doing better in college completion simply because their pool of young people is shrinking, while the United States’ pool is growing. And countries count their degrees differently, so the comparison may be apples to oranges.

What matters, some say, is that the United States stays on par with, or ahead of, countries with similar or larger populations, such as India and China. (Those countries don’t belong to the OECD and aren’t included in its reports.) As Kevin Carey, director of the education-policy program at the New America Foundation, put it in a 2009 opinion essay in The Chronicle: "As long as we’re the best of the biggest and the biggest of the best, we’ll be okay."

Meanwhile, critics of the president’s goal say there’s little evidence that raising the nation’s college-completion rate will automatically make the country more competitive or prosperous. After all, Russia ranks third, and it’s hardly the model of a successful modern economy. And Germany, an economic powerhouse, has an attainment rate of only 29 percent.

"There is no simple correlation between getting college degrees in people’s hands and national prosperity," said Peter Wood, president of the National Association of Scholars. He sees the 2020 goal as
a kind of "magical thinking" that assumes that the economy can absorb an unlimited number of college graduates with no impact on wages.

"More graduates doesn’t necessarily mean more jobs," he said. "It means more disappointment, and more disappointed people with debt."

Still, supporters of the 2020 goal outnumber skeptics. Thirty-three states have joined Complete College America’s alliance, pledging to "develop and implement aggressive state and campus-level action plans" to reach college-completion goals. And lawmakers in dozens of states have passed laws restricting remedial education and linking appropriations to graduation rates.

Colleges have embraced the goal as well, with some showing major gains. Georgia State University, for example, has raised its graduation rate by 11 percentage points over the past five years through "predictive analytics"—using data to identify struggling students sooner, and then providing them with academic and financial support. Its African-American and Hispanic students now graduate at a higher rate than its white students do, while its Pell Grant recipients graduate at the same rate as others do, according to Timothy M. Renick, Georgia State’s vice provost and chief enrollment officer.

Mr. Renick, who is also a professor of religious studies, said there is a moral argument for closing racial and socioeconomic completion gaps—as well as a financial one. At Georgia State, every percentage-point increase in retention translates into $3-million in tuition and fees. The university has lost $40-million in state appropriations in recent years, yet its budget has grown because more students have persisted in their studies, he said.

At the University of South Florida, where 41 percent of students receive Pell Grants, the six-year graduation rate is 23 percentage points higher than it was in 2000, thanks to a number of student-success programs. Black students and Pell recipients no longer lag behind their peers, and Hispanic students outperform all other racial groups.

Both universities made commitments to expand their efforts at the recent White House summits on college completion. But leaders on both campuses are doubtful that the nation can get to 60 percent by 2020.

"You don’t turn these things around overnight," said Ralph Wilcox, provost at South Florida. "That’s where a lot of universities go wrong—they don’t stick with it. If they don’t get quick returns, they start to question themselves."

To get to the goal, he said, "it’s going to take all universities’ pulling in the same direction."

In other words, it’s going to take time, and it’s going to take scale. Right now, many innovative ideas are siloed within individual institutions, or are being tested in only one or a few states. Until entire states and university systems sign on, progress toward the 2020 goal will be slow, said Complete College America’s Mr. Jones.

Ideas and Accountability
The recent White House summits, in which hundreds of college leaders convened from across the nation, were an effort not only to elicit new commitments from colleges but also to foster the spread of good ideas and give best practices a chance to emerge.

Jamie P. Merisotis, president of the Lumina Foundation, said he was encouraged by the momentum that he saw building for the completion agenda, a "snowballing" of efforts at colleges and in states.

But sweeping change won't happen unless states and the federal government compel it, said José Luis Santos, vice president for higher-education policy and practice at the Education Trust, a research and advocacy group. "The only way we will move the needle towards the 2020 goal is if we hold institutions accountable for minimum performance standards," he said.

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, 25 states now allocate some amount of higher-education funding on the basis of student outcomes, including graduation rates.

But efforts by President Obama to hold institutions accountable for their outcomes have fallen flat in Congress. Lawmakers have repeatedly rejected his bid to tie a portion of student aid to graduation rates and other outcomes, and now they threaten to block his proposed new college-ratings plan, too.

The administration has not published annual targets for its goal, but an Education Department spokeswoman said the agency set a trajectory in 2011, aiming to increase attainment by 2.1 percent each year through 2020. The country missed that benchmark in 2011 and 2012, improving by less than a percentage point each year.

Last year the department revised its goal. It now expects attainment growth to accelerate annually, from 0.7 percent in 2014 to 3.5 percent in 2020. It exceeded its 2014 target by one-tenth of a percentage point.

One way the department could reach its goal would be to include certificates in the national college-completion numbers reported to OECD, as some countries already do. The White House's Mr. Kvaal said the president has always wanted to count certificates "that were meaningful in the work force" toward his goal, but hasn't had the data.

That could soon change. Department officials have been working with the Census Bureau to add questions to its population survey that might separate certificate holders from dropouts—a distinction currently missing from the data submitted to the OECD.

Anthony P. Carnevale, a research professor and director of Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce, estimates that adding certificates would raise the completion rate by at least five percentage points, catapulting the nation to sixth in the world.

But that still would leave a 16-point gap between the United States and South Korea, and only six years to bridge it. Hindsight is 20/20, but maybe the president's goal was a bit too bold?
January 18, 2015

What the President’s Tax Proposal Would Mean for Higher Education

By Beckie Supiano

NO MENTION

Over the weekend, the White House announced a broad outline of the tax-reform plan that President Obama will lay out in his State of the Union address on Tuesday. While unlikely to gain much traction with a Republican Congress, the plan could help set the agenda for Democrats looking ahead to 2016. The plan would increase taxes on wealthy individuals and financial firms, and would offer new and expanded benefits to low- and middle-income households. It also has several direct implications for higher education.

Funding Free Community College. Earlier this month, the Obama administration unveiled a plan to offer two years of community college tuition-free to students who meet certain criteria through a partnership between the federal government and states. The administration estimated that doing so would cost the federal government $60-billion over 10 years.

Under the tax plan, proposals to increase the top capital-gains and dividends tax rate for high-income households, close a trust-fund loophole, and charge a fee to financial firms that borrow heavily would be used to pay for the community-college plan, among other things.

Streamlining Higher-Education Tax Credits. Higher-education tax credits have been roundly criticized—as incredibly complicated, as not available until after college bills are paid, as helping people who don’t need them, and as having no discernible impact on college enrollment. Even so, the credits remain a multibillion-dollar form of federal student aid.

The tax plan would heed some of the criticism by simplifying tax breaks and tailoring them to help a less-affluent slice of the population. The plan would roll the Lifetime Learning Credit and the deduction for tuition and fees into the American Opportunity Tax Credit. It would offer just one vehicle for education-savings tax breaks, rolling back expanded tax cuts for 529 savings plans and repealing future tax savings for the Coverdell education-savings program. Those moves would streamline the current expansive menu of tax benefits.
The New American Opportunity Tax Credit. This tax credit was created as a more-generous replacement for the Hope tax credit in the 2009 economic-stimulus bill. It is currently set to expire after 2017, but the new tax plan would make it permanent. The credit would be set at $2,500 a year for up to five years (up from the current four years) with increases tied to inflation. The plan would make $1,500 of the tax credit refundable, up from $1,000 today, a move that would help low- and moderate-income families.

It would also extend the credit to students enrolled less than half time: They could get a credit of $1,250, with up to $750 refundable.

The plan would also help low-income students by exempting Pell Grants from taxation and the tax-credit calculation, simplifying what is now a very complex relationship between the grant and the tax credit.

And the plan would require colleges to give students the information about tuition and fees necessary to claim the tax credit.

Changes in Tax Relief for Federal Student-Loan Borrowers. The administration has made a big push to let borrowers know about its Pay as You Earn repayment plan, under which borrowers make monthly payments of no more than 10 percent of their discretionary income and have any remaining balance forgiven after 20 years of payments. But when that time comes, borrowers face an additional expense under current law—the forgiven debt is treated as taxable income. The tax plan would change that, removing a big uncertainty borrowers face under income-based repayment. It would also repeal the existing tax deduction for student-loan interest for new borrowers.

There’s a lot of detail to wade through in the new plan, but it has already gotten some positive feedback from a group that has raised concerns about existing higher-education tax benefits. In a statement released on Saturday, the Young Invincibles, an advocacy group, offered its support for the plan, calling it "a win for hard-working students."

The Chronicle of Higher Education

January 19, 2015

State Spending on Higher Education Inches Up, but Fiscal Pitfalls Remain

By Eric Kelderman

NO MU MENTION
An annual report on state spending on higher education is mostly good news, at least for the fiscal year just past.

But widen the lens, and the focus muddies: Half of the states are still appropriating less for higher education than they did five years ago.

And the prospects for future spending are clouded by falling oil prices and state lawmakers’ resistance to raising taxes.

Overall, states increased appropriations for higher education by more than 5 percent from the 2014 to the 2015 fiscal years.

That’s the second consecutive annual increase after four years of declines or nominal growth, according to the "Grapevine" report, a joint project of the Center for the Study of Education Policy, at Illinois State University, and the Association of State Higher Education Executive Officers.

The annual survey is the latest sign that spending on higher education is inching its way back from the impact of the recession, when plummeting state revenues and increasing enrollments combined to push per-student spending to its lowest levels in a quarter-century.

In all, 39 states recorded one-year increases in spending on higher education, ranging from 0.1 percent in Maine to 14.6 percent in Colorado. (A 21-percent increase in Illinois reflects the state’s increased contribution to pensions for college and university employees, the report said.)

But much of the national increase for this cycle is a result of the large dollar amounts added by California, Florida and Illinois. Those states make up more than a quarter of the national total. Without them, the overall increase would have been less than 3 percent.

In addition, the results for individual states vary widely—and many are still struggling economically.

Mixed Results

Among the 10 states that cut higher-education spending from 2014 to 2015, Kentucky and West Virginia had the largest decreases, 2 percent each.

Over five years, Louisiana has fared the worst. Its spending on higher education is still more than 24 percent less than it was in the 2010 fiscal year. Appropriations have fallen by more than 10 percent over that period in five other states—Arizona, Pennsylvania, Nevada, New Hampshire, and Oklahoma.

The results of this year’s survey "show a checkered pattern of tentative recovery from the last recession," says a news release accompanying the Grapevine data. "Variations across states are expected to continue into the next fiscal year as energy-producing states experience revenue shortfalls in the wake of declining oil prices."
In one of those states, Louisiana, Gov. Bobby Jindal is already proposing a higher-education budget cut of as much as $300-million. Leaders of public colleges in the state say reductions of that magnitude could result in closing some campuses.

Even some prominent state legislators among Mr. Jindal’s fellow Republicans have spoken out against the proposed reductions.

At the same time, proposals to keep college affordable may restrict institutions’ ability to raise tuition even as state appropriations decline.

In Texas, another state that relies heavily on revenue from oil, lawmakers from both parties are considering a bill to renew the Legislature’s control over college tuition. State appropriations for higher education are less than 1 percent higher than they were five years ago, according to the Grapevine figures.

Higher education could face cuts even in some states in which public colleges have fared relatively well in recent years. In Maryland, newly elected Gov. Larry Hogan, a Republican, has warned that he will not raise taxes to close the state’s projected $1-billion budget deficit.

Maryland has increased spending on higher education by nearly 15 percent since 2010, according to Grapevine figures. But preparing for the coming budget shortfall, the University of Maryland at College Park has already frozen hiring and construction.

January 14, 2015

**NCAA’s Top Conferences to Allow Additional Aid for Athletes**

By Brad Wolverton

**NO MU MENTION**

The wealthiest college-sports conferences, responding to pressure to provide additional benefits to players, approved new rules on Saturday strengthening the value of scholarships.

The most significant change allows Division I colleges to cover their athletes’ full cost of attendance, which could put thousands of dollars more per year into players’ pockets. Colleges also backed a measure protecting students from losing their scholarships if they fail to meet coaches’ athletic
expectations. New rules also give players the ability to borrow against potential future earnings by purchasing loss-of-value insurance.

The moves, which came during the National Collegiate Athletic Association’s annual convention here, at a conference center just outside Washington, mark the first time that the 65 highest-profile colleges have come together to exercise more control over college sports. They did so as part of a new NCAA governance structure approved last year.

The increased scholarship aid, designed to answer critics seeking more-equitable treatment of players, is expected to cost some programs more than $1 million a year. That and other changes, which include new concussion-safety standards, apply to programs in the five most-powerful conferences—the Atlantic Coast, Big Ten, Big 12, Pacific-12, and Southeastern. Athletics departments in the rest of Division I may adopt the rules with the blessing of their conferences.

"I think it’s an incredibly important day in the NCAA’s journey," said Greg Sankey, executive associate commissioner of the Southeastern Conference. "The five conferences showed that they can collaborate, they can act responsibly in decision making, and they can make progress that benefits our student-athletes in tangible, meaningful ways."

Majorcollege athletes, who have agitated for enhanced benefits and rights, were well represented here on Saturday. More than a dozen times, players stood up to express concerns or stand behind proposed changes.

Athletes have 15 of the 80 votes in the new governance system, which allows the prominent conferences to do more to help players. (The rest of the votes go to representatives of colleges in the five major leagues.) But just as important as the students' vote was their voice, said Jim Delany, commissioner of the Big Ten Conference.

"I was so excited to really hear the athlete," he said in an interview after the session. "They disagreed with each other, they disagreed with us, and to me they had impact beyond their 15."

Mr. Delany said he had already appealed to governance leaders to allow students more say in the development of proposals in the future.

"We may think we’re doing something to their benefit," he said. "It may well be that they don’t want it or that they have another way to look at it."

‘You Don’t Have to Change Everything’

The cost-of-attendance proposal was approved by a tally of 79 to 1. Boston College was the lone dissenter, citing concerns that the rule "further segregates student-athletes from the general student population by increasing aid without need-based consideration." Boston College officials also noted in a written statement that the federal financial-aid formula is "sufficiently ambiguous that adjustments for recruiting advantage will take place."
Four years ago, a proposal allowing athletics programs to provide players with $2,000 stipends for miscellaneous expenses was approved by the NCAA’s Division I Board of Directors.

The move was later rolled back, highlighting the significant financial and philosophical differences within the association’s top level.

Those differences still exist, which will make it difficult for Division I programs outside of the most-powerful conferences to stay in step. But some conference leaders at that level said in interviews last week that the changes might not be as disruptive as some people have feared, particularly if smaller-budget programs do not race to adopt them.

"I don’t anticipate the change to be as drastic as it’s been portrayed,” said Ted Gumbart, commissioner of the Atlantic Sun Conference. "The fact that we will be moving into a realm where that gap might be exacerbated a bit, it’s not changing the way we do business.

"You can grow into these changes,” he added. "You don’t have to change everything.”

Several other measures introduced at the convention encouraged more robust debate, including the proposal to prevent colleges from eliminating scholarships for athletic reasons.

The vast majority of Division I institutions do not guarantee scholarships beyond one year, a standard that has come under increasing scrutiny in the courts. As part of a change approved on Saturday, the wealthiest 65 colleges must commit to carrying out policies that provide multiyear scholarships.

But some attendees, including several students, argued that athletics departments should be allowed to cut poor-performing players.

Diamond DeShields, a women’s basketball player at the University of Tennessee, said that players who don’t meet the expectations of coaches should lose their scholarships, in part because their aid is based on athletic—not academic—performance.

"I don’t have an academic scholarship,” she said. "You get to the institution based on your athletic performance. That’s why we’re here.”

Nandi Mehta, a soccer player at Northwestern University, had a different view. If colleges are allowed to eliminate scholarships for athletic reasons, she said, how is a scholarship any different from a salary?

"How can we say that we put the student aspect of a student-athlete first,” she said, "when we’re going to inhibit a student-athlete’s ability to get an education based on athletic performance?”

That measure passed by just three votes.

Conflict Over Concussions

Another proposal, to create new safety mandates related to head injuries, also elicited strong views. The measure, introduced by the Southeastern Conference, requires colleges to have a concussion-
management plan that, among other things, includes an annual process for ensuring that athletes are educated about the signs and symptoms of concussion.

The policy requires a medical professional to clear athletes to return to competition. It also calls for safety protocols that include procedures for reducing exposure to head injuries and policies that deal with returning to the classroom.

Athletics officials in the Big 12 Conference voiced opposition to the measure, arguing that it didn’t go far enough to ensure that medical professionals were in charge of medical decisions.

An earlier version of the proposal had included a requirement that medical professionals be given "unchallengeable authority" in evaluating players and determining when they should return to competition.

Steve Patterson, men’s athletic director at the University of Texas at Austin, questioned why that language had to be removed.

"Why can’t we get it clear," he said, "that the medical personnel are in charge?"

Brian Hainline, the NCAA’s chief medical officer, spoke up to endorse the change.

"This is an imperfect yet exceptionally important start," Dr. Hainline told attendees. "I would much rather have an imperfect start than a perfect pause."

‘Dead Spots’

In interviews after the session, representatives of all five conferences expressed satisfaction with the results. But many agreed that this was just a start.

"We took a very big step, but we can’t be naïve in our outlook," said Joe Castiglione, athletic director at the University of Oklahoma. "We have to keep our foot on the gas."

In the coming months, athletics leaders are expected to discuss ideas for changing initial-eligibility standards, which could help weed out more players who aren’t serious students.

"There are far too many participants in our programs who are not legitimate students and don’t have an interest in education—they’re here as a way to transition to a professional career or something else after college, and that’s not why we should be here," said Bob Bowlsby, commissioner of the Big 12 Conference. "We should be here to educate young people and help them move from 18-year-old adolescents into 22-year-old adulthood."

Colleges are also expected to discuss proposals that would help athletes spend more time outside of their sports.

Many big-time athletes come to college accustomed to training year-round and report spending more than 40 hours a week on their sport. Mr. Delany, of the Big Ten, believes that institutions need to look
for ways to establish "dead spots" on the calendar where college coaches and facilities are not available to athletes.

"You have to say, 'For this 30-day period, there is no interaction. If you want to go down to Gold’s Gym or go to the intramural field, that’s fine,’” he said. "'But you’re not going to engage in practice.’”

"You need to create regulations that are black and white," he added, "because gray is hard to enforce."