MU chancellor hires former lobbyist as special assistant

By Ashley Jost

Monday, March 16, 2015 at 2:00 pm

The executive suite at the University of Missouri has a new addition — a Jefferson City regular.

Brian Millner, former legislative director for the Department of Economic Development and, before that, longtime lobbyist with John Bardgett & Associates, joined MU as a special assistant to Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin this month.

Millner is no stranger to MU. He spent three years of his time as an undergraduate — Millner graduated in 2007 — donning the Truman the Tiger mascot. He jokes that he “bleeds black and gold.” To the chancellor, Millner’s longtime commitment to MU was a plus in hiring him.

Loftin said Millner’s primary role is to be a liaison with the legislature. The UM System has a centralized lobbying effort that covers all four campuses, but each campus has a liaison that works with those registered lobbyists.

This position is new, but key aspects of Millner’s job were previously done by Dianne Drainer, predominantly under the auspices of the Mizzou Alumni Association. Drainer retired last year.

Because of the timing of Drainer’s retirement before the current legislative session, Loftin said he had to ask around for names, which is how he got to Millner.

“His primary role is to help me become effective in communicating with the legislature,” Loftin said. “It’s very nice to know where each person comes from because we have a lot of people in Jefferson City; some are pretty new to their jobs.”

Loftin said Millner will also find out how many graduates live in the state’s individual legislative districts and how many students are from those districts. “These are all things that are helpful when I go to see them in the Capitol,” Loftin said of lawmakers.

Loftin doesn’t see a need for Millner to register as a lobbyist because Millner does not meet the criteria to be a lobbyist. According to the Missouri Ethics Commission, a lobbyist is anyone who
tries to influence a government official’s actions and meets one of four other criteria: the person is acting to influence officials in the normal course of business, is paid as a lobbyist, is designated to act as a lobbyist with any entity or if the person spends $50 on any public official in a calendar year.

Loftin said Millner will work with the UM System’s registered lobbyists, Steve Knorr and Marty Oetting, “as a liaison on bringing legislators here for campus visits or arrangements like that.” But the local community engagement part of Millner’s job is also “crucial,” Loftin said.

Millner will work with the Mizzou Alumni Association, MU retiree groups, the Boone County Commission, Columbia City Council the Columbia Chamber of Commerce and other community groups.

Millner has lived in Columbia for three years now with his wife. He said this job seems like a chance to get to know his community better while using the skills and relationships he has developed in Jefferson City.

“All the work and all the time I’ve spent in Jefferson City, it’s made me realize how important it is to engage in the community,” Millner said. “I think that’s really what this position is all about.”

“Everything I read and heard about Chancellor Loftin made this job appealing to me,” Millner said. “I like how he has just dove headfirst into all that Mizzou is, and how he wants someone who is able to figure out where the university can make strides for improvement. We’re still sort of figuring out what this position will be long term, but that will be a huge part of it.”

**Muslim Students Protest Campus Screening of 'American Sniper'**

Some Muslim students at the University of Missouri protested an upcoming campus screening of “American Sniper” and clamored to have the film’s debut there canceled.

At the heart of the controversy is a Muslim student activist who declared showing the film on campus would make her feel “unsafe” and demanded an “apology and explanation” as to how and why the movie was even selected for Mizzou audiences.

The uproar was taken quite seriously, and prompted the student government to conduct a meeting to determine whether the flick should be shown.
Retired professor's public cancer journey ends

By Jodie Jackson Jr.

Monday, March 16, 2015 at 2:00 pm

David Oliver’s “exit strategy” for facing the ultimate outcome of Stage 4 nasopharyngeal cancer had more to do with living than dying.

Oliver, a retired research professor at the University of Missouri School of Medicine’s Department of Family and Community Medicine, and his wife, Debbie, launched a video blog in November 2011 to tell colleagues — and later the community and friends — that he had a rare and incurable form of cancer. David Oliver, also the assistant director of MU’s Interdisciplinary Center on Aging, and Debbie Oliver, a medical school professor and former hospice director, intended to use the cancer diagnosis and journey with cancer as a tool for teaching others about both death and life.

Debbie Oliver announced David’s death Saturday with a written statement on the blog.

“Exit strategy and Operation HOPE are complete,” Debbie Oliver wrote. “David’s exit strategy was fulfilled at 7:30 a.m. on March 14 — Pi Day. As he had hoped, he died at home, surrounded by others, pain-free, and was excited about life until the end.”

Operation HOPE stood for at Home, surrounded by Others, Pain-free and remaining Excited and Engaged.

A memorial service for Oliver, 72, is set for 2 p.m. March 29 in Lester Bryant Auditorium at the MU School of Medicine. An informal celebration of life, when the family will receive visitors, is tentatively planned for March 28, but those arrangements have not been finalized.

“He was just an amazing, amazing man,” David’s daughter Jessica Tappana of Columbia said Monday morning.

She said that the word “loss” does not accurately describe David’s death because his video blogs, a private journal that he kept, and a book that he published in 2013 are all examples of how her father’s legacy will continue.
David appeared with Debbie on Wednesday via Skype to see Paul Tatum receive the David B. Oliver University of Missouri Family and Community Medicine Faculty Award, which is endowed by the Oliver family. Tappana said her father also used the occasion to “say his goodbyes.”

“He was incredibly proud of that department,” she said, adding that David “clearly had an understanding that he had a short period of time left.”

Tappana said she and her siblings assured David in the hours before his death that they would take care of Debbie.

“He was very clear that there were two patients: the patient and the caregiver,” Tappana said. “He loved her so deeply.”

The public nature of the video blog and cancer journey was a decision that David Oliver never regretted, Tappana said.

“We all came around to it,” she said. “We all now embrace it fully.”

The Chronicle of Higher Education

Education Dept. Considers Creating Not 1 but 2 College-Ratings Systems

By Kelly Field March 16, 2015 Washington

NO MU MENTION

The Education Department, under continued fire over its planned college-rating system, is considering creating two systems, an agency official said at a policy briefing here on Monday. The first ratings system would be geared toward consumers and be based on raw outcomes metrics. The second would be geared toward policy makers and researchers, and would rely on metrics adjusted for student and institutional characteristics, the official told attendees at the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute’s annual policy briefing. Only the second system would be used to measure accountability.

The shift appeared designed to answer criticism that the department was trying to do too much with one system. In her remarks, the official — Melanie Muenzer, deputy assistant secretary for planning and policy development — noted the "inherent tensions" in crafting a system that both guides consumer behavior and holds colleges accountable for student outcomes.
"It’s hard to develop a system that addresses both," Ms. Muenzer said.

In a comment on the proposed system, sent last month, a group of think tanks and advocacy groups urged the department to either "narrow the scope of the ratings to develop one system to address one purpose, or design different rating systems that use common data while being tailored to each purpose."

But one higher-education lobbyist, who asked to remain anonymous to avoid angering the department, said a two-system approach was "a terrible solution" to the problems posed by a single system.

"What a disaster that would be," said the lobbyist. "You could easily see institutions doing well on one and badly on the other, and with Title IV [student-aid] eligibility attached, it would be utter chaos."

Ms. Muenzer acknowledged the drawbacks of the approach, including that colleges could perform poorly on the consumer system but use the "adjusted" outcomes data to sell themselves to prospective students.

"You could end up with an institution that goes from a 30-percent graduation rate to a 70-percent graduation rate," she said, by way of example. "That could be very difficult for consumers to understand."

"We can’t stop that institution from using 70 percent in its marketing materials," she added.

Even so, Ben Miller, a senior policy analyst at New America, formerly the New America Foundation, and another panelist at Monday’s event, said afterward that it would be a "massive mistake" not to create separate systems.

"The way consumers make choices and researchers and policy makers look at things is dramatically different," he said.

The department has promised a final version of its rating plan in time for the 2015-16 academic year. In December it released a draft "framework" of the plan that provided an update on metrics the department is considering using in its system.

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**How Not to Get Sick on Spring Break**
Two days into Crystal Vaccaro and Rob Baer's spontaneous Mexico getaway, the trip took a turn for the worse. After a relaxing lunch at the all-inclusive resort and a stroll on the beach, Baer stopped, pivoted toward the closest potted plant and vomited. They hadn't been drinking.

Back in their room, Vaccaro followed suit. Then came diarrhea for both. (And there was only one toilet.) Needless to say, "it was a real intimate moment," laughs Vaccaro, a 28-year-old in Denver who works for a captioned telephone company.

Getting sick at home is bad enough, but falling ill on the road can be a nightmare. "Nothing's more miserable than being away from home and having something happen where you really get sick," says David Fleming, chair of the internal medicine department at the University of Missouri's School of Medicine and president of the American College of Physicians. "It kind of destroys the trip, but you're kind of helpless."

Vaccaro knows the feeling all too well. After loading up on Advil and "a million" bottles of Pedialyte to no relief, the couple called the resort's doctor, who they say showed up drunk three hours later to give them a costly shot. "I thought, 'I'm dying in Mexico, that's it,'" Vaccaro says.

While the couple survived -- thanks to a local doctor who gave them medicine to treat an amoeba they contracted allegedly from the resort's food -- the memories they could do without. Vaccaro recalls her initial excitement when planning the vacation: "It was like, 'Yeah! Let's go on a really nice trip together -- this will be so much fun. And then it was just the least romantic trip I have ever been on."

Here's how to make sure your spring break is more sun and less pain:

1. Pack the basics.

Whenever Sherry Torkos, a holistic pharmacist in Ontario, Canada, goes on vacation, she packs "a full kit" of over-the-counter products, including eye drops for allergies and plane-induced dry eye, tea tree oil for bug bites and zinc-based sunscreen.

Torkos, author of "The Canadian Encyclopedia of Natural Medicine," also recommends packing a probiotic and taking fiber supplements up to a week before leaving, since constipation is one of the most common travel health complaints. "Using a different toilet, eating different food, getting dehydrated for even a day [all] can really lead to digestive distress and tummy troubles," Torkos says. Taking fiber before departure and throughout your trip "helps to keep things on track -- literally," she says.

2. Consider your conditions.

For people with chronic conditions or who take prescription medications regularly, pre-trip prep is especially important. "Prevention is the best treatment," Fleming says. He encourages travelers to see their doctors before they leave, label their medications clearly and pack them in their carry-on bag. He also suggests taking a copy of your medical record or a sheet listing your
chronic conditions, medical history and allergies. Some doctors will print out a summary sheet for you.

People who need EpiPens for allergies or inhalers for asthma should always pack two, adds Shirley Stephenson, a nurse practitioner who works in the University of Chicago's travel clinic.

Even with thorough preparation, some people -- like someone with chronic obstructive lung disease traveling to an extremely high-altitude destination -- may ultimately not be cut out for certain types of travel, Fleming says. "Are you prepared for this? Is it worth going on the trip if you get sick?" he asks his patients. "You balance the risks and benefits to give them a realistic picture to see if it's the right thing to do."

3. Do your homework.

After Vaccaro and Baer's ineffective and expensive visit with the resort doctor (they shelled out at least $1,000 total for the visit and the shots), they turned to a friend's brother, who happened to live nearby. He recommended a doctor who treated them promptly, effectively and cheaply -- charging only about $20 each.

But not everyone has local connections. That's why it's important to get as familiar with your soon-to-be surroundings and health care system before departing. One of the best places to do that is the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's travel website, which provides travelers with personalized advice based on their medical conditions, type of travel, destination and more.

"The last thing one wants is to sustain a cut in a foreign country, and then wonder if they're up to date with their tetanus vaccine," Stephenson says. She recommends visiting a travel clinic for vaccines or medications that aren't offered in primary care settings. "Travel clinics can be expensive," Stephenson says, noting that they're usually not covered by insurance. "Yet post-travel illness can be much more expensive."

4. Know when to get help.

In hindsight, Vaccaro and Baer weren't too concerned about getting sick on their trip because they went the all-inclusive route. "We thought, 'Oh, we're going to be safe with the food because everything's on the resort," Vaccaro says.

That's a common -- and risky -- assumption, Stephenson says. "Many travelers have said that they 'knew better,' but because they were staying in a luxury hotel or eating in a fancy restaurant, they were less cautious and enjoyed drinks blended with ice, tried the beef carpaccio, indulged in raw salads, etc.,” she says.

Other travelers have trouble differentiating serious medical conditions from typical travel woes caused by factors such as higher altitudes and jet lag. That's why it's key to keep a close eye on how you're feeling and remember that the major health red flags -- high fever, persistent vomiting and diarrhea, rapid heart rate, to name a few -- are no different in new destinations, Torkos says.
Once you return home, be sure to visit your primary care doctor if you notice anything unusual -- say, a new rash, a worsening cough, loss of appetite, unrelenting fatigue, new headaches, joint pain or a bug bite that doesn't heal, Stephenson says. "Not recognizing travel-related illness makes us vulnerable to prolonged or more severe illness."

5. Be in good company.

Last year, Fleming and a group of friends traveled to Peru, where one of the women struggled with severe altitude sickness. The group and guides adjusted their hiking schedule and pace, so the woman was able to take days off and attempt some of the less rigorous hikes.

Supportive travel companions are also important for people with chronic conditions such as severe arthritis or heart failure, Fleming says. In those and other cases, it's critical to make sure your comrades are aware of your situation and have access to your medical records. If you're traveling with an organized group or on a cruise, be sure to disclose any potential problems to the crew, although "the good ones will ask," Fleming says.

"As travelers, we need to be prepared to support those who are with us who have a health problem," he says. "Yes we're on vacation, but we're all in this together, and we need to be patient with each other and do what we can to help."

That said, it may possible to be in too good of company -- as Vaccaro discovered on her most recent trip to Mexico, where she got run down from enjoying herself "far too much," she says. The consequence? Post-trip bronchitis. "But [the trip] was so much fun," she says. "At least it wasn't an amoeba."

Gowntown versus Capital City is a feud over local control in Missouri, Kansas

BY JASON HANCOCK
THE STAR'S JEFFERSON CITY CORRESPONDENT
03/16/2015 11:40 PM

Jefferson City - College-town politics don’t exactly match up with the increasingly conservative leanings of Missouri and Kansas.

That doesn’t stop leaders in the University of Missouri’s hometown from pushing on.
Since the beginning of December, the Columbia City Council has banned private businesses from conducting criminal background checks on job applicants and implemented regulations on ride-booking services such as Uber and Lyft.

It raised the age to buy cigarettes within the city to 21 and barred the indoor use of e-cigarettes.

It pondered, but ultimately abandoned, a ban on disposable plastic grocery bags, and it’s studying whether to establish its own broadband Internet network.

Thirty miles south in Jefferson City, the Republican-dominated Missouri General Assembly has taken disdainful notice.

The implications of what happens next could be felt across the state, as a series of bills make their way through the legislature aimed at blocking or overturning local laws.

“This is about the role of government,” said Rep. Caleb Rowden, a Columbia Republican. “Columbia is off track and so we need to define the lines between the roles of local and state government.”

Several of the bills may be inspired by the actions of a college-town city council, but their impact won’t be confined to Columbia.

City, county and school district leaders have long complained about actions they deem as interfering with local control. But facing what some say is an unprecedented number of legislative challenges to their authority, local officials around the state are crying foul.

“Nobody knows local affairs better than the locals. Nobody is better able to respond to local needs better than the locals,” said Kansas City Mayor Sly James. “To have people, the majority of whom don’t live in the locale, trying to implement one-size-fits-all policies, I think is shortsighted and unwise at best.”

Blue island in a sea of red

It’s hard not to feel a little picked on by the state legislature this year, said Columbia City Councilman Michael Trapp.
“We’re working hard to address issues that are important to the community,” he said. “Feeling we may be undercut by our legislature is very frustrating.”

Columbia’s politics have always been a little out of step with the rural counties that surround it. But then again, that’s the story for many college towns around the nation.

Travel 160 miles west to Lawrence and you’ll hear similar complaints about the push and pull between college-town city leaders and a conservative state legislature.

“Any time we tried to do something progressive, someone would introduce a bill to prohibit us from doing it,” said Dennis “Boog” Hightberger, a Democratic state representative from Lawrence who served six years on the city commission.

The distinction extends beyond purely local issues.

“When you’re talking about issues like guns, women’s health or hot-button social issues, it’s a foregone conclusion that people from Lawrence are going to line up on the opposite side from the majority in the legislature,” said Rep. John Wilson, a Lawrence Democrat.

It’s no secret that cities in general tend to be more liberal than their rural and suburban neighbors, said Chapman Rackaway, a professor of political science at Fort Hays State University.

Columbia isn’t really that much more Democrat-friendly than the state’s two urban metropolises, Kansas City and St. Louis. In fact, it’s sent more Republicans than Democrats to Jefferson City in recent years — partially because most of the districts include swaths of surrounding rural counties.

“But in college towns, not only are people liberal, but they tend to be more politically engaged,” said Rackaway, who before moving to Kansas lived in Columbia for 10 years.

Lawrence and Columbia “don’t really fit in with the overall culture of the state,” Rackaway said. “They’re like fish out of water.”

Rowden, who lives in Columbia but represents parts of rural Boone County, agrees.
“The politics is just different,” he said. “The folks in Centralia and Hallsville see the world differently than folks in Columbia.”

Sen. Kurt Schaefer, a Columbia Republican, said he’s not surprised that his hometown is getting so much attention.

“When have you seen a municipality propose things like this, especially in such a short period of time?” he asked.

Schaefer is sponsoring a bill of particular interest to Kansas City that would set statewide regulations for ride-booking businesses such as Uber and Lyft.

Kansas City has worked for months to craft local regulations on the businesses, such as ensuring drivers have adequate insurance and safe vehicles.

Uber has argued local rules are too onerous. Schaefer’s bill would prohibit those local efforts.

“This would allow an entrepreneurial technology company like Uber to operate in the state,” Schaefer said, “without local governments trying to regulate them out of business.”

Columbia approved regulations on ride-booking operations last month, said Columbia Mayor Bob McDavid, including mandates that drivers are licensed as chauffeurs.

It hasn’t seemed to hurt Uber’s business, McDavid said.

“I look at my Uber app, and there are a lot of drivers today,” McDavid said. “It seems to be functioning just fine.”

**History of preemption**

The tricky balance of power between state and local government is nothing new in Missouri. So-called preemption bills have long been a staple of the Missouri General Assembly playbook. Take, for example, the issue of gun control.
Over the last 30 years, Missouri lawmakers have slowly but surely stripped all local authority to regulate guns, culminating last year when legislation was approved voiding any local ordinance restricting the open carry of a firearm.

But this year, the sheer volume of preemption bills is on the rise.

In addition to Schaefer’s ride-hailing legislation, he’s also sponsoring a bill that would prohibit local governments from providing a service already offered by a private company within its borders without a vote of the people.

The bill was inspired by Columbia’s potential foray into the broadband business.

Rep. Dan Shaul, a Republican from Imperial, has a bill that would prohibit cities from banning disposable plastic grocery bags.

Shaul is also state director of the Missouri Grocers Association.

Rowden is sponsoring a bill that would prohibit cities from boosting their minimum wage or mandating benefits such as vacation or sick leave. It would also overturn Columbia’s “ban-the-box” law, which prohibits private employers from asking about a job applicant’s criminal history or conducting background checks before making a conditional job offer.

Kansas City has a ban-the-box ordinance, but it only applies to public employees, not private businesses.

Originally, the Missouri Chamber of Commerce wanted the bill to prohibit local governments from implementing discrimination laws that are stricter than the state’s. Dozens of municipalities, including Kansas City and Jackson County, have passed ordinances that prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Rowden said he removed the discrimination provisions and has no intentions of putting them back in the bill.

To Rep. Stephen Webber, a Columbia Democrat, the effort to preempt local laws is simply a power grab. Republican lawmakers have pushed to restrict the power of the
judiciary and executive branches of government, he said, and now their focus has turned to local government.

“They want all the power in the General Assembly,” Webber said, “because the districts have been gerrymandered enough that they’re confident they’ll maintain control. The goal is to consolidate power.”

Trapp, the Columbia city councilman, said state lawmakers should keep their focus on state affairs and “stop trying to micromanage city government.”

Schaefer said reining in local governments is a state function.

“Local governments are entirely a creation of the state,” he said. “All authority a county or city has is given by the state.”