Boone Hospital plans petition opposing application for new hospital

By Jodie Jackson Jr.

Tuesday, May 19, 2015 at 2:00 pm

Boone Hospital Center is working out details of a petition opposing an effort by Nuerterra and the University of Missouri Health System to build Columbia’s sixth hospital.

Boone Hospital President Jim Sinek told the hospital board of trustees Monday that a Boone Hospital Foundation board member has volunteered to coordinate the petition drive targeting a certificate-of-need application filed by Fulton Medical Center, the new name of the Fulton hospital co-owned since December by the Nuerterra/MU Health partnership.

The petition will be delivered to the Missouri Health Facilities Review Committee, which will meet July 13 in Jefferson City to consider the application that spells out plans for a 10-bed, $38 million hospital. The 51,500-square-foot facility at 4130 and 4150 Lenoir St. will displace residents living at Ed’s and Sunset Hills mobile home parks.

The application identifies a geographic region that excludes the population of Columbia and shows the planned Fulton Medical Center as the only hospital in the region, although five other hospitals are within four miles driving distance from the site.

Sinek has said the region determined by the application was “gerrymandering” and “an attempt to create a false impression that there’s a large population base that’s not being served.”

The certificate-of-need application says there would be “no impact” for hospitals closest to the proposed hospital’s service area.

Sinek said the wording of the petition will be finalized this week. He said hospital officials also plan to request a public meeting in Columbia with the health facilities review committee before the July 13 hearing in Jefferson City.

“It’s kind of a prelude to the official certificate-of-need hearing,” he said. Sinek said supporters and opponents would have a chance to speak at the local meeting.
Amy Leiker, vice president of global marketing for Leawood, Kan.-based Nueterra, said in an email that demographics and demand trends are always considered when building a new hospital.

“The expansion of Fulton Medical Center will provide residents in Mid-Missouri with another option for healthcare close to home,” she said. Leiker has declined to answer additional questions. Questions to MU Health officials are repeatedly referred to Nueterra.

Monday’s Boone Hospital Board of Trustees meeting also included an update from BJC HealthCare CEO Steve Lipstein about the health system’s growing footprint in the St. Louis region and beyond. BJC operates Boone Hospital through a lease agreement with the Boone County commission.

BJC’s system now includes 14 hospitals after the purchase of Mineral Area Regional Medical Center in Farmington and a partnership with Memorial Hospital of Belleville, Ill.

BJC HealthCare also has taken over operations and ownership of the St. Louis Regional Psychiatric Stabilization Center, a 25-bed adult inpatient acute psychiatric program in St. Louis.

Lipstein said BJC is strengthening its collaborations with other health systems at a time when University of Missouri Health Care is joining a new collaborative with the Mercy and Mosaic health systems. Lipstein said MU Health is also working to form partnerships with hospitals in Hannibal and Lake of the Ozarks.

“I think we can expect more collaborations,” he said. As a result of the state legislature not expanding Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act, some 700,000 Missourians are still without health insurance, he said.

The picture is especially challenging for rural hospitals and health care in rural areas, Lipstein said.

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Atmospheric release of BPA may reach nearby waterways

Water contamination by hormone-disrupting pollutants is threatening water quality around the world. Existing research has determined that harmful concentrations of Bisphenol-A (BPA), a chemical used in consumer products such as plastic food storage and beverage containers, have been deposited directly into rivers and streams by municipal or industrial wastewater. Now, researchers from the University of Missouri and the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) have assessed Missouri water quality near industrial sites permitted to release BPA into the air. As a result, scientists now believe that atmospheric releases may create a concern for contamination of local surface water leading to human and wildlife exposure.

"There is growing concern that hormone disruptors such as BPA not only threaten wildlife, but also humans," said Chris Kassotis, a doctoral candidate in the Division of Biological Sciences in the College of Arts and Science at MU. "Recent studies have documented widespread atmospheric releases of BPA from industrial sources across the United States. The results from our study provide evidence that these atmospheric discharges can dramatically elevate BPA in nearby environments."

Water sampling sites were selected based on their proximity to the Superfund National Priorities List (NPL) or locations with reported atmospheric discharges of BPA as identified by the Environmental Protection Agency. Current or historical municipal wastewater treatment sites, which have been shown in the past to contribute hormonally active chemicals to surface water from urban or industrial sources, also were tested. Finally, relatively clean sites were chosen to serve as the control group.

The water then was analyzed for concentrations of BPA, Ethinyl estradiol (EE2), an estrogen commonly used in oral contraceptive pills, and several wastewater compounds. Scientists also measured the total estrogen and receptor activities of the water. This approach is used to measure all chemicals present in the water that are able to bind to and activate (or inhibit) the estrogen or androgen receptors in wildlife and humans. Levels of chemicals were highest in samples with known wastewater treatment plant discharges.

"In addition, we were startled to find that BPA concentrations were up to ten times higher in the water near known atmospheric release sites," said Don Tillitt, adjunct professor of biological
sciences at MU, and biochemistry and physiology branch chief with the USGS Columbia Environmental Research Center. "This finding suggests that atmospheric BPA releases may contaminate local surface water, leading to greater exposure of humans or wildlife."

Concentrations of BPA measured in surface water near these sites were well above levels shown to cause adverse health effects in aquatic species, Kassotis said.

University of Missouri to get $10 million for new learning center


WDAF-KC (Fox) – Kansas City, Mo.

Gov. Nixon Pledges $10 Million for New Learning Center at Mizzou

Watch the story: http://mms.tveyes.com/PlaybackPortal.aspx?SavedEditID=bbfd3977-574c-4028-b1ba-995c3169ee19
Study: 1 in 5 college women raped, assaulted

(CNN) - A new study about the incidence of rape involving college freshmen women will likely add to the ongoing debate about whether enough is being done on campuses to keep students safe.

The study, conducted at a large unnamed private university in upstate New York and published in the Journal of Adolescent Health found that 19 percent of women, nearly one in five, said they had been a victim of attempted or completed rape, either by force or while they were incapacitated due to alcohol or drugs, during their freshman year.

"What this says to me is a lot of our young women are dealing with this sexual violence and we all probably know young women" who have been victims, said lead author Kate Carey, professor of behavioral and social sciences at Brown University's School of Public Health.

The study, conducted by researchers at Brown and Miriam Hospital's Centers for Behavioral and Preventive Medicine, involved surveys with 483 first-year women who ranged in age from 18 to 21.

They were recruited to take part in a survey about women's health and answered questions on a range of issues including alcohol consumption, suicidal ideations and sexual behavior. They recorded their responses before they started their first year, and at the end of the fall, spring and summer during their freshman year.

While it is not the first study to try to study rape involving college women during their freshman year, researchers believe their methodology -- asking women during their freshman year -- might minimize "recall bias," which would be skewed results when women are asked about what happened during their freshman year several years later, said Carey.

15.4 percent of the women said they were raped or a victim of attempted rape while they were incapacitated, while 9 percent said they were forcibly raped or a victim of attempted rape by force, according to the study.

18.6 percent -- nearly one in five -- said they were victims of either an attempted or completed forcible or incapacitated rape.
Debate over 'one in five' statistic

For years, the "one in five" statistic has been mentioned by advocates, pundits, even President Barack Obama when the topic of rape on campus comes up. The statistic comes from a 2007 study for the U.S. Department of Justice, which found that one in five women say they were sexually assaulted on college campuses.

But that study and its findings have been called into question by some because the study was limited in scope -- only involved two colleges -- and used a broad definition of sexual assault, which included unwanted kissing and fondling.

This latest study, while also limited in scope since it only involves surveys at one private university, does include a much narrower definition of rape.

The study did not include the behavior of fondling or touching, and also did not include cases which involved an individual overwhelming a woman with arguments for sex or continually pressing for sex.

The definition in this study solely included cases involving the threat of force or the use of force, or incapacitation so that a woman could not resist or consent, said Carey, the lead author.

While the study was done at only one school and does not necessarily signal what's happening at colleges around the country, Carey says the body of evidence suggests a similar pattern on most campuses.

"There can be regional differences and there can be sub-cultural differences and so we wouldn't expect that the data that we found in New York would be exactly the data that we might find in Arizona but ... the more survey studies, the more assessments that we have out there that are sort of revealing somewhat similar findings, the more confidence that we have that it is a somewhat generalizable picture that we're seeing here."

'A real call to arms'

A stunning 28 percent of the women said they had been a victim of either an attempted or completed forcible or incapacitated rape before college, from the age of 14 through 18, according to the study. That number jumps to 37 percent for all women surveyed from the age of 14 through the start of their sophomore year.

"If I have a class of sophomores, this says that one out of every three will have had something like this in her background, and so to some extent this is a real call to arms," said Carey.

The issue has been in the national spotlight following high profile stories such as the now heavily debunked Rolling Stones report about an an alleged gang rape on campus, arrests of three college students after an alleged gang rape during spring break in Panama City, Florida, and a Columbia University woman, Emma Sulkowicz, who carried around a mattress on campus to protest the school's handling of her alleged sexual assault.
She graduated Tuesday and reportedly brought her mattress to graduation.

Tess Koman of Cosmpolitan.com posted a video of what she said was Sulkowicz carrying her mattress across the stage at Columbia's commencement ceremony.

Carey hopes her study adds to the other research that already exists and helps continue the conversation about sexual violence of young women and involve women and men, even at younger ages.

"We ... do need to think about engaging in prevention early, probably at least at the high school level, and focus not necessarily on the women themselves, although they are a key part of the conversation, but engage all members of the community in talking about what are healthy relationships, and what is the meaning of consent, and to what extent is alcohol, drinking alcohol to the point of incapacitation, just not a good idea on many, many levels."

Changing the culture about what's acceptable behavior and what's not is key, she added.

"We don't want to see these kinds of numbers if we do (a study) like this five or 10 years from now, and we have an opportunity to step in and to really work diligently as parents and faculty and coaches and advisers and administrators to create an environment where these kinds of things are becoming much, much less common."

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

The Washington Post

Cuts in higher ed funding push low-income students deeper in debt

By Danielle Douglas-Gabriel • Washington Post

NO MU MENTION

WASHINGTON • A day away from crossing the stage at Montclair State University's graduation, Evangelia Stone reflects on her journey from community college, the "amazing" professors she met along the way and the $50,000 in student loans she took out to get a bachelors' in sociology.

Stone, the first in her family to graduate from college, qualified for the maximum award in Pell Grants, the federal program that provides money for the country's poorest students to attend college. The free aid was enough to cover all her costs at Atlantic Cape Community College in southern New Jersey, but it barely paid for a quarter of the more than $20,000 in-state tuition, room and board at Montclair. The school offered Stone
no scholarships or grants, but she received several thousand dollars from the New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visual Impaired. It wasn't enough.

"Nobody should have to spend this much money, period. But in-state students going to public universities … the fact that I'm leaving with this much debt is absurd," said Stone, 25, who plans to pursue a master's degree in social work at Rutgers University this fall. "Higher education is supposed to be a public good, not just a private purchase that wealthy students get to enjoy."

Amid state cuts in higher education funding and modest increases in federal grant aid eclipsed by rising tuition, African-American, Latino and low-income students like Stone must borrow to get a degree, according to a new report from liberal think tank Demos.

Eighty-four percent of college students with Pell grants graduate from four-year public schools with debt, compared with less than half of students without the need-based grants, the report said. While less than two-thirds of white graduates from public schools borrow, four out of five black graduates take out loans for college. And black students who do borrow come out with more debt than their peers.

"We have now entered a new phase where student borrowing is now the primary way young people pay for college," said Mark Huelsman, a policy analyst at Demos and author of the report. "This shift places an unequal burden on communities that have historically been denied an opportunity to gain and leverage wealth."

He added: "While higher-income, predominately white, households can hope to minimize borrowing by using tax-advantaged savings and investment accounts, home equity and other mechanisms, low-income households by and large cannot use these tools."

In the last few decades, the cost of college has outpaced inflation and wages. States reversed course on investing in higher education, and public colleges raised tuition to offset the loss of funding. Federal grant aid for low-income students, which students of color often rely on, barely covers a third of the cost of college, according to the Institute for College Access and Success.

Stone discovered the limitations of her Pell grant three semesters shy of graduation. Between her time at Pace University in New York, community college and taking courses over the summer, Stone used up all of the federal need-based aid she could receive. And that meant she had to borrow.

Using data from the Education Department and the Federal Reserve's 2013 Survey of Consumer Finances, Huelsman found that graduates with Pell grants borrow at far higher rates and higher amounts than their middle- and upper-income counterparts at two- and four-year institutions. That is regardless of whether they attend public or private colleges.

The trend of borrowing among those who can least afford it signals the erosion of decades of federal policy instituted in the 1960s to give needy students access to higher education. It's striking in light of another study from the New America Foundation that found that 68 percent of public colleges provide scholarships to students who don't need financial aid.

Rather than help poor students attend college, state schools are using their resources to attract high-achieving, affluent, out-of-state students who can pay more tuition and boost the college's national rankings. By bringing in more wealthy out-of-towners, these public schools are becoming "bastions of privilege," wrote Stephen Burd, a senior policy analyst at New America and the author of the report. And that is often to the detriment of low-income kids and students of color.

A body of research suggests that taking out small loans to pay for college is a manageable expense for graduates, but borrowing more than $10,000 could be detrimental to students of color or students without family resources to buffer against the risk of borrowing, according to the Demos report. High debt load can also lead students to drop out of college, which can make it more difficult to repay the loans.
According to Demos, black and Latino students are dropping out of college with debt at higher rates than white students. At all schools, almost 40 percent of black borrowers drop out, compared to 29 percent of whites. More than two-thirds of black and Latino student borrowers at for-profit, four-year schools drop out. Meanwhile, nearly a third of low-income student borrowers at public four-year schools drop out, a rate 10 percent higher than student borrowers on the whole.

May 20, 2015

As They Slice NSF’s Budget, House Republicans Seek to Expose Research Misconduct

By Paul Basken

Washington

NO MU MENTION

Among many controversial provisions in a bill to set policy for the National Science Foundation, the Republican leadership of the House of Representatives has proposed that the NSF start publicly naming any scientists it finds guilty of research misconduct.

The so-called Competes Act reauthorization, which faces a floor vote on Wednesday, is getting generally panned by university researchers and their advocates. But the idea to name names may be one of the more-popular suggestions.

Greater transparency should be encouraged, said Ferric C. Fang, a professor of laboratory medicine and microbiology at the University of Washington who studies research misconduct and its causes. Naming those who commit violations is "a good thing," said another ethics expert, Adriane Fugh-Berman, an associate professor of pharmacology and physiology at Georgetown University.

House Democrats don’t agree with that. The top-ranking Democrat on the House science committee, Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson of Texas, tried unsuccessfully to remove the language last month during the committee’s drafting of the bill.
The bill contains a series of provisions that Ms. Johnson and other Democrats, including the Obama administration, regard as hostile and distrustful toward scientists. Their chief concern with the overall bill is its proposal to begin dictating division-by-division budgetary allocations for the NSF, with deep cuts in areas that include social sciences and earth sciences.

In a statement warning that the bill would be threatened in its current condition, the administration said the Competes Act reauthorization "undermines key investments in science, technology, and innovation, and imposes unnecessary and damaging requirements on federal support of research."

"There’s a recurring theme in this bill that we don’t trust scientists," Ms. Johnson told the committee in her request to remove the misconduct-transparency mandate. "This provision is a solution in search of a problem, and it sends a chilling message to the entire scientific community. I worry most about the young scientists and whether they will stay in research careers after seeing how little their leaders in Washington trust them."

Dr. Fugh-Berman, who directs PharmedOut, a Georgetown research and education project that highlights abuses involving pharmaceutical marketing, disagreed. "A chilling message? Really?" she said. "Why would we want anyone to be a scientist who was discouraged by a law forbidding falsification, fabrication, or plagiarism?"

Another ethics expert, C. Kristina Gunsalus of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, said she sees a middle ground. The mandate being pursued by House Republicans, she said, "is homing in on one particular difference" between the NSF and the National Institutes of Health, which already is required to publicly identify scientists it censures, "and legislating that." But there are many more differences between how the NSF resolves misconduct allegations — through its inspector general — and how the NIH handles them — through the Office of Research Integrity, a separate division of the Department of Health and Human Services.

The NSF inspector general and the Office of Research Integrity "accept different things, they investigate different things, have different standards for it," and end with different appeals processes, said Ms. Gunsalus, a professor emeritus of business and director of the National Center for Professional and Research Ethics. The NIH has a more "legalistic" process, perhaps due to its experience with some high-profile misconduct allegations, Ms. Gunsalus said. The NSF has more flexibility to handle matters based on their severity, and it sometimes preserves the anonymity of researchers who commit relatively small infractions, she said.
"It’s actually been kind of useful to have these two experiments going on with different approaches," Ms. Gunsalus said. "The system is getting mature enough that it’s probably time to start reconciling and saying, Let’s take best practices from each and figure out how to move forward."

And that may be, eventually, where Congress ends up. The language in this year’s Competes Act already represents a drastic scaling down from the more-comprehensive proposals that the House science committee included in last year’s First Act, according to a Republican committee staff aide. The First Act, another attempt at setting broad science policy, did not win approval from Congress, and feedback from researchers led to the more limited language on misconduct this time, the aide said.

But the question of whether NSF and NIH policies for handling research misconduct should be better synchronized is "a good question, and one we will continue to consider and study," the aide said.

**Affirmative Action for State Research?**

Repeatedly during its crafting of the Competes Act, the House has emphasized accountability as a key principle in its drive to cut back agency spending.

The House appears intent, however, on perpetuating a $150-million-a-year exception to that war of fiscal frugality that it’s waging against NSF spending on social sciences, climate research, and student training.

As part of the legislation, the NSF would be ordered to keep in "robust" shape a 35-year-old program that directs grant money to states whose universities and researchers cannot win it on their own.

The program is known as the Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research, or EPSCoR. The most recent comprehensive review of the program, conducted in 2013 by the National Academies, affirmed longstanding doubts about whether it actually stimulates competitive research or just redistributes money away from the NSF’s normal peer-review system for judging scientific quality.

Despite several billion dollars of spending on the program over three decades, the study concluded, the same 10 states that received the most money from it in 1977 remain at the top of the list.

"Moreover, more than half of all states now receive EPSCoR funds, and no state that has participated in the program has permanently ‘graduated’ from it," the report said.
The language in the Competes Act seeking to protect EPSCoR was proposed as an amendment during consideration of the bill last month by the House science committee. The amendment, saying the program "should be a high priority" for the NSF, was offered by Rep. Mo Brooks, a Republican of Alabama, a state whose universities have received nearly $80 million through EPSCoR since 2009.

Its Republican author and backers have described the language as important in large part because the Republican-led Congress is taking steps to cut other parts of NSF’s budget.

Supporters acknowledge the EPSCoR program is a form of affirmative action, which they have opposed in other political contexts. But it is useful in this case, Republican proponents have said, because they argue it breaks down unfair biases that have managed to linger, in part due to NSF decision-makers' steering money toward their own alma maters.

Some Democrats do support EPSCoR, according to a staff aide on the minority side of the House science committee. But support is largely tied to states that receive the money, and those states are far more likely to have Republican representatives in Congress, the aide said.

That exposes a lack of logical consistency in Republican's attacks on other NSF programs on the grounds of accountability, said Albert H. Teich, a research professor of science, technology, and international affairs at George Washington University who served on the National Academies panel that studied EPSCoR. Yet Mr. Teich said he still supports EPSCoR.

"You get a lot of support and interest in places that haven’t traditionally been very much involved in science and technology, for a relatively modest amount of money," said Mr. Teich, a former director of science and policy programs at the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

One major problem identified by the study panel, Mr. Teich said, is that political pressures have led to the expansion of NSF’s EPSCoR program to the point where most states are now eligible, thereby diminishing its effectiveness for those that most need the boost. Five states were eligible at EPSCoR’s founding, in 1980; now it’s 31.

The Competes Act does not tackle the problem of EPSCoR’s growth and lack of hard data on effectiveness, though Congress may yet confront it. The Republican staff aide on the House science committee said lawmakers would like to give the NSF time to respond to the report from the National Academies — and to a subsequent study by
the nonprofit Institute for Defense Analyses that reinforced the academies' findings — before considering what steps they may take.

May 20, 2015

‘End of the World’? Knight Commission Hears 3 Visions for Stabilizing College Sports

By Andy Thomason

Washington

NO MU MENTION

College sports, perhaps more than any other arm of higher education, is busy planning for things that haven’t happened.

The current model of intercollegiate athletics is under assault from so many sides — including several legal challenges and a unionization effort by football players at Northwestern University — that decision makers are forced to puzzle over problems that only take the form of the proverbial elephant in the room, according to experts who spoke at a meeting of the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics here on Tuesday.

Three of the most notable elephants: the unionization effort at Northwestern, a lawsuit seeking to create a "free market" for players to sell their skills, and a federal judge’s ruling last year in a lawsuit, known as the O’Bannon case, that athletes may profit off the use of their likenesses.

If the National Collegiate Athletic Association loses its appeal of the O’Bannon ruling, "it’s not like the end of the world as we know it," said A.L. Spitzer, a tax lawyer who works with colleges. But if either of the other two come to pass, he said, it "really would end the world as we know it."

While other speakers on the same panel challenged that interpretation as hyperbolic, none denied that "the sand is shifting under the feet of the NCAA," as another panelist, Andrew Zimbalist, an economics professor at Smith College, put it.

Here are three measures the commission’s panelists said could put intercollegiate athletics on more solid ground.
1. A Presidential Commission
The argument for the creation of a presidential commission on college sports, which is hardly a new proposal, is bolstered by precedent, Mr. Zimbalist said. The structure surrounding American participation in the Olympics suffered a crisis in the 1970s after criticism over rules set by the Amateur Athletic Union regarding athletes’ rights and the amateur status of participants.
A presidential commission was formed to consider the issue. It recommended that the governance structure of Olympic participation be simplified. In 1978, Congress passed a law giving the U.S. Olympic Committee sole authority over American athletes’ participation in the games.

Advocates of a federal commission for college sports say that federal consideration of the issue could yield a similarly satisfying solution, and that the government may be the only body with the breadth and authority to deal with all the issues facing college sports.

Matt Mitten, director of Marquette University’s National Sports Law Institute, said a commission would go a long way toward resolving claims that athletes are being exploited because it would provide a formal process for all stakeholders to propose new measures.

2. An Antitrust Exemption for the NCAA
An antitrust exemption, which could be granted only by Congress, would make the association immune to the challenge brought in the O’Bannon case. But it’s unlikely to come to pass without "some kind of grand bargain," said Jeffrey Blattner, a lawyer and expert on antitrust law — meaning the association would probably have to make significant changes to satisfy lawmakers.

Trying to secure such an exemption would be "a fool’s errand," said Ronald Katz, board chairman of the Institute of Sports Law and Ethics at Santa Clara University. Rather, he said, the association should take action to counter its popular perception as a cartel — for instance, by saying institutions should limit athletic spending to 4 percent of their overall budgets.

But Jack Swarbrick, director of athletics at the University of Notre Dame, cautioned against demonizing the NCAA. "There is no NCAA," he said. "It is its members. A lot of the language here today has drawn a distinction between those two things. It doesn’t really exist."
3. Group Licensing for College Athletes

College athletes may secure the right to profit off their own images, but exactly how that would work is an open question. The federal judge who handed down the O’Bannon decision specified only that the NCAA could cap the amount players may earn at no lower than $5,000.

Doug Allen, a professor of practice at Pennsylvania State University and former official in the National Football League’s Players Association, used professional models to outline how group licensing for college athletes might work.

In Mr. Allen’s model, athletes’ arrangements would differ according to their team and would depend on how much revenue that team brought to the college. In any given year, a portion of the revenue generated by the team would be distributed among the players. It’s important that not just the star athletes be represented in the agreement, Mr. Allen said, because, for example, the injury of a football team’s star quarterback could allow a backup to step in and become just as marketable.

That kind of agreement applies only to athletes’ name and image rights, not the other ways they bring in money — through television deals, for instance. The "free market” lawsuit, brought by a former Clemson University football player, Martin Jenkins, has even broader implications than the O’Bannon ruling if it succeeds, Mr. Allen said.

Federal Error Rates Criticized

May 20, 2015

By Michael Stratford

NO MENTION

The U.S. Department of Education last fall switched its approach to estimating how much it improperly paid out in Pell Grants and student loans after officials learned their
initial methodology would have shown large jumps in erroneous payments, the
department’s watchdog unit said in a report issued Tuesday.

The revised methodology, which the department retroactively received permission from
the White House’s Office of Management and Budget to use, produced far lower
estimates of improper payments than the department’s original methodology, according
to the Office of Inspector General’s report.

The Education Department, like other federal agencies, is required to estimate each
year the rate at which some of its programs improperly dole out federal dollars. Such
erroneous payments include, for example, a student receiving a Pell Grant that is above
or below the amount for which he qualifies. It would also include a college not properly
returning federal loan money after a student withdraws from classes.

Historically, the department has estimated improper payments by taking a
representative sample of Pell Grant and loan recipients and looking at discrepancies
between their self-reported income data and their federal tax filings.

Last year, though, the department decided to take a new approach. It started
extrapolating improper payment rates based on the errors it happened to uncover
during audits of colleges during the previous year.

The department originally planned to weight its results based on the number of colleges
it audited. But after running those numbers, according to the report, the department
switched its approach. It instead weighted the improper payment rate based on the
total amount of dollars covered by the audits.

The change was dramatic. Had the department stuck to its original methodology, the
report says, its estimated improper payments for the Pell Grant program in fiscal year
2014 would have been about 4.28 percent, instead of the 2.16 percent rate it
published, representing a difference of about $669 million.

For the direct loan program, the department’s published improper payment rate was
1.5 percent, but the original methodology would have yielded a 2.64 percent rate, a
difference of $1.16 billion, according to the inspector general’s calculations.

Department officials rejected the report’s allegations about the methodology switch as
an “inaccurate representation” of what happened. In a letter responding to the report,
department officials said they redid the estimate out of concern for its statistical
reliability, not because they were unhappy with the original results.

“The methodology was changed not due to the estimate being higher, but rather due to
the inaccuracies within the estimate, which made the estimate an unreliable method,”
the officials wrote. “In other words, running the data through the methodology revealed
deficiencies in the methodology that needed to be addressed.”

The Office of Inspector General report also says that the department incorrectly told the
Office of Management and Budget just days before it published the final results on
erroneous aid payments that it had not changed the methodology, even though it
actually had.
It was only after the inspector general finished its investigation -- and some four months after the department finalized and published its improper payment rates -- that officials sought and received approval for the revised methodology, the report says. Aside from criticizing its sudden methodology switch, the inspector general's report takes aim at the department's overall approach to calculating the improper payment rate for student grants and loans.

The department’s estimates and methodologies were “inaccurate, incomplete and unreliable,” the report says.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Sharp End district remembered for 'togetherness'

PHILLIP SITTER, 9 hrs ago

COLUMBIA — When Charles Fry, 74, thinks back on Sharp End, he doesn't think about the parking garage that stands there now. He recalls nights of jazz and crowds of hundreds and rambling around with "Night Train" and the rest of his friends.

Sharp End, the historic black business district in downtown Columbia's northwest corner, exemplified the camaraderie and friendship between locals and people from Sedalia, Mexico, and Fulton — a single community that drew from all over mid-Missouri, Fry said.

About 200 people gathered Tuesday evening on Walnut Street between Fifth and Sixth streets — the old center of Sharp End — to commemorate the landmark area. Mayor Bob McDavid and other community leaders unveiled a plaque detailing Sharp End's place in Columbia's history. And for those who still remember the bustling district, the occasion was a chance to revisit "memories of people who've passed on," Fry said.

Sharp End itself passed on decades ago — the victim of urban renewal, said Mary Beth Brown, an MU doctoral student in history and an office support assistant in the Black Studies Department. She's also a member of the Sharp End Heritage Committee, a group that has compiled oral histories of the area and helped lead the effort to commemorate it.
Sharp End began in the 1900s as tenement housing for black families, Brown said, and over time, black-owned businesses moved into the area. There were restaurants, a pool hall, barbers and tailors, she said.

The Douglass School Urban Renewal Project, part of a national wave of urban renewal projects, changed all of that, Brown said.

The Columbia City Council adopted an urban renewal plan in September 1958, began executing it in May 1959 and completed it in July 1966, Brown said. By the time the project was complete, 300 structures were gone, replaced in parts by public housing and parking lots, she said.

"It wasn't just the black community (affected), but they bore the brunt," Brown said.

The Fifth and Walnut Parking Garage — where Sharp End businesses stood for a half-century — was an empty lot for the next 50 years, Brown said.

Even though physical evidence of Sharp End on Walnut Street is gone, memories remain. There was the Tiger Club theater, the Busy Bee Barbershop, the Blue Room pool hall.

Britani Lewis, standing on Walnut Street, remembered Vi's Cafe, owned by her great-grandmother Vitilla Monroe. "There were big tenderloin sandwiches for city workers when they got off," she said, adding that her family still has the recipes.

Cheryl Wright — Monroe's niece, born and raised in Columbia — helped at the cafe.

"I was too young to be allowed on one side of the street," she said, laughing. She worked at the counter, she said, and she still has "fond memories of the area."

"There was a lot of togetherness," she said.

Mable Ballenger remembers stopping by Vi's Cafe, along with other establishments in Sharp End. "I liked seeing people that we knew, getting in a group," she said.
"Sharp End was our main street, like Broadway was to everyone else," said Barbra Horrell, member of the Sharp End Heritage Committee, speaking to the crowd gathered Tuesday.

"Our children need to know there was a black business community in Columbia," she said.