Editorial: A Missouri tobacco tax hike should invest in people, not roads

August 15, 2015 • By the Editorial Board

Sometime in early 2016, if not before then, you may find yourself stopped outside a grocery store by a clipboard-wielding signature hound asking you about raising the tobacco tax. When the worker asks, keep this in mind: There is no longer a serious debate in Missouri over the basic proposition that the Show-Me State’s lowest-in-the-nation tobacco tax is way too low. Even the king of the 17-cent cigarette tax has now acknowledged that.

Last month a petition to raise the tax was filed with Secretary of State Jason Kander’s office by the Missouri Petroleum Marketers & Convenience Store Association. That group’s executive director, lobbyist Ron Leone, is one of the primary reasons why Missouri’s tax on a pack of cigarettes remains at 17 cents, well below the national average of $1.60.

Each of the last three times various Missouri groups have put a measure on the ballot asking voters to raise the tobacco tax for one cause or another — to fund schools, health care, smoking cessation or any combination thereof — Mr. Leone and his organization have led the opposition. Each time they have defeated the tax proposals.

But now Mr. Leone is on record endorsing a tobacco tax hike. To be fair, he’s testified in favor of tiny hikes before in legislative hearings, but putting his organization’s name behind a detailed, 135 percent tax increase seeking statewide ballot access actually helps the cause.

Mr. Leone wants the money for the wrong purpose, and he isn’t seeking to raise it high enough, but, hey, this is progress.

There are now two ballot initiatives on file with Mr. Kander’s office related to the tobacco tax. The more serious, and better conceived, proposal would raise the tobacco tax by 50 cents to fund early-childhood education proposals statewide. Called ”Raise Your Hand for Kids,” the campaign aims to raise $250 million a year for early childhood efforts in every county in the state, bypassing the Legislature and depending on local programs.

The group has filed several iterations of its proposed ballot measure with Mr. Kander as it settles on the details. But it has been building support, raising money and polling for about a year. It is a serious effort that would spend increased tobacco taxes on an underserved population in Missouri.

Mr. Leone, on the other hand, only wants to raise the tobacco tax by a measly 23 cents a pack. At 40 cents, Missouri would still have the lowest tax in this part of the country and the third-lowest nationwide. Mr. Leone’s group would dedicate the proceeds to transportation projects.

Make no mistake, Missouri’s highways (and mass transit) need a lot of help. But the solution there is to raise the state’s also woefully inadequate fuel taxes so the actual users pay the costs. That’s what is happening in most of Missouri’s border states. Iowa’s Legislature, for instance, raised its gas tax 10 cents this year. Mr. Leone’s proposal also has other issues. It is phased in over three years. It doesn’t apply the increase in taxes to existing inventory, giving an incentive to spread the three-year gains out even more. And it has a
sneaky poison pill: If another tobacco tax hike makes it to Missouri’s ballot in the future, this one would revert to zero. One step forward, two steps back.

Missouri voters already said no to an ill-advised general sales tax to shift the cost of highway maintenance from motorists to the poor and middle class when they voted down Amendment 7 last year. They would say no to this one, too, were it to make the ballot. Asking smokers to pay more for highways than drivers — and especially trucking companies — is clearly a bad idea.

We suspect part of Mr. Leone’s strategy is to head off a more serious proposal at the pass.

There has also been much talk in political circles of an even higher tobacco tax proposal under consideration by higher-education advocates. Attorney General Chris Koster, Treasurer Clint Zweifel (both Democrats) and University of Missouri President Tim Wolfe have all endorsed the concept of the Missouri Promise, a program to pay full in-state tuition costs for Missouri high school graduates who maintain a 3.0 grade-point-average and demonstrate civic responsibility.

There have been behind-the-scenes discussions between this group and the early childhood advocates, trying to avoid a conflict at the ballot box.

The bottom line is either proposal would be more worthy of support than the one put forth by the convenience store association to use a higher tobacco tax for roads.

But, to borrow from Shakespeare, we come here today to praise Mr. Leone, not to bury his proposal.

By admitting that the tobacco tax is ripe for a reasonable increase, he has provided a service to voters. That is a big deal. Now it is time for people who care about economic development to settle on a strategy to correct Missouri’s course on its current race-to-the-bottom trajectory.

Most national studies suggest investing in early childhood education will have the highest payoff down the road, though we’re big fans of the Missouri Promise concept, too.

Either makes a strong point. Missouri needs to start investing in its greatest asset: its people.

**MU hospital investigated for facilitating abortions**

Chancellor Loftin was called to testify on behalf of the MU hospital and their possible misuse of public funds.

As chairman of the Missouri Senate Interim Committee on the Sanctity of Life, Sen. Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, is leading the investigations against Planned Parenthood facilities in both St. Louis and Columbia as well as MU’s involvement in making abortion services available.
Hearings were held investigating whether the St. Louis Planned Parenthood facility was selling fetal tissue for profit, despite Planned Parenthood’s claims that no fetal donation program is in place in Missouri. The committee is also investigating the Columbia Planned Parenthood facility’s recent licensure to provide abortions.

While investigations in Indiana, Georgia, South Dakota and other states have concluded that Planned Parenthood is in accordance with all state laws, the investigation in Missouri continues as MU is also being questioned for their involvement in bringing abortion services back to Columbia.

MU Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin was called to testify at a hearing Aug. 25 as MU was accused of misusing public dollars and breaking the state law. Section 188.205 of the Missouri Revised Statutes outlines that it is “unlawful for any public funds to be expended for the purpose of performing or assisting an abortion, not necessary to save the life of the mother, or for the purpose of encouraging or counseling a woman to have an abortion not necessary to save her life.”

At the hearing, they discussed how St. Louis doctor Colleen McNicholas was hired to carry out abortion services as the physician for the Columbia Planned Parenthood facility with the possible help of MU hospital employees.

“There’s an awful lot of university employees that appear to be recruiting Dr. McNicholas to come to Columbia to basically resume abortion services at the facility, in part with the help of the university through some privileges from the university,” Schaefer said at the hearing.

Throughout the hearing Schaefer read through a series of emails from MU hospital employees regarding talks of bringing a physician to Columbia to resume abortion services. Schaefer questioned why it would be acceptable for MU, a publicly funded institution, be engaged in such activity.

Loftin defended the hospital, claiming that each University hospital doctor has to be credentialed in some manner, and that a lot of the funding for the MU hospital comes from federal dollars, rather than state funds. Loftin also read a statement he said was written by Robert Hess, who advises the University of Missouri System’s General Counsel regarding medical and hospital issues.

“Dr. McNicholas’s application was found to meet medical staff standards,” Loftin read. “The fact that a physician performs abortions at an outside facility is not lawful basis for the university of our privileges under federal law.”

Loftin said MU would potentially have to forfeit $150 million or more per year of public health service funding if they were to stop credentialing all qualified applicants, as that would be discriminatory.

Despite Loftin’s defense of the MU hospital, MU recently canceled agreements in place between the School of Medicine and the Sinclair School of Nursing on Aug. 24.
“There will be no impact on the graduate student training because that agreement hadn’t been used for many years,” said Teresa Snow, corporate director of strategic communications and media relations of MU Health Care.

The agreement was first arranged with the School of Medicine in Aug 2005, and prior to 2007 was required by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education to provide residence positions specializing in OB/GYN the option in training in a performance of abortions.

While the Planned Parenthood Columbia clinic was one location where training could take place, no residence positions ever chose to have that optional training, Snow said.

“One residence did train in other women’s health services between 2007 and 2015, but they did not choose to be trained in the performance of abortions,” Snow said.

However currently ACGME does not require that training position be offered, so no active agreements are in place with the School of Medicine as it is not longer a requirement and the agreement wasn’t being used, Snow said.

The decision to cancel the agreement was made by Loftin, Snow said, as the recent scandals surrounding Planned Parenthood prompted a more thorough review of MU’s policies.

“He asked all the schools and colleges to review the existing agreement, take a look at what we got, see if they’re still in use, see if they’re still needed, and the School of Medicine determined, we don’t need this agreement anymore, and they sent over to cancel it,” Snow said.

Graduate students in the School of Medicine still work with physicians at MU Health Care and train with women’s healthcare specialists in primary care settings at two Missouri OB/GYN associates.

Gail Vasterling, director of Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services, said in a letter written to Schaefer that Section 197.215.1 requires that surgical procedures be performed only by physicians who have surgical privileges. However, it does not require that a physician have surgical privileges if no surgical procedures will be performed at the facility, which means they can still be licensed to perform non-surgical, or medical abortions.

The Columbia Planned Parenthood facility was issued a license by the state of Missouri on July 15, according to a mid-Missouri Planned Parenthood news release, and is currently only providing medical abortions.

“We believe that, despite having conclusive evidence that Planned Parenthood of Kansas and Mid-Missouri does not donate tissue for medical research, Missouri legislators continue to spend valuable taxpayer dollars to convene interim committees with the sole purpose of spreading anti-abortion views and furthering an extreme political agenda to end access to safe, legal abortion in the state,” said Laura McQuade, president and CEO of Planned Parenthood of Kansas and Mid-Missouri, in a news release.
Rep. Mike Moon, R-Ash Grove, who is the vice chair of the Missouri House of Representatives Ways and Means Committee, which is conducting investigations into whether Planned Parenthood facilities are profiting off of fetal tissue in Missouri, said at a recent protest of the Columbia Planned Parenthood facility that there is currently no end date for the investigations, because many of the questions they posed were not answered sufficiently.

Investigations into Planned Parenthood facilities across the nation were sparked after the Center for Medical Progress, an anti-abortion organization, released edited videos of secretly recorded conversations of Planned Parenthood executives and staff, speaking about procedures to remove fetal tissue and distribute it to researchers.

It is unclear when the Sanctity of Life Committee’s next meeting will be, but Schaefer told Missourinet.com that it might not be until after the legislature’s veto session Sept. 16.

How much will stipends affect college recruiting?

Sept. 1, 2015 By TIM REYNOLDS

NO MENTION

CORAL GABLES, Fla. (AP) — An athlete has two offers to decide where to play for the next four years. One comes with considerably more cash than the other.

It only sounds like free agency.

These days, it's college recruiting.

A new stipend that scholarship athletes are receiving to pay for some of the things that their scholarship doesn't cover could be a game changer for college sports, especially since some believe that recruits could wind up making decisions based on which institution can put the most cash in their pocket.

"Money is a big thing in everybody's lives, so when you see money, people are going to think, 'Well, this school is offering $5,000 more. If it comes down to this and I can't decide, I'm going to take the $5,000 more,'" said Devin Bush Sr., the coach at Flanagan High in Pembroke Pines, Florida.
At schools like Alabama and Florida State, athletes will get between $4,500 and $6,000 a year. Some schools who compete against the Crimson Tide and Seminoles in the Southeastern and Atlantic Coast conferences won't come anywhere near that. Some schools outside of the five most powerful conferences won't offer the stipend at all.

The amounts are based on numbers calculated by each school's financial aid office to cover expenses not already factored into scholarship awards and often vary widely among players in the same locker rooms based on how far they live from school.

"On a scale of one to 10, I'll say it's a five," Cavin Ridley, a highly recruited wide receiver from Deerfield Beach High in Florida, said when asked how much the stipend number will matter to him. "It's not something I really care about. I'm going to be taken care of, regardless, while I'm in college. It'll help with the little things."

Generally, athletes who live far from their schools will get more than those who choose colleges in or near their hometowns.

"The more prominent schools have a lot to offer," said Roger Harriott, the coach at national power St. Thomas Aquinas High in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. "And they sell that."

Miami quarterback Brad Kaaya will receive more than most of his Hurricanes teammates, since his home is California and the figure accounts for the expense he'll incur flying back and forth across the country. Kaaya sees both sides of the issue, especially since he had to prepare a case — it was just homework, not his actual personal opinion — against cost of attendance for a class project in summer school a couple months ago.

"For the guys who come from out of state and can't afford plane tickets, all the things that you need outside of the facility, it works," Kaaya said. "I've heard it's a huge issue with basketball right now, guys shopping around, trying to get the most money in some cases. I don't think it's to the point where it's free agency, I don't think it will get to that point, but it does go into a gray area."

A very gray area. In all, 22 of 25 recruits from the South Florida area who were asked about the issue by the AP said schools had used disparities in the cost-of-attendance number as part of their sales pitch.

However, Alabama's Nick Saban insisted it's not part of how his team woos prospects.

"We don't talk to players about this," Saban said. "We talk about the value that we create in personal development, in the success that we've had with our players academically and their opportunity to develop a career off the field if they attend the University of Alabama. ... I think it's to improve the quality of the student-athlete's life, not to be used as a recruiting tool."

At the Atlantic Coast Conference media days earlier this summer, most players who were asked about cost of attendance seemed unsure of how it would work. But when asked how they would spend the extra money, the majority cited basics like food and rent — not exactly luxuries.

"Sometimes toward the end of the month, we're kind of low on our money," Florida State kicker Roberto Aguayo said. "I think it's good just to have that sense of security."

Many coaches cringe at the free agency comparison, but it's hard not to draw the parallel.

Signing days for football and basketball in the coming months will almost certainly show how much this money talks.

"I don't think that's the reason kids are going to make decisions on where they're going to go to school, I don't think it going to be based on a couple thousand dollars," said North Carolina football coach Larry Fedora,
Anti-GMO movement, ag research funding strike nerve with McCaskill

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

COLUMBIA — Sen. Claire McCaskill, D-Missouri, turned up the Midwestern charm Tuesday morning at Bay Farm Research Center, slamming the movement against genetically modified organisms and assuring MU researchers she wouldn't abide any bias against agricultural research from the National Science Foundation.

"It's ironic to me that the same group that's pounding the table about climate change wants to ignore the science with GMOs," she said. "If you believe in science, you believe in science. You can't just pick and choose depending on the issue."

She also told the agricultural genetics researchers in the room to toughen up and ignore "a small group of people (protesting the growth and sale of GMOs) making a lot of noise."

But McCaskill was alarmed when Tom McFadden, director of MU's division of animal sciences, told her the National Science Foundation seems to avoid funding the application-based research agriculture embraces, and agricultural researchers have learned to frame their projects as more academic research to receive money.

"You shouldn't have to disguise it," she said. "That's something I'd like to go to bat for in Washington if bias exists."

USDA funding for research is comparatively paltry, McFadden said, so "it would be helpful to have more access to the NSF money."
McCaskill also heard about a wealth of advancements being made in drought prevention, genetic research and energy efficiency, but there were complaints of unreliable state funding for several projects. Several researchers said they'd made progress on an idea, only to have funding pulled unexpectedly.

After commiserating with Missouri Soybean Association treasurer Ronnie Russell about East Coast snubs, including what she saw as excessive focus on the New York Yankees and Boston Red Sox in Ken Burns' 1994 documentary "Baseball" at the expense of the St. Louis Cardinals, McCaskill left for Kennett to continue her 13-city tour of the state's agriculture.

McCaskill began the day with a visit to Stanton Brothers Eggs in Centralia.

Other Missouri destinations will include Kansas City, St. Joseph, Mountain Grove, Springfield and Purdy, according to a news release.

McCaskill Visits MU Research Farm

Cutting-Edge Gene Tests May Improve Management of Autism

A pair of genetic tests could help parents and doctors better understand the numerous challenges that a child newly diagnosed with autism might face throughout life, a new study suggests.

The tests tracked down genes that could explain the nature of a child's autism susceptibility in nearly 16 percent of cases, according to findings published Sept. 1 in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

That number increased to almost 38 percent when researchers used the cutting-edge tests to assess children with certain physical abnormalities. These birth defects are an indication that those children had suffered developmental problems stretching back to the womb, said senior study author Dr. Bridget Fernandez, chair of genetic medicine at Memorial University of Newfoundland in Canada.

Fernandez and her colleagues anticipate that genetic testing of children with autism will continue to increase. She and some other experts believe that, based on the study results, doctors should encourage these tests for kids who show physical signs of developmental problems.

Doctors may be better able to care for children with autism using these tests, because they will have a basic genetic understanding of the kid's condition, Fernandez said.

For example, the genes linked to a child's autism might predispose them to obesity or diabetes.

Another autism-linked gene can make children much more prone to seizures, said Mathew Pletcher, vice president and head of genomic discovery for Autism Speaks.

"With that knowledge, now you can start to plan for, prescribe for and treat for those [pending] health issues," Pletcher added.

The two genetic tests are called chromosomal microarray analysis and whole-exome sequencing. "They are two very comprehensive tests that haven't been around for too long," Fernandez said.

Chromosomal microarray analysis identifies abnormalities in a person's chromosomes, and already is recommended as a first-tier genetic test for people with autism, the researchers said in background notes.

Whole-exome sequencing examines the protein-encoding parts of all of someone's genes, to look for potential disease-causing anomalies. This test is used mainly in a research setting, Fernandez explained.
It's estimated that one in 68 American children is on the autism spectrum. The term refers to a group of complex disorders of brain development.

To examine the tests' potential, the research team used them to assess 258 unrelated children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. Their average age was 4.5 years.

Separately, each test was able to track potential genetic causes of autism about equally -- about 9 percent for chromosomal microarray analysis and more than 8 percent for whole-exome sequencing.

But the combined tests were effective almost 16 percent of the time. And that effectiveness more than doubled when assessing kids with subtle physical signs of developmental problems, such as differences in the creases on a palm or an oddly shaped ear, the researchers said.

Fernandez expects that the effectiveness of the tests will increase over time, as researchers identify more genes related to autism. "There are still things out there that we don't know to look for," she said.

She hopes that knowledge of the genetics behind autism will lead to medications that target those particular faulty genetic pathways. In that case, these tests could help doctors prescribe appropriately targeted drugs to autistic children.

Years down the line, the tests might also be useful in screening siblings of children diagnosed with autism, to see whether they might develop problems related to autism, she said.

But at this point "the tests aren't cheap," Fernandez said. Whole-exome sequencing can run from $3,000 to $5,000, while chromosomal microarray analysis costs about $1,500, she said.

**Despite this, the tests are so useful that parents of an autistic child should consider them even if their child underwent a genetic exam years ago, said Dr. Judith Miles, a professor emerita of child health genetics at the University of Missouri’s Thompson Center for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders.**

"Things have changed," Miles said. "Families who were evaluated a while ago, it's very reasonable to come back and allow us to have another look. These tests give you a more specific diagnosis that lets us personalize the care."
MU professor designs app to help high schoolers learn physics

Watch story: http://www.komu.com/player/?video_id=30308&zone=5&categories=5

COLUMBIA - MU professors designed a new app that is now available to high school physics teachers and students.

Meera Chandrasekhar and her team designed "Exploring Physics" over the last six years. The app has two sections, one for students and one for teachers. The student section of the app allows a student to enter data, draw diagrams, make graphs and turn in their homework.

"It is an interactive app," said Chandrasekhar. "The app functions as a combined workbook and lab book and text book at the same time."

Teachers can use the app to watch videos on how to set up experiments, read through lesson plans and grade homework.

The developers are still working through some bugs and early issues. Chandrasekhar said three of the eight units are still being finalized.

Chandrasekhar said the current high school physics curriculum has been widely accepted for 15 to 20 years. The difference in Exploring Physics is that the research team took that curriculum and designed it specifically for high school freshman.

"Ninth grade is not a typical place where students take physics," said the professor. "Even though that is the preferred time at which a student should take physics because it sort of teaches them the basic fundamental principles that can be used in chemistry and biology."

Chandrasekhar said she hopes Exploring Physics will be used in classrooms in the next academic year. The challenge will be whether school districts provide iPad tablets to all students.
"Schools have begun to move toward having tablets and laptop computers for students. For example, locally at Battle High School all students have iPads. Many of the other schools in Missouri are going to either laptops or iPads," Chandrasekhar said.

MU Law Expert Says Cost is Driving Change in Legal System


Documentary journalism program starts classes at MU

By Megan Favignano

Tuesday, September 1, 2015 at 2:00 pm

Steve Gieseke, a junior at the University of Missouri, grew up with movies. Gieseke said his family frequently watched films together, which led him to pursue a career in the industry. When he starts his film career, Gieseke said, he wants to create documentaries. That pursuit became tricky when it came time to pick a major his freshman year.
“They didn’t have anything like that when I came here as a freshman, so I was in photojournalism,” he said.

Gieseke had planned to combine photojournalism and film studies, but this fall he was able to become one of the first students to enroll in MU’s new documentary journalism program.

The Jonathan B. Murray Center for Documentary Journalism at MU’s School of Journalism held its first classes last week. Stacey Woelfel, associate professor and director of the Murray Center, said many students faced the same dilemma as Gieseke before the program started.

“The school has served people interested in documentaries over the years by sort of putting square pegs in round holes,” Woelfel said. “We had people come through who said, ‘Well, I want to make documentaries, but you don’t have a documentary program, so I’m going to be in TV.’ Or they would do the same thing in photojournalism or convergence.”

Those students, Woelfel said, often had to substitute courses and pursue independent studies to gain the skills they wanted. The new program’s curriculum will prepare students to be filmmakers and to work for production companies and networks.

Woelfel said faculty members are honest with students and often say most of them won’t be independent filmmakers. Instead, he said, most graduates will work for someone else and have documentary projects on the side.

“Making a living as an independent filmmaker is hard,” he said.

So far, 19 undergraduate students have signed up for the program, which is open as an interest area for undergraduates and as a master’s option for graduate students. Woelfel said he expects about five graduate students to enroll.

Aside from the student demand for a documentary interest area, Woelfel said there also was desire from the industry. After MU received the necessary funding to start the program, Woelfel said, some of his television network contacts told him they were interested in hiring documentary journalism interns.

True/False Film Festival founders Paul Sturtz and David Wilson have been involved with the Murray Center since its initial planning meetings, Woelfel said. Documentary journalism students will be required to attend the festival.

Jon Murray, co-creator of MTV’s “The Real World,” donated $6.7 million to MU last year to start the program. MU selected Woelfel, who was the news director at KOMU-TV, to serve as director of the Murray Center.

MU selected documentary filmmaker Robert Greene to serve as the program’s filmmaker-in-chief. He and Woelfel both are teaching a class this fall. Faculty from journalism and film studies also will teach courses for the program, Woelfel said.
Courses required for the program include micro-documentary photojournalism and videography, documentary business and the public sphere, communications law, and a senior documentary project. Entrepreneurship, Woelfel said, is an important part of the program’s curriculum because students will need that background to produce independent projects after they graduate.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Columbia elementary schools to help test MU behavioral intervention program

YUAN YUAN, 14 hrs ago

COLUMBIA — Fifth-graders in Columbia Public Schools will soon get a chance to participate in an MU research project to evaluate a school intervention program called the Self-Monitoring Training and Regulation Strategy, or STARS.

“There’s not a lot of behavioral support interventions for kids that are really struggling,” said Aaron Thompson, an assistant professor in the MU School of Social Work and the developer of STARS. “We hope to teach kids strategies that help them make better decisions, help them solve problems, monitor solutions to problems and manage their own internal responses to external stimuli.”

Thompson and his collaborators have received nearly $3.5 million from the U.S. Department of Education to evaluate STARS in a dozen schools. The project targets fifth-graders, because they are about to make the transition from elementary to middle school.

STARS is a selective intervention program for fifth-graders who show disruptive or challenging behavior in the classroom, according to a STARS method summary. It has nine lessons, each 35 to 40 minutes long, that generally target decision-making, problem-solving, self-awareness and self-regulation skills, Thompson said.
School counselors, school social workers and others with a background in human services or psychology can be trained to deliver the intervention to small groups of students. Students learn self-management through practice.

“After we give them basic lessons and skills, we practice on a weekly basis,” Thompson said. “These students develop some goals, mostly targeting behavior. They monitor their progress on achieving those goals. And the teachers also monitor their behavior.”

At the end of each day, students will get their daily total percentage of performance. They will meet with their counselors once a week to look at the collected data and rewrite their goals for the coming week using that data.

Thompson developed STARS based on his experience as a principal and a school social worker. As a school principal, he ran an educational program for children with social or emotional disorders, and he saw positive effects on students participating in the self-monitoring program. The program later developed into STARS.

He first tested STARS about two years ago. At the end of the study, he said, students who were in the STARS program had improved their social competency, classroom behaviors and relationships with teachers.

This time, researchers are able to follow fifth-grade students into sixth grade to see the long-term effects. The latest project will last for four years. Researchers will screen all fifth-graders in the selected schools and select 108 students with particularly challenging behavioral risks each year for three years and observe their behavioral changes from one year to the next. The selected students will need their parents’ consent to participate.

Researchers will measure students' behavior, academic achievement and relationships to evaluate the effectiveness of STARS.

“We anticipate that the training associated with this program will help provide our school counselors with yet another tool to assist students’ social, emotional and academic growth,”
Susan Perkins, Columbia Public Schools’ elementary guidance and school counseling coordinator wrote in an email. “The latest research points to the effectiveness of incorporating mindfulness within the academic setting to enhance learning and retention.”

STARS intervention will provide an evidence-based tool that will help students monitor and take responsibility for their own behavior, Perkins said.

“A lot of times, with many other school interventions, we locate the problems in the child and try to manipulate variables around the child rather than promoting their involvement, supporting their autonomy and trying to open up the opportunity to build a better relationship with the students,” Thompson said.

Compared to other interventions, STARS enables students to be more engaged and to have better relationships with teachers, which can lead to behavioral change, Thompson said.

“What we want to do is to examine ultimately on the outcomes,” Thompson said. “I expect to see significant improvements in behavior, and I believe we will see improvements in their social skills.”

If the project proves the effectiveness of STARS, Thompson said he plans to develop a website and make the program accessible for schools and “anybody who would want to put this in the tool bag of things to use in schools.”

New Dean Loboa hopes to continue trend of growth for MU College of Engineering

During the 20-year tenure of former Dean James Thompson, the College of Engineering saw its enrollment more than double and its research and education programs in bioengineering, computer science and information technology expand.
Thompson stepped down from his position September 2014. The college is under new leadership now.

**Elizabeth Loboa, who is currently serving as chair of the biomedical engineering department at UNC-Chapel Hill and North Carolina State University, will officially take the reins of the MU College of Engineering as dean on Oct. 15 of this year.**

“We are excited to have Elizabeth join the university,” Provost Garnett Stokes said in a news release. “As a renowned researcher and educator with comprehensive knowledge in biomedical engineering and economic development, as well as a passion for mentoring students, faculty and staff, she is well qualified to lead the College of Engineering at Mizzou.”

Loboa attended University of California-Davis for her undergraduate education where she earned a degree in mechanical engineering. After that, she attended graduate school at Stanford University, where she received a master’s degree in biomechanical engineering and her doctorate in mechanical engineering.

As she continued her education, the idea of becoming a professor sounded more and more appealing to her, Loboa said.

“The ability to teach and mentor incredible students, run an impactful research program and interact with fantastic colleagues sounded like my dream job,” she said in an email.

Upon receiving her doctorate, Loboa became an associate professor at Stanford for a year. That job eventually led her to North Carolina, where she was the first external hire for the joint department of biomedical engineering at UNC and NCSU.

Loboa spent 11 years as a professor at UNC and NCSU, and while she wasn’t actively looking to make the jump to become a dean, but when the position became available at MU, Loboa knew it was an opportunity she couldn’t pass up.

“The opportunity at Mizzou was the specific reason why I decided to become a dean,” Loboa said. “Mizzou Engineering is a great college with potential to be even greater. I am honored to have been selected to lead the college.”

Loboa said she also looks forward to working collaboratively with students and other programs across campus.

“The potential for interdisciplinary collaborations and cross-cutting technology development between the College of Engineering and other colleges and schools at Mizzou is fantastic,” Loboa said.

When she arrives at MU in October, Loboa said she plans on doing a “listening and learning tour” to learn about all of the departments within the College of Engineering.
“I am a believer in data-driven metrics, strategic planning, and openness and transparency in the decision making process,” Loboa said. “I will not initiate a specific agenda until I actually start my position and have all data in hand.”

Loboa also plans to use data-driven metrics to address the lack of gender diversity in the College of Engineering. Less than 20 percent of the engineering school is female, and according the Women in Engineering website, the school loses “substantial numbers of female students during their first year.”

Loboa will join a select group of female deans in engineering programs. According to the Beverly Willis Architecture Foundation, there are fewer than 30 across the country.

“The lack of women in engineering and their attrition is an unfortunate reality in many universities across the country,” Loboa said. “I hope that women in engineering at Mizzou take pride in the fact that their university hired a female dean of engineering and, along with the recent hire of a female provost, see that as yet another example of the commitment that I believe Mizzou has in this area.”

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Gartner's future with Business Loop CID unclear after debt, delayed sales tax vote

BLAKE NELSON, 13 hrs ago

COLUMBIA — Carrie Gartner, the executive director for the Business Loop Community Improvement District, said Tuesday that she will have to talk with the district's board about her future.

"My role with the organization…there's not money for that," Gartner said.

Gartner, whose salary is $70,000 plus benefits, would not say that she is resigning, citing the need to discuss personnel issues in closed meetings. “That is a discussion I need to have with my board.”
The board of directors for the Business Loop CID had counted on revenue from a proposed sales tax to pay Gartner, address debt the district accrued during its formation and to begin improvement plans on the Business Loop. Board members are not paid.

**The board on Monday postponed a vote on whether the sales tax will appear on the ballot after members realized the district consisted of one registered voter, MU student Jen Henderson. Henderson, after days of publicly questioning the sales tax, said Tuesday she would vote no on it if it were to appear on a ballot.**

“She’s just a voter who wants to express her right to vote,” Richard Reuben, an MU law professor and lawyer who is part of the legal team representing Henderson, said before she made her decision. He said Henderson was not interested in litigation, but hoped her involvement would “lead to a better CID.”

Attorney Josh Oxenhandler is also representing Henderson.

If there were no registered voters in the district, Missouri law would allow property owners to vote on the sales tax.

The district's property owners have already approved a new property tax, estimated to bring in about $50,000 a year. But that alone would not cover Gartner’s salary, or the district's debt.

The district has racked up $65,000 in legal fees and $15,000 in petition fees, on top of the salary paid to Gartner thus far, according to a financial statement on the district's website. Gartner said many costs have since increased, and the total debt now exceeds $110,000.

The absence of the sales tax also makes it unlikely that improvement plans the district had for the Business Loop would be possible, although the board has identified few specific projects.

Michael Maw, president of the Ridgeway Neighborhood Association adjacent to the Business Loop, said in an email that general plans for the Loop are "hopeful, yet vague."
“Which is fine at this stage, but the CID needs to develop a clear, detailed design...of what is actually achievable,” Maw said.

With almost no revenue, addressing debt may be all that’s achievable.

September 2, 2015

How One State Reduced In-State Tuition for Undergrads

By Sarah Brown

The rarity of a public-college tuition cut became a reality this year in Washington State, where lawmakers approved a reduction for state residents over the next two years. At some institutions, the price tag will fall by one-fifth for in-state undergraduate students.

Every campus will see a 5 percent cut this year, and for 2016-17, students enrolled at four-year colleges and universities will see tuition fall by an additional 10 or 15 percent. Lawmakers also will tie tuition levels to the state’s median family income starting in 2017 in an effort to keep college costs down in the future. (Some campuses are raising tuition for nonresidents and graduate students, although the increases vary and are generally small.)

The state’s college officials were cautious about a tuition cut for several months; their support was contingent on the state's backfilling the millions of dollars in lost revenue with additional financing. But once lawmakers fulfilled that promise with $200 million in state funds over the next two years, college leaders backed the final plan, which the Legislature passed in June.

Given the increasing public attention on college affordability and student-loan debt, including in the 2016 presidential race, Washington State’s move has generated buzz among lawmakers and administrators nationwide. Still, several volatile factors had to
align at once — including finances and politics — for Washington's tuition cut to take place.

In some states grappling with budget deficits, such a reduction is probably out of reach for now, and tuition cuts might not be sustainable in Washington State or elsewhere without new taxes or an economic boom. Some observers also assert that extra state funds should be used as financial aid for low-income and middle-class students, not wealthier students who can already afford to pay.

How the Debate Was Framed
From 2008-9 to 2014-15, Washington State posted the nation’s third-biggest increase in public-college tuition in terms of inflation-adjusted dollars, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Over that time frame, Washington’s average rate statewide went up 58.6 percent, or $4,009, when adjusted for inflation, compared with a 29-percent average increase nationwide.

Keeping that trend in mind, lawmakers in both parties agreed at the start of the legislative session that they needed to make a meaningful investment in higher education, said Rep. Ross Hunter, a Democrat and chief budget writer in the state's House of Representatives. The debate concerned what that investment might look like; the tuition-cut plan was a top priority for Republicans.

In Washington the Legislature has control over tuition levels, and the governing boards of the state’s college and universities don’t play much of a role. That structure could increase the likelihood of a tuition cut, said Thomas L. Harnisch, director of state relations and policy analysis at the American Association of State Colleges and Universities.

A tuition reduction is a more concrete outcome for lawmakers to tout to constituents than, for instance, improved institutional quality, he said.

Republicans introduced a bill in February to cut tuition. When college officials delivered their first legislative testimony, early in the session, they emphasized that such a cut would harm campuses unless the state made up for the lost revenue, said Chris Mulick, director of state relations for Washington State University.

Administrators worked with lawmakers on the development of the tuition legislation as well as the budget bill, Mr. Mulick said, conversing regularly throughout the spring.

Democrats initially pushed back against an across-the-board cut, instead proposing to freeze tuition and increase the number of state-financed grants for less-wealthy
students, Mr. Hunter said.

An early version of the Republicans’ bill would have cut tuition by 25 percent at four-year institutions but kept it flat at community colleges. GOP lawmakers eventually backed down to secure Democrats’ support for a more modest, but still significant, cut on every public campus.

The final plan requires the state to find about $200 million for public colleges, much of it to make up for lost tuition revenue. Republicans agreed to close some corporate-tax loopholes to raise the funds, Mr. Hunter said.

Doubts Remain

Sen. Andy Hill, a Republican and chief budget writer in the Senate, said he hoped higher-education investments would, in the future, become "baked into the budget" in Washington State. He expressed confidence that tying tuition to the median family income would not only control college costs but make them more predictable.

Mr. Mulick wasn’t so sure about long-term funding. He added that lawmakers have enacted higher-education policies in the past, such as a measure granting tuition-setting authority to the colleges’ governing boards, that did not persist for long.

It is difficult to predict the long-term stability of state spending on higher education given economic ups and downs, Mr. Hunter said. Also, the tuition cut was financed in large part by a one-time move to close tax loopholes, he said.

And while tying tuition to income makes sense in many ways, said Dustin Weeden, a policy specialist at the National Conference of State Legislatures, it means that "wild fluctuations" in state funding could be devastating for colleges and universities.

Another lingering question for Washington, and potentially other states, concerns which students should benefit from college-affordability investments. Mr. Hunter said the funds that offset the tuition cut could have been used more effectively, to increase the number of grants given to middle-class and low-income students. A tuition freeze would have provided enough relief to students who could already afford to pay for college, he said.

The tuition cut came with a corresponding reduction in the state’s college-grant program. It made sense from a budgetary standpoint: A decline in tuition meant less money was needed to keep financial aid at the same support levels.

But similar debates about who should benefit from such measures — all students, or primarily less-affluent students — could get heated in other states, Mr. Mulick said.
"We had never viewed that as an either-or type of deal," he said.

Most states have not returned spending to prerecession levels, Mr. Weeden said, but improving economic outlooks are freeing up more funds for higher-education spending. So it is possible that other states will soon look to Washington State’s plan for inspiration, he said, adding that tying tuition to the median family income might be another policy that proves viable elsewhere.

One factor to keep in mind, he said, is that lawmakers in other states might demand that colleges absorb some or all of the costs of a tuition cut, which could be problematic.

Also, even if a state provided money to make up for lost tuition revenue from a cut, such a plan may not gain college officials’ support if lawmakers don’t provide money for other higher-education priorities, Mr. Mulick said.

If a tuition cut "crowded out other needed investments in higher education like compensation and enhancing access," he said, "it would’ve been hard for us to swallow."

September 2, 2015

Where Scott Walker Got His Utilitarian View of Higher Education — and Why It Matters

By Eric Kelderman

In the spring of 1990, Scott Walker, then a senior at Marquette University, decided to leave college before finishing his degree. A job in finance had opened up at the American Red Cross in Milwaukee, and Mr. Walker, now the governor of Wisconsin and a Republican candidate for president, leapt at the opportunity. "Certainly, I wanted an education for more than a job," he has since said, "but my primary purpose was to get a job."
It’s impossible not to consider that statement when regarding the governor’s recent gambits in higher-education policy.

In January, when Governor Walker released his proposed budget for the next two years, he put the finances and mission of Wisconsin’s university system front and center. He recommended granting the system autonomy from several state regulations, but as part of the deal he proposed to cut $300 million from the University of Wisconsin budget over two years while freezing tuition. In addition, he pushed to remove protections for tenure and shared governance from state law.

Those proposals set off a storm of controversy within the state and led to head-shaking from higher-education advocates across the country. With the cuts, Wisconsin became one of just a handful of states planning to reduce its spending on higher education. The plan for autonomy, which came with a high price, smelled too much like part of the governor’s privatization agenda, which had already made many observers in the state wary.

The kicker came when it was discovered that Governor Walker’s budget proposal would have gutted the "Wisconsin Idea" — the university system’s mission statement, ensconced in state law, that had long been a point of pride in the state. The Wisconsin Idea sets the system’s goals to "extend knowledge and its application beyond the boundaries of its campuses and to serve and stimulate society."

"Inherent in this broad mission are methods of instruction, research, extended training and public service designed to educate people and improve the human condition," reads the state law. "Basic to every purpose of the system is the search for truth." The proposed budget sought to excise "knowledge," "truth," and "public service," while adding a goal for the system to meet the state’s work-force needs.

Mr. Walker quickly backtracked on those changes, but the episode made the governor’s position seem clear: The value of a college degree, in his view, can be measured largely by the job that a graduate gets, and colleges are spending too much money and time on things that do not serve that mission. Thanks to his presidential bid, Mr. Walker’s take on higher education — and the policies that accompany that position — is now coming under scrutiny from a wider public audience. In a crowded presidential field, and among sitting governors, he is perhaps the strongest proponent of such a utilitarian view. He is influential, but he is not alone.

Peter A. Lawler, a conservative scholar at Berry College, says the governor’s treatment of higher education as a career-preparation service is a bipartisan problem,
based on the exaggerated ideas that colleges are inefficient and that the liberal arts are not valuable on the job market.

"The personal element of education is under attack," says Mr. Lawler. "Walker is doing that, but so is the U.S. Department of Education."

No Surprises
Like his political hero, Ronald Reagan, Governor Walker has routinely taken aim at higher education in both policies and public statements. In 1967, Reagan, who was then governor of California, rationalized budget cuts in higher education by saying that taxpayers shouldn’t be subsidizing "intellectual curiosity." Governor Walker has suggested that "maybe it’s time for faculty and staff to start thinking about teaching more classes and doing more work."
Jay Heck, executive director of Common Cause in Wisconsin, says that Governor Walker uses lines like his comment about faculty members' not working hard enough as a familiar trope to garner support from conservatives. "I think he’s interested in higher education from an ideological aspect: cutting tenure, making life miserable for liberals in Madison," Mr. Heck says.
To a certain degree those lines have worked, says Mr. Heck, both in Wisconsin and in Iowa, a key battleground for presidential candidates.

As governor, Mr. Walker has made some faculty members miserable too. In 2011, shortly after he was elected, he introduced a bombshell bill eliminating collective-bargaining rights for state employees, known as Act 10, without having discussed it during the campaign.

The element of surprise has been a hallmark of many of Governor Walker’s main policy proposals: There was also no advance notice of this year’s higher-education proposals, for example. But look back at the arc of the governor’s tenure, and it’s hard to be shocked by his latest attempts to overhaul the university system.

The idea of cutting regulatory red tape for higher education — a common refrain that has been taken up by influential Republicans like U.S. Sen. Lamar Alexander, leader of the Senate education committee — was part of the governor’s first legislative session, in 2011. At the time, Carolyn A. (Biddy) Martin, then chancellor of the system’s flagship, in Madison, argued that granting the university more freedom from state regulations would save money over the long haul. That proposal was roundly rejected by state legislators, and a few months later Ms. Martin resigned her post to become president of Amherst College.
Even before the most recent economic downturn, higher-education leaders in Wisconsin and across the country argued for cutting regulations as a means of
operating more efficiently and saving the institutions money. In Wisconsin that cause has also been taken up by libertarian activists, including several of Mr. Walker’s key political supporters, says Noel Radomski, director of the Wisconsin Center for the Advancement of Postsecondary Education at the University of Wisconsin at Madison.

The Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, a right-leaning think tank, has produced several papers since 2001 arguing that the university system should face less centralized control from the state, and even its own Board of Governors, in order to spur economic development, make it more accountable to the public, and allow the flagship to join the ranks of elite public universities. Jon Hammes, a member of the institute’s Board of Directors, is now co-chairman of Mr. Walker’s fund-raising efforts for the Republican nomination.

The research institute receives much of its financial support from the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, whose chief executive, Michael Grebe, was chairman of Mr. Walker’s 2010 and 2014 gubernatorial campaigns and is now chairman of the governor’s presidential campaign. The foundation has been a longtime player in the state’s higher-education politics. In the late 1990s, for example, it gave $100,000 to a group of faculty members challenging a speech code at the Madison campus. Neither the institute nor the foundation responded to requests for comment.

Despite that backing, the Wisconsin Legislature, which is dominated by Republicans, eventually rejected all of the governor’s proposed regulatory freedoms for the university system, fearing that tuition would soon spiral out of control. At the same time, lawmakers pared the proposed budget cuts by just $50 million, agreed to the tuition freeze, and removed protections for tenure and shared governance from state law.

‘Command and Control’

Many faculty members opposed the regulatory autonomy and were not sorry to see it fail. But over all, they considered the legislative session a disaster: the result not only of misperceptions about the university’s operations but also of a highly polarized political environment in the state. Many professors and observers say much of the blame for that polarization lies with a governor who is more interested in a narrow ideological victory than a broad bipartisan consensus.

Despite fears of privatization, Governor Walker’s proposals weren’t meant to privatize the system, says Mr. Radomski. Instead, he argues, they were intended to gain more control of the system through the Board of Regents, which the governor appoints, and a cooperative system president. "A lot of it, when you boil it down, is command and control," Mr. Radomski says.
That is a big change for a state considered the birthplace of the modern progressive movement in the United States — a place where the university system had broad bipartisan support and Republicans had to be centrists in order to win elections. But the political dynamic began to change during the late 1980s, says former U.S. Rep. Steve Gunderson, a moderate Republican who was elected to Congress in 1980 after defeating an incumbent Democrat.

The economic challenges of that decade led many conservatives to seek out candidates seen as more ideologically pure, says Mr. Gunderson, who is now president of the Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities. "People wanted to build walls around themselves and blame someone else."

And that is the style that Governor Walker has embraced for his political career, Mr. Gunderson says.

"I watched him in his first term when he went after public-retiree programs, and I wondered why he didn’t declare an economic emergency," Mr. Gunderson says. "Instead he polarized the state: You cannot have a discussion with family and friends who might have a different opinion."

When it comes to polarization and fierce debate over higher education, Wisconsin is hardly alone. Governors across the political spectrum are now looking to higher education as a way to bolster their economies. Several have criticized degree programs and faculty members who, they complain, are not contributing to the economy, often as the rationale for cutting higher education’s budget.

Gov. Rick Scott, Republican of Florida, has questioned the value of majors like anthropology and began an effort to examine faculty pay and productivity. In North Carolina, Gov. Pat McCrory, also a Republican, has suggested that state support for higher education be overhauled to promote majors that create jobs and not the liberal arts, and has specifically criticized gender studies as a field that should not be subsidized by the state.

At the same time, campus leaders have for more than a decade touted the income benefit that comes with a college degree, usually as a way to prove their economic value to the state.

We’ve gotten to this point because the nation’s only broad economic-development strategy is to send more people to college, says Carol Geary Schneider, president of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, which advocates for the liberal arts in higher education. While that makes a college degree essential, it also
puts higher education on the hot seat for the success or failure of the nation’s economy, she says.

And Governor Walker has been as happy as any political leader to keep colleges on that hot seat. Doing so may have helped him establish his conservative credentials, and it has certainly influenced the national debate over the role of public higher education.

But Common Cause's Mr. Heck predicts that the governor’s divisive style and policies are too narrowly tailored and may cost him in the presidential election. Even though Mr. Walker has won two gubernatorial elections and survived a recall attempt, Mr. Heck says, he has never run in the same year as a presidential election. During those years, a broader slice of the electorate comes out to vote, and Wisconsin hasn’t voted for a Republican presidential candidate since 1984.

We may soon find out if Mr. Walker’s aggressive utilitarianism plays in a national context. Mr. Heck has his doubts. "If you look at everyone who’s running for president," he says, "Governor Walker has very little crossover appeal."