MU nursing school to enter into new agreements with Planned Parenthood

ELISE SCHMELZER, 10 hrs ago

COLUMBIA — Two months after MU canceled 10 contracts with Planned Parenthood, new agreements will again allow nursing students at the university to gain clinical experience at the health care provider's clinics.

Three nursing students have requested to complete their clinical rotations at Planned Parenthood clinics during the spring semester, MU Health Care spokeswoman Teresa Snow said. As of Tuesday evening, one student had been approved to work at the health care provider's Independence, Missouri, location.

The other two students requested to work at the clinic in Columbia, but their agreements are still under review by Planned Parenthood and the university's legal team, she said.

Snow said she expects the university to finalize all three contracts "sooner rather than later."

Between Aug. 21 and Sept. 3, MU canceled 10 agreements that allowed nursing and medical students to gain practical experience at Planned Parenthood facilities in five cities in four states. In September, University of Missouri Health System spokeswoman Mary Jenkins said the agreements were canceled because they hadn't been used "for quite some time."

The three new agreements only allow a specific student to work with Planned Parenthood and have defined start and end dates, Snow said. The previous agreements could be used for multiple students and did not have definite end dates.
The new agreements also include specific clauses prohibiting students from helping provide abortions or counseling a woman to have an abortion, Snow said. Missouri law prohibits public funds from being used to perform or assist abortions not necessary to save the life of the mother.

Snow didn't know what specific tasks the nursing students would do while at the clinics but said the students would "work closely with a practicing health care provider to gain skills and knowledge."

Under the previous contracts, nursing students were not allowed to assist with abortions. Their training included instruction on birth control, female health exams and cancer screenings. One nursing student completed an elective clinical rotation at the Planned Parenthood clinic in Overland Park, Kansas, earlier this year and another worked at the Independence clinic in 2014, Snow said. The Columbia location hosted its most recent nursing student in 2009.

The MU School of Social Work maintains an agreement with Planned Parenthood that allows students to work with social workers and learn about health care policy. No social work students were working with the health care provider this semester, Snow said.

The relationship between MU and Planned Parenthood has been the focus of intense scrutiny since July when the Missouri Senate Interim Committee on the Sanctity of Life began investigating the health care provider's operations in Missouri.

The cancellations of the agreements and University Hospital's decision to rescind the privileges Planned Parenthood's doctor needs to provide abortions in Columbia have prompted protests on campus and petitions criticizing the university's decisions.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

MU students petition in support of Jefferson statue and legacy on campus

MADELINE MCCLAIN, RUTH SERVEN, 11 hrs ago

COLUMBIA — A U.S. flag was draped around Thomas Jefferson's shoulders. Sticky notes stuck to the bench on which the statue sat described Jefferson: patriot, freedom fighter and president.

Olivia Kohring held a clipboard and began gathering signatures to support keeping Jefferson’s bronze statue on Francis Quadrangle. Kohring, director of communications for Mizzou College Republicans, said the group organized the event in response to a petition and previous protest of Jefferson's statue.

On Oct. 7, protesters covered the statue with sticky notes labeling Jefferson a racist, misogynist and rapist, the last in reference to his relationship with a slave, Sally Hemings. The protest, #postyourstateofmind, was connected to a petition to remove Jefferson's statue from the quad.

Abigail Hoer bent to write "freedom fighter" on a sticky note and press it onto the concrete bench. Hoer said the Declaration of Independence, which was written largely by Jefferson, is important to her because it laid the foundation of citizen participation in government.

Members of the College Republicans stood around the statue asking for signatures and talking about Jefferson's legacy. That includes the Louisiana Purchase, which allowed for the creation of the University of Missouri, the first public university west of the Mississippi River.

One of the first signers was Zach Amos, a senior majoring in journalism, who said he’s a descendent of Thomas Jefferson’s cousin. Amos said he thinks that although Jefferson might not have been the best moral figure, his faults shouldn’t outweigh his contribution to the country.
“The overarching narrative from my family is that it wouldn’t be fair to judge good old TJ on the moral standards of today, 200 years after he’s dead,” Amos said.

“I don’t know anyone who is a slave here,” said Daniel Hoer after signing the petition. “This is America. If you don’t like it, go somewhere else.”

Some students walked by without stopping. After being asked to sign, Shelby Anderson called over her shoulder, “I’d rather not. He raped my ancestors.”

Anderson said she signed the original petition to remove Jefferson’s statue. “It’s offensive to idealize and cherish someone who raped and owned slaves,” she said.

Skyler Roundtree, chairman of the College Republicans, said that although Jefferson owned slaves, he favored gradual emancipation. Roundtree referenced the Act of 1807, signed by Jefferson, which made importing slaves into the United States illegal. But it did not free current slaves or new slaves brought into the country illegally.

As of 8:15 p.m. Tuesday, the petition authored by Maxwell Little to have the statue removed had 86 signatures. Roundtree said his goal was to gather more signatures than Little’s petition; by about 4:40 p.m., the College Republicans had gathered 143 signatures.

The remaining eight or nine protesters moved to Speaker’s Circle and chanted “Jefferson, Jefferson, Jefferson!” until they left to attend class.

The Tuesday protesters’ hashtag #standwithjefferson was co-opted at times by those who want the statue removed and by others.
MU publishes a detailed proposal for diversity course

Proposal includes potential pilot program for next semester.

On Oct. 14, astronomy professor Angela Speck, chair of the Diversity Enhancement Committee, published a detailed proposal calling for all students to be required to take a general-education level diversity class. The class chosen is a three-credit-hour course titled Educational, School and Counseling Psychology 2000: Experiencing Cultural Diversity in the United States. The university currently offers two sections of this class each semester.

**In light of recent events occurring both on campus and nationwide, much attention has been drawn to the issue of diversity and cultural competency on MU’s campus.**

The Diversity Enhancement Committee is currently in the stage of gaining support for the first step of the proposal, which is to launch a pilot study of the course, running about 20 sections for 600 students.

In May 2011, a similar proposal for a diversity course requirement was presented to faculty members and subsequently shut down, according to previous Maneater reporting. The votes for the proposal were 210-232, with the proposal being sent to about 1,200 faculty members.

Speck believes the failure of the original proposal stemmed from a lack of deliberate conversation, which is why she is making a point to ask for feedback from both faculty and the MU community.

“I’m trying to reach out to make it clear that anyone who wants to be involved can be involved,” Speck said. “I want all the feedback. I want all the concerns. I want to know what the things are that I haven’t thought of.”

Speck hopes to get the pilot study approved and launched in the next semester, which would then run over the next calendar year. In the meantime, steps have been taken on campus to improve cultural competence.

Speck said many of the issues she sees on campus regarding lack of diversity have to do with ignorance. She hopes a required course would combat the lack of knowledge and help breed a more accepting community.

“Starting with (the events in) Ferguson, it has become more and more clear that we have a problem on campus of how certain minorities are treated,” Speck said. “And it’s not just race,
although I would say that race is the most apparent, but it’s not the only one. We have some issues that we need to address, and a lot of it is born of ignorance.”

In addition to a required course for students, the proposal also outlines diversity training for faculty and graduate students in order to allow them to integrate issues of diversity into their own courses.

Journalism professor Berkley Hudson, chair of the Faculty Council’s committee on race relations, also sits on the Diversity Enhancement committee. Hudson realizes the difficulty of getting staff to support a proposal.

“How do we enlist the faculty to gather around and appreciate that this could be useful to the health of the entire community of the University of Missouri?” Hudson said. “So that’s the tricky part that we are working with now.”

Faculty members have expressed concern about the proposal, specifically concerning its rigor and its effect on the distribution of credit throughout the departments, Speck said.

She said that while imposing a new required course may replace some 1000-level courses in smaller departments, she believes that the diversity course would spark interest in students to pursue degrees in those smaller departments.

“My prediction is that we will increase majors and minors in those small departments that could be hurt, departments like women’s and gender studies and black studies,” Speck said. “But I don’t know that without doing a pilot study.”

Another concern voiced by faculty is that as an academic requirement, the course will not be rigorous enough.

“There are several people who have expressed concern about the rigor of the course, that it is too shallow,” Speck said. “However, I would say that the intention of this is to be part of the gen-ed requirement and if we have think about how we teach gen-ed courses … the diversity course is not intended to turn people in to social justice warriors. It’s intended to open their eyes to this and make them understand the importance of these topics.”

On Oct. 8, Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin announced that beginning January 2016, all first-time students will be required to take a training program on the issue of racism prior to enrolling in classes.

Both Hudson and Speck said they were unsure on how this recent announcement will affect the status of their proposal, but they do say that the two go hand in hand. For now, they believe that the training program is a good place to start.

“Change has to happen from top to bottom and all throughout,” Hudson said. “At the student's level, the staff level, the administration level, at the chancellor's level, for us to have a
productive, rewarding and enriching experience as an educational community. And we can make the choice every day whether or not we want to make that change happen.”

Editorial: MU’s proposed required diversity course pilot is a promising development

Students have wanted this requirement as a means of promoting a campus-wide conversation on inclusivity for decades.

For years, students have been urging our administrators to consider implementing a mandatory diversity education requirement. Now, after much resistance and gridlock, a pilot course of this request has finally being proposal. **Needless to say, it’s been a long time coming, MU.**

We’ve needed this requirement as a means of promoting a campus-wide conversation on inclusivity for a long time, and because the details of the pilot are promising, we can confidently endorse it. This requirement could be a compelling proactive effort to combat ignorance and bigotry, a refreshing change of pace from the perpetual reactionary responses we’ve seen from our administration.

It's encouraging to see that the administration has been evolving on this issue. Earlier this year, Angela Speck, Chair of Faculty Council's Committee on Diversity Enhancement, said that a cultural competency requirement was not realistic, stating that “it’s not going to happen.”

Now, it seems that Speck has since changed her position on the feasibility of such a requirement. An update on the proposal was released Oct. 14 and includes a detailed outline of a pilot version of the course.

This update shows that our administration is finally taking the possibility of this requirement seriously. Administrators have had doubts regarding whether it’s possible to implement and mass produce diversity education like this, and these doubts might prove to be valid. But we cannot know for certain until an attempt is made.

The goal of this course should be to engage students in reflection on the issues of institutional racism, classism and sexism that are ingrained in both MU’s and our country’s social structures. In short, the class should expose students to perspectives they’ve never considered.

In the pursuit of this goal, it can be easy to make mistakes. From reading the proposal, however, it looks as though Speck and the committee are right on the main premise regarding what this course needs to be.
The maximum class size of 30 is an essential aspect of this course. It’s impossible to have productive discourse on these issues in a lecture hall packed with hundreds of students.

In addition to their plans to observe the results of the pilot, the committee has been studying a similar cultural competency course that is required for all students at Lincoln University in Jefferson City. Examining the class at Lincoln as a success story is a wise move, but it’s important to keep in mind how different Lincoln is from MU. It’s a far smaller school, with less than 3,000 students, and it is also a historically black college.

Similar cultural competency courses at MU, such as Cross-Cultural Journalism, have fallen flat because they are too large for successful discussions and rarely incorporate any campus current events regarding inclusiveness into class discussions. The pilot of this class cannot make this mistake. Discussion about these issues will not be productive if it does not incorporate current events, especially those on MU’s campus. One of the greatest problems surrounding this issue is simply how uninformed some students are about instances of social injustice on MU’s campus. Incorporating current events into the class would help dispel this ignorance.

In this class, there will be people who disagree, and that’s OK. It’s a part of the process. Discourse is a two-way street, and that means students will need to be prepared to encounter contrary views that might offend them. This class needs to ensure that students are informed so that they can fully understand the issues themselves through discussion, rather than simply having a professor tell them that there is a single right answer and that they’ll be penalized if they don’t agree.

At the end of the day, this class isn’t an end-all solution. The pilot is a promising step toward accomplishing the much larger goal of combating cultural ignorance at MU, but it is not the final step. If the pilot program does end up failing, we hope that the committee stays true to its promise to “explore other possible avenues for implementing diversity training” made at the end of the update while trying out the pilot.

In the meantime, we need students, faculty and administrators to get behind this proposal. This is a pivotal moment for MU. In the aftermath of all that has happened this year, the MU community is, in this moment, clearly focused on bettering themselves. This momentum must be taken advantage of.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

MU Department of Black Studies to host annual conference Thursday

BROOKE KOTTMANN, 11 hrs ago

COLUMBIA — This year’s MU Black Studies Fall Conference will focus on black life across disciplines and generations. The conference will take place from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Thursday at Mark Twain Ballroom in Memorial Student Union. Admission is free and open to all.

There will be three keynote speakers, Stephanie Shonekan, associate professor at the Department of Black Studies, said in an email:

• Payton Head, Missouri Students Association president, will present a speech titled “Your Struggle is My Struggle.”

• Kristin Kopp, MU professor of German and faculty affiliate with UMC Black Studies program, will address race relations in the U.S. by teaching the history of blacks in Europe.

• Cynthia Frisby, MU associate professor of strategic communication, will present a study of minority youth as portrayed in the news media.

The conference will look at black lives through different disciplines and perspectives, including history, sociology, German studies, music and journalism, and join students and professionals, Shonekan said. She said that the conference is an extension of the Black Studies Department’s mission to research, teach and study black life at an international level.

"This conference is quite significant in terms of recent tension on (MU’s) campus, nationally and internationally as well,” Shonekan said. “It’s a critical moment to pause and take stock of where we are as we contend with these issues. This conference allows us to contextualize and analyze the situation that we have on ground.”
Twenty-one presenters will speak on topics including:

- Black voting
- Black LGBTQ community
- Police brutality
- Blacks in Columbia
- Blacks in the media
- Disability in black culture
- Transnational black life
- Black feminist politics
- Africans vs. African Americans.

Innovation Center
Helping startups stay home
By Henry J. Waters III
Tuesday, October 20, 2015 at 2:00 pm

Universities and other civic boosters yearn for ways to stimulate business startups that will become successful additions to the economic scene. Educational institutions such as the University of Missouri have become investors in such efforts, seeing a natural affinity with research activities.

If university research results in useful products or services, turning those assets into successful private businesses is an appealing goal giving the university an important role beyond the purely academic. It’s often called technology transfer. It fulfills the goal of economic development adopted by most institutions.
MU has built a business incubator housing the Missouri Innovation Center, where fledgling entrepreneurs are given help getting started and a group called Centennial Investors meets to consider capital investment opportunities.

Centennial’s original idea included enabling startup businesses that would grow up here, but soon enough the main incentive among members became profit for individual investors — in particular, new businesses typically headed out of town, not because anyone wants them to move but because that’s usually part of the deal if a successful buyout occurs. Multimillion-dollar XYZ Corp. located in Palo Alto is not likely to spend substantial money to buy the local newbie and leave the operation here. Incorporating the operation into the Palo Alto operation normally is the plan.

Now the Missouri Innovation Center is developing an accelerator fund to provide digital startups money and mentoring help to develop a product and a successful business. MU is making an initial investment and will process additional donations from individuals. The campus last week launched the Mizou Venture Mentoring Service, patterned after a similar program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

The local fund will be $1 million to $3 million. MU campuses and private donors can invest. The idea is for the operation to turn a profit for investors. Bill Turpin, CEO of the Missouri Innovation Center, says it’s a way to make money that supports the local economy and the university and its students. A committee of local entrepreneurs will approve applicants for grants from the fund.

Will private investors donate? My hunch is the university will have to be the primary underwriter while the project gets off the ground and we learn whether such a fund will return a profit. Bless UM for being willing to give it a shot. It has reason to invest other than immediate cash profit.

HJW III

Fifty-two percent of Republicans who watched the second GOP debate said Carly Fiorina was the winner. Marco Rubio came in second with 14 percent. Thirty-one percent thought Donald Trump did the worst.
Nixon blocks $46M in state spending to fix Missouri budget

Tuesday, October 20, 2015 at 2:00 pm

JEFFERSON CITY (AP) — Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon on Monday blocked more than $46 million in state spending in what he said was a move to balance the budget after the loss of millions of dollars in tobacco settlement money.

At issue is $50 million from tobacco companies Nixon and lawmakers banked on when planning spending for this fiscal year. The money is part of an annual payment tobacco companies make to states under a 1998 settlement aimed at covering the costs of providing health care to those with tobacco-related illnesses.

But an appeals court recently ruled the companies don’t owe Missouri the $50 million. Attorney General Chris Koster is appealing but doesn’t expect a ruling before the end of the fiscal year.

Nixon, a Democrat, said in a statement his spending restrictions are necessary to “keep the budget in balance and our AAA credit rating intact.”

“In taking these necessary actions, we have made every effort to minimize the impact on vital services by reducing spending from new programs yet to get underway and funding increases that would grow the size of government,” Nixon said.

The $46.1 million in cut spending primarily will mean some new programs won’t be funded and that health care, nursing and other service providers will see a smaller net rate increase than planned.

Among the withholdings is $575,000 of the $750,000 appropriated for the Missouri Scholars and fine arts academies. The Missouri Scholars Academy, held at the University of Missouri during the summer, is a three-week academic program for the state’s gifted students who are going into junior year of high school.

Academy Director Steve Keller said he was surprised by Nixon’s move after the governor also withheld scholars academy money last year, though that money was eventually released. Keller said if this year’s withheld funding is not released in time, the academy will have to charge students a fee of about $1,000 to be in the program.
Republican Rep. Scott Fitzpatrick, the House budget committee vice chairman, disputed whether it’s necessary to block spending.

Fitzpatrick pointed to high revenue growth at the end of last fiscal year and said that start should make up for the $50 million loss unless revenue growth lags substantially this year.

“Unless revenues tank,” Fitzpatrick said, “there is no way the governor is justified in withholds.”

But budget director Dan Haug said despite high revenue growth at the end of the fiscal year, revenues still didn’t grow enough to fully fund last year’s budget.

Fitzpatrick said lawmakers can reassess state finances when the next legislative session begins in January and vote to override Nixon’s spending restrictions if they don’t feel they are needed.

OCTOBER 20, 2015

A few hold the political purse strings in Missouri

Of all large Missouri political contributions since 2011, a quarter have come from 10 individuals and groups

Topping the list, Rex Sinquefield has donated $22 million to Missouri candidates and committees since 2011

State lawmakers voted to abolish voter-approved campaign contribution limits in 2008

BY JASON HANCOCK

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JEFFERSON CITY - More than a quarter of all large campaign contributions in Missouri over the last five years were doled out by 10 individuals and groups, according to analysis by The Star of reports filed with the state ethics commission.
Sitting atop the list is Rex Sinquefield. The retired financier from St. Louis has since 2011 contributed $22.1 million in large contributions — defined by state law as any donation greater than $5,000.

That’s three times as much as the second largest donor. It’s also nearly as much as the next nine combined, a list that includes a payday-loan-funded nonprofit, a teachers union and the state’s largest utility.

In the 2016 campaign cycle alone, Sinquefield has donated more than $3 million to six Republican candidates seeking statewide office on the ballot next year.

The numbers paint a stark picture of the state of Missouri politics, where the cost of campaigning has risen dramatically since the General Assembly voted to abolish campaign contribution limits in 2008. Republicans are benefiting the most from the free-flowing campaign cash, but Democrats aren’t shy about taking their share of five- and six-figure checks from big-spending donors.

From funding individual candidates to bankrolling ballot measures, wealthy individuals and interest groups have flexed their monetary muscle and changed the way politics function in the Show-Me State.

“Any objective analysis of campaigns would see that there is more money in politics and the checks are getting bigger,” said Mark Jones, political director for the Missouri National Education Association. “The voice of the regular person is being drowned out by this loud siren of money coming from this very select class of donors.”

To supporters of the no-limit system, however, large checks are a small price to pay for greater transparency.

Voters implemented campaign contribution limits in 1994. But in the years leading up to lawmakers voting to do away with them, big donors formed multiple committees to skirt the donation limits and funnel money to candidates. That made it difficult to track campaign cash.

“In a perfect world there would be contribution limits,” said Dave Spence, a St. Louis businessman and the Republican nominee for governor in 2012. “But the big donors would find a way around it. It’s discouraging, but that’s how a lot of the big donors feel. They’re going to get to the money to the candidates one way or another.”
Republican legislative leaders have been the biggest roadblocks to reinstalling donation limits, but even some Democrats have voiced concern.

Attorney General Chris Koster, the only Democrat currently running for governor and the front-runner in the race, has publicly expressed skepticism about donation caps.

“I have said before that if a contribution limit policy that can be effective can be drafted, I would be in favor of that, but Citizens United makes it difficult to draft such a policy,” Koster said late last year, citing the 2010 U.S. Supreme Court decision that essentially declared political spending is protected under the First Amendment.

The huge megadonors may not always get what they want, said Peverill Squire, professor of political science at the University of Missouri in Columbia. But “the issues they want to talk about get talked about.”

“Their priorities get debated and legislation gets proposed,” he said. “Rex Sinquefield hasn’t always gotten exactly what he wants, but his issues never get ignored.”

Sinquefield has proved over the years that he’s not afraid to fund seemingly endless fights over his pet causes — revamping the state’s education system and eliminating the Missouri income tax.

Lawmakers who don’t see things his way risk running into a buzz saw of Sinquefield money ready to rip them from office or watching his fortune go around them and directly to the statewide ballot.

And over the years, Sinquefield’s spending has gotten results, said Travis H. Brown, Sinquefield’s longtime adviser and spokesman.

“Last time I checked, Kansas City and St. Louis have to hold a referendum every five years on whether they want higher taxes because of Rex Sinquefield,” Brown said, referring to a Sinquefield-funded effort that forced the two cities to regularly place their earnings tax on the ballot.

Brown added: “And you have a Democratic governor who has more veto overrides than any other governor in the history of Missouri politics thanks to expanded conservative majorities in the legislature.”
Sinquefield has supported Democratic candidates in the past, including Koster and Mayor Francis Slay of St. Louis. But the vast majority of his campaign spending goes to Republicans and conservative causes.

He is essentially funding a slate of 2016 statewide Republican candidates. So far he has donated $890,000 to gubernatorial hopeful Catherine Hanaway; $1 million to lieutenant governor candidate Bev Randles; $750,000 to attorney general candidate Kurt Schaefer; $250,000 to treasurer candidate Eric Schmitt; $100,000 to secretary of state candidate Will Kraus; and $25,000 to Kraus’ rival for the nomination, Jay Ashcroft.

Sinquefield may have the deepest pockets in Missouri, but he’s hardly alone.
The next largest individual donor is Spence, although his total comes with an asterisk. A huge chunk of the $6.7 million he’s spent in Missouri politics since 2011 went toward his unsuccessful gubernatorial campaign in 2012.

Spence, who had served as president of Alpha Packaging for 26 years before resigning to run for governor, said he spent the money because he was a first-time candidate who needed to get his name out to voters.

“I could have spent all my time getting people to contribute or I could be out there talking to voters,” he said.

He said Missouri’s no-limit system “is just not healthy. I’ve never demanded anything from candidates I’ve donated to. I don’t operate in the gray. But do I think some big contributions from donors come with strings attached? Yes. Absolutely they do. Donors want their agenda pushed.”

Next on the list is a Kansas City-based nonprofit called Missourians for Responsible Government. Since 2011, it has donated $3.9 million, with almost all of that money going to a single political action committee set up to fight efforts to implement new regulations on payday lending.

Because Missourians for Responsible Government is a nonprofit, it is not required to disclose where its money came from. However, QC Holdings Inc., a payday lender based in Overland Park that operates primarily under the Quik Cash name, reported to the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission in 2012 that it spent “substantial amounts opposing the efforts” to place a payday lending initiative petition on the ballot.
Missourians for Responsible Government didn’t respond to a request for comment.

The next largest donor is a Joplin family.

David Humphreys, president and CEO of Joplin-based manufacturer Tamko Building Products Inc., his mother, Ethelmae Humphreys, and his sister Sarah Atkins have combined to donate nearly $3.6 million to Republican candidates and conservative causes since 2011.

The largest chunk of the donations by far comes from David, including a $500,000 check last month to a political action committee determined to oust from office any Republican lawmakers who refused to vote to override the governor’s veto of a bill targeting labor unions.

Last month the three combined to give $500,000 to Republican candidate for attorney general Josh Hawley.

In a written statement to The Star, Humphreys said his family supports “individual liberty and responsibility, lower taxes, free markets and less restrictive government regulation of people and commerce.”

“We support politicians who appear to share a similar philosophy,” he said.

The next biggest donor stems from a 2012 campaign to raise the state’s cigarette tax, which at 17 cents a pack is the lowest in the nation.

The American Cancer Society, at the state and federal level, has spent $3.3 million since 2011, most of that money on the 2012 campaign to raise the tax on tobacco products.

They were joined by the Health Care Foundation of Greater Kansas City, a nonprofit foundation that ranks ninth on the list of Missouri’s largest donors. The foundation has spent roughly $1.5 million on Missouri campaigns since 2011, nearly all of it going in support of the tobacco tax increase.

“Our board of directors is passionate about tobacco prevention,” said Jennifer Sykes, the foundation’s spokeswoman. “If you really want people to stop smoking, research points to increasing the tobacco tax.”
On the other side of the 2012 ballot measure were two tobacco companies — Cheyenne International LLC of Grover, N.C., and Xcaliber International LLC of Pryor, Okla.

Since 2011, Cheyenne ranks 15th on the Missouri big-donor list, spending $1.2 million, and Xcaliber ranks 20th, spending a little more than $1 million.

The tobacco tax increase was narrowly defeated by voters.

The Association of Realtors is next on the list, with local, state and national chapters of the organization donating nearly $2.8 million in large donations since 2011. Much of that money has gone to support Missourians for Fair Taxation, a political committee formed to fight Sinquefield’s attempts to do away with the state’s income tax and replace it with a higher sales tax.

The committee says on its website that it plans to push for an amendment to the Missouri Constitution that would prohibit state and local governments from imposing any new sales tax or use tax on services.

Ameren Corp., the state-regulated utility company based in St. Louis, is next on the list, spending nearly $1.8 million.

Over the years the company hasn’t shown much of a partisan preference. Last month, for example, it gave $15,000 to both the Missouri Democratic Party and the Missouri Republican Party.

Next up are a pair of labor unions.

Local, state and federal branches of the National Education Association, a teachers union, combined to give nearly $1.7 million since 2011.

Just behind them comes the combined total of local, state and federal branches of the Laborers’ International Union of North America, which totaled about $1.4 million in donations.

In fact, several unions — including those representing firefighters, autoworkers and government employees — rank in the top 20, donating more than $1 million to campaigns since 2011.

Pat Dujakovich, president of Greater Kansas City AFL-CIO, said that while organized labor can act as a counterbalance to massive donations from wealthy individuals and corporations, they shouldn’t be painted with the same brush.
Unions contribute to campaigns in order to advance the interests of their members, Dujakovich said, as opposed to a “billionaire trying to advance his personal agenda.”

“When a labor union makes a contribution, that’s thousands of workers coming together to pool their money in order to write that check,” Dujakovich said. “Maybe unions can come together to write a million dollars’ worth of checks. Rex Sinquefield writes a million-dollar check.”

In addition to labor unions and tobacco companies, the bottom half of the top 20 includes Stanley Herzog, owner of St. Joseph-based Herzog Contracting Corp., and the Missouri Hospital Association.

Several initiative petitions have been filed in recent years that would reinstall campaign contribution limits, although few have advanced very far. Missouri remains the only state with the combination of no donation caps, no limits on lobbyist gifts and no restrictions on lawmakers becoming lobbyists.

In a way, Missouri is a fascinating experiment in campaign ethics law, said the University of Missouri’s Squire.

“Missouri,” he said, “is sort of a political guinea pig.”

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

FACT CHECK: Campaign finances more complicated than McCaskill says

KATHERINE KNOTT, 19 hrs ago

Says Rand Paul is the only GOP presidential candidate "who hasn’t found his billionaire to fund his super PAC." --Sen. Claire McCaskill

Aug. 21 in Real Time with Bill Maher

Sen. Claire McCaskill has noticed Republican presidential candidate Sen. Rand Paul’s recent drop in the polls, and she thinks she knows why. Paul hasn’t found a financier to bankroll his campaign, she told Bill
Maher on his Aug. 21 show. In fact, she said the Kentucky Republican is the only GOP presidential candidate “who hasn’t found his billionaire to fund his super PAC.”

"You wonder why you don't see Rand Paul as much; he's still shopping for his billionaire,” McCaskill said. “He's like the only one who hasn't found a billionaire to fund his super PAC.”

With the importance money will play in the 2016 presidential race, we wonder if Paul is the only GOP candidate without a wealthy backer. We reached out to McCaskill for evidence, but her office did not respond.

**Paul’s big backers**

McCaskill used the word “billionaire,” which is certainly an exclusive club. The problem is there is no easy way to determine who’s a billionaire versus, say, a super-rich millionaire. That’s part of how Donald Trump can say his net worth is $8.7 billion while others peg the number at about $3 billion.

Also, it’s important to note that the presidential candidates don't have super PACs because, legally, super PACs and candidates cannot work together, said MU economics professor Jeffrey Milyo.

“The senator’s comment is misleading about the nature of the law, but that sort of sloppiness is very common, in part because the issues are somewhat complex, and in part because it serves the purpose of the speaker,” Milyo said in an email.

Logistics and legalities aside, at the heart of McCaskill's claim is the suggestion that no wealthy supporters have stepped up to support Paul in a big way. That’s not correct.

Campaign finance records compiled by OpenSecrets.org show that on June 19, Jeff Yass gave $1 million to America's Liberty, a super PAC that supports Paul. He also has given $250,000 to Concerned American Voters, another super PAC that supports Paul. Yass is the founder of Susquehanna International Group, a privately held global trading firm.
Yass is rich. How rich is unclear. Reuters described Yass as a billionaire in a June story about campaign giving. PhillyMag.com described Yass as Paul’s “(very) rich friend in Philadelphia.” Yass doesn’t make Forbes’ 400, but that list includes people with net worths of $1.7 billion or more.

Paul has another wealthy backer in Scott Banister, a self-described capitalist who sits on the board of directors for multiple companies. Scott and his wife, Cyan, have served as angel investors for almost 100 companies, including Zappos, according to Fortune.

Banister has given a combined $1.2 million to Concerned American Voters.

In all, $5 million has been raised for the two super PACs that support Rand Paul. In comparison, Right to Rise, a super PAC supporting former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, has a war chest of more than $100 million.

Is Banister a billionaire? Again, we don’t know for certain.

The other candidates

So Paul does have the support of some wealthy donors. And Yass has been described as a billionaire.

What about the rest of the crowded GOP field?

We found three who don’t appear to have the backing of someone who can write a big check. PACs supporting former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum, former New York Gov. George Pataki and former Virginia Gov. James Gilmore haven’t broken the $1 million mark and haven’t received significant help from one donor in particular, Federal Election Commission filings show.

Security is Strength, a super PAC that supports Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., lists $500,000 donations from billionaires Robert McNair and Ronald Perelman. Former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee’s super PAC has relied heavily on the support of Ronald Cameron, who donated $3 million, according to OpenSecrets.org. Steve Wynn has supported New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie; T. Boone Pickens is helping Bush; and Robert Mercer is with Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, according to FEC filings. Florida Sen. Marco Rubio has been helped out by Larry Ellison and Norman Braman.
Donald Trump has, well, himself.

And Republicans aren’t the only ones who have support from wealthy donors. Seven people have given $1 million to the super PAC supporting Democratic frontrunner and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, according to OpenSecrets.org.

Yet, the numbers don’t tell the whole story. As MU political science professor Marvin Overby points out, candidates have been well-funded in past election cycles, but they still failed to secure the nomination.

“A wealthy donor, like casino magnate Sheldon Adelson, can make a candidate, like Newt Gingrich in 2012, more viable for a longer period of time,” Overby said. “But there are reasons Gingrich didn’t get the GOP nomination: Despite a wealthy backer, he was the wrong candidate, with the wrong message, and a troubled organization.”

Our ruling

McCaskill said Paul’s failure to gain traction in the crowded GOP field may have something to do with the fact that Paul is the only candidate to have not found his billionaire.

There are two problems with this statement. There are candidates running for president who don’t have a billionaire, and Paul has a reported billionaire backer in Yass.

We rate McCaskill’s statement False.
Who Deserves a Second Chance?

October 21, 2015

By Jake New

SOUTHEASTERN CONFERENCE MENTION; NO MU MENTION

In its first few weeks of existence, Hocking College's fledgling football team has had plenty to celebrate. More than 800 spectators attended the team's first home game in August, the stands filled with students clad in blue shirts and cheering on the Hocking Hawks by ringing blue cowbells. Hocking won 52-2, and went on to win three of the next four games.

Officials say the games have provided a much-needed morale boost at Hocking, a two-year technical college located near the struggling Appalachian town of Nelsonville, Ohio. In 2008, state officials began a three-year investigation into Hocking, and several current and former administrators were charged with stealing funds from the college. Last year, facing a $4.4 million deficit, the college laid off 36 employees, and the president was forced to resign. Enrollment has fallen 38 percent since 2010.

Hocking's new football team is an attempt to revitalize the college, by attracting more students to campus and by energizing those already living there. “Following several difficult years for the college, we have the opportunity to raise the spirits of our campus community and engage our local communities around a common interest in sports,” Betty Young, Hocking's current president, said, adding that the football team is helping the college enroll more men and students of color.

Funded by less than $900,000 and staffed with volunteers, the college's new athletic program -- which also features archery, cheerleading and men's and women's basketball teams -- has little in common with big-time college sports. At the same time, the football team has already become embroiled in a controversy that is all too familiar among top football programs, casting a shadow over the young team's early successes. The inaugural roster includes Trent Mays, a former high school football player who was convicted in 2013 of raping a 16-year-old girl.

Mays was a star quarterback for Steubenville High School, a football powerhouse in Ohio, and the case drew immense national attention. In 2012, Mays and other
members of the team sexually assaulted an unconscious girl over the course of several
hours. Mays penetrated the victim with his fingers and attempted to force her into oral
sex, while his friends filmed and photographed her. The footage and photographs were
widely shared through social media, and Mays joked about the assault to friends over
text messages.

In 2013, Mays, then 17, was “found delinquent” of rape and the dissemination of child
pornography. He was sentenced to two years in juvenile detention and was released
earlier this year.

His inclusion on the Hocking football team raises questions about the objective of the
juvenile justice system and how colleges should treat students previously convicted of
serious crimes. Hocking officials have defended the decision, saying the player deserves
“a second chance” after serving his time. Critics argue the severity of some crimes
should prevent athletes from ever playing on another school- or college-sponsored

“...OK, we’re not going to deny them an education,’ but it’s another
to let them play football,” Dionne Koller, director of the Center of Sport and Law at the
University of Baltimore, said. “Participating in sports is a privilege, not a right.”

Second Chances
Hocking is not alone in providing second chances to athletes accused or convicted of
gender violence.

The University of Oregon faced a lawsuit last year when it allowed an athlete to play
its basketball team after he was previously accused of sexual assault at Providence
College. The player was then suspended from Oregon after he allegedly assaulted a
female student there. He has since transferred to yet another institution. Two other
players who were also suspended for their alleged involvement in the Oregon assault
have transferred to play basketball elsewhere.

In August, a former Vanderbilt University football player who was charged with five
counts of aggravated rape transferred to play football at Lane College. Another player
allegedly involved in that same case transferred to Alcorn State University, a team that
also included a registered sex offender.

Laura Bennett, student conduct officer at Harper College, a two-year institution in
Illinois, said that as four-year universities continue to face greater pressure to punish
athletes for sexual assault, more students with a history of being accused or found
guilty will look at two-year colleges as a path to reclaiming their athletic career. "That's
where they end up," Bennett, who is also president of the Association for Student
Conduct Administration, said. "My institution."

Last year, a former University of Georgia football player named Zach Mettenberger
demonstrated just how a troubled college athlete can bounce back by first transferring
to a smaller college. After being dismissed from Georgia’s football team in 2010 and
pleading guilty to two charges of sexual battery, Mettenberger transferred to Butler
Community College to play football. The following season, he transferred again to
Louisiana State University, becoming starting quarterback.

In 2014, Mettenberger was drafted to play for the Tennessee Titans in the National Football League.

“An athlete can sort of hopscotch through these kinds of programs, always staying one step ahead of their criminal history,” Koller said. “He plays two years here or there, and it cleans him up, making him eligible again for a four-year program.”

Colleges who transfer in players with histories of sexual and domestic violence have received heavier scrutiny in recent months, and as a result some athletic conferences have created new rules to limit the practice.

\textbf{In June, the Southeastern Conference became the first athletic conference to announce it would no longer allow its members to accept transfer athletes with histories of domestic and sexual violence. In August, the Big 12 Conference adopted a similar rule after an article in Texas Monthly alleged that Baylor University may have known that a football player, who was later convicted of a sexual assault at Baylor, had previously been suspended from another team over violent behavior.}

Colleges that accept transfer players who have been accused of violent behavior at other institutions (or who return such players to their own rosters) risk allowing that behavior to be repeated on their own campuses. In 2007, a lawsuit filed by a former student assaulted at the University of Georgia ended in a six-figure settlement. The plaintiff was raped by a football player who had been previously dismissed from a community college after sexually assaulting two women there. In 2009, the Arizona Board of Regents agreed to pay a former Arizona State University student $850,000 after she was raped by a football player the university had already expelled once for groping and exposing himself to women. The student had returned to campus at the request of a coach, and then raped the woman in her dorm room.

Those lawsuits haven’t stopped some institutions from continuing to bring or keep players with troubled pasts on their teams. The University of Oklahoma’s roster includes a player who was charged last year with punching a woman and breaking four bones in her face. In defending his decision to keep the player on the team, Bob Stoops, Oklahoma’s head football coach, espoused the importance of second chances, echoing a common refrain used among coaches.

“It’s our job to help them,” Stoops said.

\textbf{Rehabilitated?}

Hocking’s president, too, often mentions second chances. But Young also notes that Mays’s case comes with a key difference: he is not a transfer who committed a sexual assault as an adult at another institution, but a freshman who was convicted of his crime as a juvenile while still in high school.
“There is a developmental difference in juveniles and adults and that difference is the basis for the design of the juvenile justice system,” Young said. “We expect juvenile offenders to have opportunities to live productive adult lives. That statement does not discount the gravity of juvenile offenses. It only recognizes a desire for rehabilitation of youth.”

Mays served his two-year sentence at Paint Creek Light House Youth Center, a facility known for offering an intensive rehabilitation program for juvenile sex offenders. After his release, he returned to high school and graduated with honors. Last month, a judge reduced his sex-offender status, requiring him to register as a sex offender once a year for the next decade, rather than every six months for 20 years. Mays’s lawyer did not return several requests for comment.

The football player’s release coincided with the news that Hocking was creating an athletic program, with football as its banner sport. He reached out to the new team’s head coach, Al Matthews, who decided he could join the program.

“When we aren’t just going to open their arms and give me a scholarship, just because of who I was,” Mays told the Associated Press at the start of the season. “But I have to prove myself, and that’s what I’m ready to do.”

It is not uncommon for colleges to enroll students who are sex offenders or convicted criminals, but Bennett, the president of ASCA, said that institutions should carefully weigh the risks of admitting such a student and determine what sort of restrictions should be put in place. As a registered sex offender, Mays is unable to live on campus, but Young said the athlete is free to join any student organizations and clubs.

Bennett said that she sometimes recommends students with histories of violence only be allowed to enroll in online courses. If they do attend classes on campus, she might also suggest barring their involvement in student organizations. ASCA does not recommend a blanket rule, however, saying that it’s up to individual institutions to assess what risks are involved with accepting a particular student.

"Most community colleges are open enrollment, so we do have convicted criminals and sex offenders," Bennet said. "A large portion of those have done their time and are trying to get their lives back on track and that's great. But there are also predators." It's an institution's job to attempt to determine where an applicant falls along that spectrum, she said.

Victims’ advocates, legal experts and college law enforcement officials interviewed for this article, however, said they have concerns about Hocking’s vetting process. The associate vice president of student affairs is also the new athletic director. The head football coach is the college’s police chief.

Laura Dunn, founder of victims’ advocacy group SurvJustice, said a security chief acting as head football coach, even with a small-time program like Hocking’s, is a worrying conflict of interest.

“We know of far too many cases of athletes getting special treatment despite committing heinous crimes of interpersonal violence,” Dunn said. “I am surprised any
school would be foolish enough to not have better management structures given the priority student safety should always have over athletics.”

When asked about the Hocking safety director’s dual role, one top campus police chief let out a low, long whistle of surprise. The chief -- who asked not to be directly quoted as he has a policy of not commenting on other institutions -- said he’s never heard of such an arrangement before, and that the college may need to rethink allowing Matthews to coach the football team.

Hocking students have raised similar concerns in recent weeks. Through campus protests and an online petition, the students are calling for the resignation of both Young and Matthews, as well as the Board of Trustees. Their list of complaints is long, and includes both the inclusion of Mays on the football team and the college’s handling of an alleged sexual assault in September. In that assault, a female student said she was gang raped by four men -- three of whom we’re allegedly Hocking football players.

The university would not say whether the players had been suspended from Hocking or from the team, saying it could "not comment on the Title IX investigation." Last month, Hocking placed its spokesman, who is also the broadcaster of the football team’s games, on administrative leave after he allegedly coached students to say no assault had occurred, and told local media that the investigation was “closed.” The case is still open, according to the Athens County prosecutor’s office, which is investigating the assault instead of Hocking College police because of the chief's conflict of interest.

In September, Keller Blackburn, Athens County's prosecutor, told the Athens Messenger that Hocking officials should be more concerned about student safety and "not just the reputation of the institution."

Young said the college is “no different than any other campus in regard to the problems of sexual assault,” and that it has taken several steps to make students feel safer on campus. Athletes receive sexual assault prevention training, she said, and new security cameras have been installed at the entrance to residence halls. "Chief Matthews has always demonstrated the utmost professionalism in his roles, including having the process in place to engage the local prosecuting attorney and their victim advocate," she said, which helps "assure not so much as an appearance of conflict of interest."

As for Mays, Young said the football player “demonstrates positive leadership on and off the field.”

“All persons involved in such an incident are changed forever,” she said. “As an educator, parent and grandparent, my prayer is for each one to find a pathway to a positive life as an adult. We are seeing that progress in our student.”
Many Colleges’ New Emergency Plan: Try to Account for Every Possibility

By Mary Ellen McIntire OCTOBER 20, 2015

NO MENTION

Whatever the hazard — whether a meningitis outbreak or hosting the U.S. Olympic trials in track and field — the University of Oregon intends to be ready.

The university has drafted what is known as an "all hazards" emergency-operations plan — a comprehensive assessment of how it expects to respond to the various risks and disasters that could befall it. To carry out the plan, Oregon created an incident-management team of about 25 people, drawn from offices across the university, who are trained to standards established by the Federal Emergency Management Agency. When a mass shooting shook the small campus of nearby Umpqua Community College this month, the university sent members of its team to offer assistance.

Since a gunman killed 33 people at Virginia Tech, in 2007, campus security has taken on added urgency at many colleges and universities. Most have developed emergency-operations plans for threats specific to their institution, according to survey results released recently by Margolis Healy, a private firm that advises schools and colleges on safety and security. But just over half of the survey’s 513 respondents said their institution had conducted a comprehensive all-hazards vulnerability assessment to help shape that plan, as Oregon did.

That relatively small fraction is cause for concern, said Daniel R. Pascale, the firm’s senior director of security and emergency-management services. "That really is a fundamental cornerstone of how you build your plans, how you will conduct training, how you will conduct exercises, because you certainly want to understand those threats, and then be able to put mitigation strategies in place," he said.

The benefits of comprehensive planning go beyond being better-equipped to deal with an active shooter, said Andre P. Le Duc, executive director of enterprise risk services at the University of Oregon. "It isn’t just looking at it by the peril or hazard, being
earthquake, fire, or whatnot," he said. "It’s looking at what are things that could impact our ability to meet our strategic objectives."

The list of potential hazards facing a university can reach into the hundreds: A power outage. A natural disaster. A large campus event. A bacterial outbreak. That creates many variables for emergency planners. A college must consider which types of disasters it is most susceptible to, how buildings on the campus are able to withstand a disaster, and which building codes it is subject to, Mr. Le Duc said.

While the university has a written emergency-operations plan and annexes — offering details about how to respond to specific events — should an incident occur, he said, the large team is the most important part of its approach.

"A team can be much more dynamic than a plan," he said. "The plan gives us the framework for who has what authority to do what. The team — who works together, who knows each other — can assess the situation in the moment and determine the appropriate response."

**A Collaborative Approach**

There are reasons, though, why many colleges have taken only limited steps toward emergency planning. In the Margolis Healy survey, budget constraints were the most frequently cited reason that colleges did not conduct all-hazards vulnerability assessments.

But other challenges are more fluid. Robert L. Armstrong, director of emergency management and fire prevention at Ohio State University, said the array of perceived threats change regularly based on what’s happening elsewhere in the world.

The university regularly surveys faculty, staff, and students about what they see as the most important hazards facing the campus. Last year, during the Ebola outbreak, the threat of infectious diseases bumped up a few spots in importance, Mr. Armstrong said.

Still, on issues of campus security, officials can adopt an "out of sight, out of mind" mentality, he said. "Resources tend to be funneled in other directions until something happens. When we have something happen, those resources suddenly reappear, and they’ll stay for a few years. And then they’ll start to be diverted to other areas that need it more," he said.

While large, residential campuses have beefed up their security preparations since 2007, community colleges and smaller institutions are less prepared should something
unexpected happen. And if a natural disaster shuts down a region, even a well-prepared campus can struggle to get the resources it needs.

The Universities and Colleges Caucus of the International Association of Emergency Managers hopes to tackle that problem by starting a pilot program to connect institutions that could share resources in case of emergency. Keith A. Perry, chair of the caucus and Stanford University’s emergency manager, said he hoped to build on what colleges have done informally to create a clear framework for them to discuss what they might give or receive.

"Almost all of us are looking at things from an all-hazards approach," Mr. Perry said. "This will be something that will just be one more tool in that toolbox we can use at the time of an event to respond more efficiently and appropriately."

About 15 institutions in the caucus are reviewing the framework, vetting it through their legal and risk-management offices. The caucus hopes eventually to expand the program to other institutions that aren’t members.

The caucus first helped connect colleges during Sandy, the 2012 superstorm that struck when many members were meeting in Florida at the organization’s conference. One college sent diesel fuel to the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, now part of Rutgers University, said Mr. Perry.

‘Amazing’ Support

Colleges in many states have informal mutual-aid agreements, said David Perry, chief of police at Florida State University. Forging those agreements before an emergency hits can be a key part of a college’s preparations.

"It’s insurance to know that you have an additional resource that will respond when needed, but then it helps show an institution where they could improve or they might need additional resources," he said.

The University of Oregon’s decision to send a team to Umpqua Community College is an example of how a mutual-aid agreement might work.

The university’s Mr. Le Duc said his team had offered assistance to the Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission and the state’s security arm, which Umpqua officials then accepted. The team sent a pool of public-information officers to the campus and helped the community college’s leaders improve their emergency-management structure.
There was already enough infrastructure in place for law-enforcement officials and the investigation, Mr. Le Duc said, so his team tried to provide support in other ways.

"Our focus was knowing that after the investigation is done with, they would basically then want to open up campus or give it back to UCC leadership," he said. "Our job was to help them get their feet underneath them again."

It was helpful to work with people who understood emergency response and higher education but hadn’t been traumatized by the shooting, said Vanessa Becker, Umpqua’s board chair. Oregon’s team members were able to respond more quickly than the community college’s own leaders, she said.

"Having a team that was able to come in and support us through that was nothing short of amazing," Ms. Becker said. "I can’t really describe it any differently."

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**ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH**

**Chance of break from stubborn dry spell comes later this week for St. Louis area**

Oct. 21, 2015 • By Tim O'Neil

In one of the few downpours this fall, Lori Eschner and her son Ben, 8, use Alexander Liberman’s "The Way" sculpture as a way to escape an afternoon rain shower on Monday, Oct. 12, 2015, at Laumeier Sculpture Park in Sunset Hills. They live in St. Charles. Photo by Laurie Skrivan, Iskrivan@post-dispatch.com

The autumn dry spell has been good for soccer schedules, sunny weekends and driving large harvesting machines across dusty fields.

But it’s gone on so long that trees and gardens are stressed, ponds are low. Some farm yields are stunted, especially later plantings. Soil moisture is scant. Everything could use a good dousing, from lawns to dingy automobiles.

No measurable rain has fallen at Lambert-St. Louis International Airport since Sept. 29, when one inch was recorded. September rainfall was near normal, but two quick downpours accounted for most of it. Since Aug. 22, when 0.9 inch was recorded at the airport, St. Louis has had five measurable rainfalls, none of them in October.

Odd as it may seem, rainfall for the year remains nine inches above normal, largely because of the wettest June ever recorded in St. Louis, when 13.1 inches fell. The running total so far this year is 42 inches, four inches above the annual average.
The good news is a 50 percent chance of rain this Friday and Saturday. Jim Kramper, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service office in Weldon Spring, said a storm system over the Southwest will be moving eastward and offers a chance for a welcome break here.

Kramper said there is no single reason for this year’s wild swings in precipitation. In late summer, the jet stream began pushing storm systems to the east, creating steady, sometimes drenching, rains along the Seaboard but avoiding the Midwest. The federal drought monitor now lists most of Missouri and central Illinois as “abnormally dry,” although Kramper said there is no indication of an entrenched drought.

The much-discussed El Niño forming in the Pacific Ocean is likely to provide the two-state area with a relatively warm and drier winter, he said. Kramper warned that most, but not all, previous El Niños point to that pattern.

Bob Garino, Missouri statistician for the federal crop-reporting service, said the overall corn harvest is “very good, with soybeans in more of an average year.” Garino works in the Columbia, Mo., office of the U.S. Agriculture Department’s Statistics Service.

Garino said the dry spell has allowed farmers to harvest nearly all of the state’s corn and half of the soybeans, both well ahead of this time last year. But the wet spring reduced by about 20 percent the acres planted in soybeans.

The Illinois harvest also is ahead of last year.

Garino said soil moisture content has fallen sharply since August. And Rich Hoormann, a regional agronomist for the University of Missouri Extension Service, said the depleted soil moisture has reduced hay yields and kept many farmers from planting winter wheat.

“Nobody’s going to plant in dust,” Hoormann said.

In the urban area, the dry spell is hurting even mature trees, said Chip Tynan, horticulturalist at the Missouri Botanical Garden. He prescribed deep soakings for ground beneath trees and warned that evergreens are in “critical need” for water before the winter freeze.

“Everything that grows needs water right now, until the rains return,” Tynan said.

He said the stress on trees means that fall colors are likely to be subdued this year.

Rivers are down. The Mississippi River has fallen 23 feet since early August and was at 1.7 feet on the gauge downtown on Tuesday. That’s still enough flow for normal barge traffic, an Army Corps of Engineers spokesman said.