MU News Bureau

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After chiding, UM System gets off with a slap on the wrist

ISABELLA ALVES, 15 hrs ago

JEFFERSON CITY — After a firm scolding, the University of Missouri System escaped further punishment from lawmakers Tuesday.

One of the largest lines in the higher education budget is the UM System, which had a bullseye on its back during this tight fiscal year. Many lawmakers nocked their arrows and aimed at UM to try and move money from the system to other, smaller programs. They all missed their mark.

As bill amendments were debated on the House floor, many lawmakers voiced their displeasure with UM. They cited a state auditor's report that was critical of $2 million in bonuses and voiced long-simmering frustrations with the system. Despite the complaints, several lawmakers argued that cutting UM now would be like beating a dead horse.

House Budget Chair Rep. Scott Fitzpatrick, R-Shell Knob, said any more money beyond the $50 million cut that UM is already facing would be "beyond punitive deductions" and that making additional cuts would create more pressure to raise tuition.

Rep. Mike Moon, R-Ash Grove, proposed two amendments that would have stripped money from UM. One would have moved money from the system to a program that would try to attract senior citizens to Missouri. The other would go toward a program that helps families cover childcare costs.

Even though both amendments failed overwhelmingly, they sparked intense reactions from lawmakers across both aisles in the House.
Rep. Donna Lichtenegger, R-Jackson, House Higher Education Committee chair, said "This nonsense has to stop. The university has heard what we have said to them. Let’s give them a chance to turn themselves around." She said that lawmakers can’t continue to "dig, dig, dig at the University of Missouri."

MU, the flagship university for the UM system, has also faced a drop in enrollment. Many contribute the drop to campus protests, decreasing numbers of high school students and other factors. This resulted in a $32 million budget gap for the university, according to previous Missourian reporting.

"People in the state of Missouri have spoken by taking their children to other universities,” Rep. David Wood, R-Versailles, said. "I think it’s time we stop, let (the UM System) heal, and gain back the respect that they deserve."

These weren’t the only amendments that aimed to scavenge money from UM. Rep. Jay Barnes, R-Jefferson City, also proposed an amendment that would move money from the UM agriculture program to the Lincoln University agriculture program.

"All the arguments I’ve heard is how great Mizzou is doing. Lincoln has the same types of programs, except they’re underfunded," Barnes said. "It's harder to get some of these grants for Lincoln when they don’t have these state funds available."

Rep. Robert Ross, R-Yukon, also had an amendment that he decided not to propose. The amendment would have put language in the budget that would prevent employees from getting "additional pay, bonuses, or stipends above an employee's contracted pay."

He said he felt the message to UM was already received: "We’re going to be watching."

According to The Associated Press, the House debated these issues Tuesday as lawmakers analyzed the budget plan:

• A provision for full $3.4 billion in basic funding for public elementary and secondary school districts, more than the amount recommended by Gov. Greitens.
• Cuts to a longtime tax credit for low-income seniors and disabled people living in rental housing. Funds will be redirected to other programs for seniors and disabled people.

• Funding bans for the expansion of Medicaid coverage to low-income adults, non-lifesaving abortion providers and pro-abortion counseling.

• Defeat of motions to provide in-state tuition rates for students living in the U.S. illegally and the use of state funds for toll roads and DUI checkpoints.
MU to close three more residence halls

University plans to continue using the buildings for other purposes

By Alan Burdziaik
Columbia Daily Tribune

The University of Missouri will temporarily close three more residence halls to undergraduates because of uncertain enrollment as part of a plan designed to save about $2 million annually.

Discovery, Responsibility and Center halls were chosen last week to be closed to undergraduates beginning in the fall semester, MU spokeswoman Liz McCune said. Four other residence halls—Excellence, McDavid, Respect and Schurz—also are slated to be temporarily closed to undergrads starting in the fall. McCune said one or more of the buildings could be brought back online for housing if demand warrants it. If that happens, the university will start with Center, because it is the smallest of the seven.

"At this point we're not saying it's due to declining enrollment, but enrollment uncertainty because we still just don't have solid numbers for the fall yet," McCune said. "We just want to have the flexibility so if the numbers are low we don't have dorms that are not at full capacity."

The latest decision by Residential Life will decrease the number of residence halls that will serve undergraduate students to 16. Two halls were recently closed—Laws Hall has been demolished and demolition on Lathrop Hall will begin in May and end by August, McCune said.

Savings from shuttering the seven halls will come via a reduction of as many as 15 positions and utility and technology services, McCune said. Layoffs have not been ruled out, she said, and positions will likely be eliminated through attrition. Some staffers who now work in one of the halls to be shuttered will go to work in a new residence hall that is being built on Kentucky Avenue, McCune said.

With a total of 531 beds, the latest three halls slated for closure were chosen because they are not energy efficient.

The University of Missouri System and its flagship Columbia campus are facing a budget crunch as Gov. Eric Greitens restricted $31.4 million from the state's current fiscal year budget for UM. Greitens' proposed budget for fiscal 2018, which begins July 1, is expected to cut another $40.4 million. State cuts and declining enrollment could combine for a shortfall of about $50 million for 2018 for MU alone, MU officials have said.

UM System President Mun Choi this week told faculty, staff and students about plans for the system to cut 8 percent to 12 percent of its budget, a move that could include laying off faculty and staff, closing centers and institutes and ending unpopular degree programs.

Discovery, Responsibility, Excellence and Respect halls are four interconnected buildings on MU's eastern end on Virginia Avenue. Matt Wegner, a 20-year-old sophomore, said he had not heard of plans to shutter the four until Tuesday.

Though he has plans to live off campus next academic year, he said he liked the location of Responsibility Hall, where he currently stays, because it is close to Plaza 900, a dining hall, and most of his classes.

Closing the buildings also will not matter much to Jess Martin, a 19-year-old freshman who lives in Discovery Hall, but she said it's unfortunate for future students who plan to live in dorms.

"I think it's going to suck for people next year because they're closing most of the suite-style dorms," Martin said.

McCune said the changes are not expected to be permanent and the halls will be used for other purposes while
Missouri House budget funds schools, blocks DWI checkpoints

By David Lieb

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo.

No tolls roads. No drunken driving checkpoints. No in-state tuition rates for students living illegally in the country since childhood.

Those are just a few of the things to which Missouri House members said "no" Tuesday as they gave initial approval to a proposed $27.8 billion operating budget for the next fiscal year that contains numerous restrictions and requirements on how that money can be spent.

The Republican-led House budget plan includes nearly $3.4 billion in basic aid for public elementary and secondary school districts for the 2018 fiscal year that starts July 1 — the full amount called for under state law and significantly more than what Republican Gov. Eric Greitens had recommended.

But it would cut core funding for most public colleges and universities by 6.6 percent and for the University of Missouri system by more than 9 percent — a slightly smaller reduction than what Greitens had recommended to help balance a budget that he has described as "broken."

A financial report released Tuesday shows Missouri's revenues have been growing this year, but not by as much as needed to fully fund the current budget. Declining corporate tax revenues are part of the reason. Greitens also has cited growing spending demands, particularly by the Medicaid health care program for low-income residents.
Among its cuts, the House Republican plan would end a longtime income tax credit for low-income seniors and disabled people living in rental housing, redirecting the savings to fund programs for the disabled and seniors.

The budget plan includes a prohibition on money being used to expand Medicaid coverage to low-income adults under the federal health care law enacted under former President Barack Obama. It also prohibits any money from going to entities that perform abortions, or that refer women to others who perform them, when not necessary to save the life of pregnant women.

Missouri's Republican legislative majorities have long fought against abortion and Obama's health care law.

Previous budgets also have included wording barring state scholarships and in-state tuition rates from going to students living in the U.S. illegally because of the actions of their parents. The House defeated a Democratic attempt Tuesday to remove the ban as Republican Rep. Rick Brattin argued that doing so would be "enabling" and "rewarding wrongdoing."

The House also defeated efforts Tuesday to strip out budget-wording banning the use of state money for toll roads and law enforcement checkpoints designed to nab intoxicated drivers.

Missouri has no toll roads, and voters have rejected them in the past, but the state transportation department has been studying the potential of using tolls as part of a public-private partnership to rebuild Interstate 70 between suburban St. Louis and Kansas City.

Some lawmakers argued Tuesday that DWI checkpoints infringe on people's constitutional rights against unreasonable searches, though the courts have allowed them. Others said the checkpoints are less effective than saturation patrols, in which multiple law officers simultaneously patrol a highway with an eye toward a variety of violations. They said local law enforcement agencies could still conduct DWI checkpoints, if they funded them solely with their own money.

The House also approved a few additions to the budget Tuesday, including an amendment doubling to nearly $3 million the amount of money available to make voters aware of a new Missouri law asking them to show photo identification at the polls.

A second round of House votes is expected to occur later this week to send the 13 bills comprising the budget to the Senate, where additional changes are likely. The two chambers face a May 5 deadline to pass a final version of the budget.
All University of Missouri campuses see drop in international students

By Emily McCarter

COLUMBIA - International student applications are declining at all four University of Missouri system campuses amid uncertainty about US immigration.

The St. Louis, Rolla, Kansas City and Columbia campuses reported international student application declines from last year range from 10 to 50 percent, according to The Associated Press.

MU Spokesperson Christian Basi with the Columbia campus refused an interview but sent KOMU 8 News an email outlining international student information, without giving specific numbers about applications.

“Enrollment/applications figures for international students can be difficult to pin down due to the nature of the process,” Basi said.

He attributed the decreased interest among international students to the political climate and “the recent executive orders restricting U.S. entry from residents of certain countries.”

He said safety is also a contributing factor.

“Based on incidents that have happened around the country, many prospective students and their families have said that they do not feel safe coming to the United States,” Basi said.

The University of Missouri - Columbia’s total enrollment is 33,266 and its international enrollment is 2,507, making up about 7.5 percent of the student body.

David Sowers, an international minister with Mizzou’s Christian Campus House, said he thinks the drop in international students has to do with the protests on MU’s campus in 2015.
“I think that there were those who heard about this overseas, and I think that they became concerned, and in some cases, probably unduly so about the overall impact on the university,” Sowers said.

Sowers works with MU international students through a conversation partner program that helps teach them English. He said the drop in applications has not affected his ministry so far but is unsure about the future.

“I’ve wondered if, down the road, with the drop off in enrollment that’s occurring now, if we’re going to see some affects in the future,” he said. “I just don’t know.”

Basi said MU’s international recruiters are working to attract more students.

“Currently, our international recruiters are focusing on yield activities, but at this time, we expect to see a decrease in international students this coming fall,” he said.

Sowers agrees a drop in international student enrollment will probably continue for now.

“I would guess that probably there’s going to continue to be a trend like that for a little while,” he said. “But hopefully, that will turn around in the near future.”

But, Sowers said as long as MU handles the application drop in a responsible way, he thinks it will end up creating a positive view of the university.

“I think that the confidence level will grow and recover to what it was before,” he said.

**Missouri House budget funds schools, blocks DWI checkpoints**

By David Lieb
JEFFERSON CITY, Mo.

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Pulitzer Prize winner speaks at MU's public health and criminal justice reform

ALLYSON VASILOPULOS, 10 hrs ago

COLUMBIA — When Washington Post reporter Wesley Lowery began investigating the death of Michael Brown, who was shot and killed by police officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, he discovered that records documenting fatal shootings by police officers were scarce.

"I was shocked in some ways … that we didn’t know the answer," Lowery told an audience of more than 150 people in MU's Jesse Wrench Auditorium on Tuesday. "We’re a country that counts everything."

With a team from The Washington Post, Lowery began making a database on the newspaper website that compiled records of fatal police shootings as reported by newspapers across the nation. Lowery said in many cases, the officer was not named in the articles. Many officers were involved in multiple shootings.
These records showed that 990 fatal police shootings had happened in 2015. This conflicted with FBI data, which recorded no more than 463 police shooting deaths in any year, Lowery said.

"We knew that this was going to be an under-count based on the voluntary nature of it," he said.

Lowery spoke at MU about his experience covering interactions between the community and law enforcement officers after Brown's death in 2014. His talk was in honor of the 10-year anniversary of the creation of MU's Master of Public Health Program and the start of an undergraduate degree in public health. The undergraduate program is set to start in the fall and is accepting applications, program director Lise Saffran said.

The event was co-sponsored by the School of Journalism, the Black Studies Program, the Honors College and the College of Education, all at MU.

Saffran had read Lowery’s book, "They Can’t Kill Us All," and had heard him speak before. Saffran said Lowery's writing addressed issues that correlate to public health. His work combined individual stories and national data to see patterns in police interactions that had not previously been uncovered.

"Public health is about understanding and improving health by focusing on populations in order to see patterns," Saffran said. “I knew that he would be the perfect speaker for national public health week,” she said.

Earnest Perry, the associate dean for graduate studies at the School of Journalism, introduced Lowery.

"I'm a black man in America who’s often tasked with telling the story of black men and women killed on America’s streets by those who are sworn to protect them, but who have historically have seen and treated those men, women and even their children as anything but American," Perry said. "That story didn’t start or end on the streets of Ferguson."

As a national correspondent, Lowery reported on protests in Ferguson after Brown's death. The protests led to Lowery's investigative work as member of a reporting team for The Washington Post. The database of fatal police shootings across the nation and a series of articles won a Pulitzer Prize in 2016.
Lowery said he first heard of Brown’s shooting from his friend and fellow journalist’s Instagram, where she posted images and video of the shooting. The clips showed blood, police tape around the scene and groups of protesters.

“I was captivated by these images,” Lowery said.

At the time, most media outlets were not giving much attention to Brown's death, Lowery said. So when he flew to Missouri to cover the story, he didn’t expect to spend more than a few days on it.

"I had no real comprehension of the scope or the magnitude," he said.

It wasn't until he arrived at the first press conference held by Brown's family that he understood the impact of the shooting. Lowery said the church that housed the press conference was filled to capacity with more than 600 inside and another 100 to 200 gathered in the parking lot outside.

"It was a clear indication that there was something different about this," Lowery said.

He spent most of his time in Ferguson talking to community members. When he got back to Washington, he decided to look deeper into the statistics behind fatal police shootings and helped to construct the database, which is still being updated.

Lowery ended Tuesday's talk by questioning why an event such as Brown's death is usually the only catalyst for journalist to launch investigations. He encouraged journalists to pay attention to important stories that might otherwise go unnoticed.

"What other voices are out there that we aren't hearing?" Lowery said.
MUPD asking for help in identifying two larceny suspects

By Andrew Mitchell

COLUMBIA — Two suspects were wanted for questioning Tuesday following a larceny at the University of Missouri's Surplus.

According to the MUPD, both men were seen in the area of the larceny. Officers encouraged the public to help identify the two suspects in the photos.

Police asked if you have any information to contact Detective Tucker at 573-884-4495 or email at tuckerkl@missouri.edu.