Few new details emerge ahead of University of Missouri layoff announcements

By Ashley Jost St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 1 hr ago

ST. LOUIS • Officials were largely mum Thursday, a day before the pending announcement of layoffs and program eliminations at the University of Missouri System and its four campuses.

Multiple sources confirmed that university system leadership laid off at least part of its lobbying team and most of the public relations team.

University of Missouri System president Mun Choi is expected to discuss the extent of the layoffs and field questions from reporters Friday afternoon on the flagship campus in Columbia.

The announcement will include cuts at the system headquarters in Columbia, as well as the Columbia, St. Louis, Rolla and Kansas City campuses.

It follows a nine-week budget process during which campus leaders were tasked with identifying 8 percent to 12 percent of their budgets to cut.

The need to cut comes from a decline in state funding and, at some campuses, lower tuition revenue.

But it’s not just about making cuts to meet current deficits. Instead, Choi has pushed for leaders to think about how to make adjustments that would allow them to then reinvest money in strategic areas that show promise.
It’s unclear how closely the announced cuts will align with the proposed cuts each campus delivered to Choi a few weeks ago.

The proposal at Mizzou includes eliminating more than 300 jobs, fewer than 100 coming from layoffs. The campus is responsible for identifying $60 million in cuts.

The effects of the proposed cuts vary by campus.

The layoffs Wednesday at the system headquarters included chief spokesman John Fougere, who joined the system in 2013 from Gov. Jay Nixon’s administration.

“It has been my honor to serve my alma mater for the past four years,” Fougere said Thursday. “I will always love the University of Missouri.”

In a statement, University of Missouri System curator chairman Maurice Graham called these layoffs and other cuts “difficult but needed” to become more efficient.

“These are good people and good friends,” curator David Steelman told the Post-Dispatch. “No one likes to see this happen, but it’s happening to help make the institution a better place.”

Missouri Sen. Caleb Rowden, R-Columbia, said it’s too early to gauge how the decision to lay off an undetermined chunk of the system leadership will play out in the perception of the university by the Legislature.

“A lot of people are looking for big, significant change at the university,” Rowden said. He called this an example of that, but said that he’s personally anxious to see what the next step is.

Rowden says Choi has already helped the university system, and particularly Mizzou, work with elected officials who are still frustrated after the way the university handled a series of issues stemming from race-related protests at Mizzou in 2015.

“I’m willing and I think we should give Dr. Choi time to let this play out,” he said. “I think he has a plan for how we get to the place we want to be.”
University of Missouri System layoffs begin; big budget announcement coming Friday

BY MARÁ ROSE WILLIAMS
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Layoffs at the University of Missouri System administration and operations level have started, but university leaders have not said exactly what jobs have been lost and from what departments.

System President Mun Choi said he will make an announcement regarding the budget for the four-campus system on Friday that will include some details about “strategic investments for the short-term and consolidations and centralization efforts to streamline our operation,” according to a statement released this week to the campuses. His announcement will also deal with finance issues at the campus level.

The Friday budget announcement, Choi said in his statement, is the result of nine weeks of discussions, meetings and planning by system and campus leaders, faculty, staff, students and other stakeholders “to respond to fiscal challenges in FY18 and beyond.”

University officials did not respond to emails or phone calls requesting more details about reported system layoffs.

The St. Louis Post Dispatch reported that a “major round” of layoffs occurred Wednesday at the system’s Columbia headquarters, “affecting its lobbying and public-relations operations.”

Layoffs across the system at all four campuses — Kansas City, St. Louis, Columbia and Rolla — have been expected since Choi earlier this year instructed campus leaders to outline cuts of 8 percent to 12 percent from their budgets.

University officials have said the cuts are to deal with revenue loss because of state funding reductions, and enrollment declines on the Columbia campus. The Missouri legislature passed a budget with a 6.58 percent decrease in core funding for universities statewide. That’s after a 7.6 percent withholding announced by the governor in January 2017.
While the layoffs reported Thursday are not at the campus level, last month University of Missouri’s Columbia campus officials announced that cuts there would be the largest in recent memory. Officials proposed slashing 12 percent of the budget from all MU schools, colleges and divisions.

Last month when MU Interim Chancellor Garnett Stokes outlined the cuts — amounting to roughly $55 million — she noted there would be personnel losses and the reallocation of certain programs but did not say which departments or programs specifically stood to face the most cuts.

Weeks before the Stokes announcement, anticipating financial woes for the university, MU’s division of operations came out with news that about 25 administrative-level jobs would be eliminated from that unit, effective July 1.

Cuts at the University of Missouri-Kansas City are to be less. UMKC leaders proposed a 3 percent reduction from each school, college and division.

The cuts, university officials said, could come in the form of program eliminations, layoffs, staff reorganization and other reductions in spending.

Friday’s announcement will occur at 1 p.m. in Stotler Lounge at Memorial Union. A live stream will be available.

COLUMBIA DAILY TRIBUNE

University of Missouri System lays off communications, lobbying staff

By Rudi Keller

The University of Missouri System laid off its chief spokesman, chief lobbyist and the vice president who manages them both as part of the budget cuts ordered by President Mun Choi.

The job cuts were part of a major reduction in the University Relations staff that will save at least $664,000 in annual salary, based on confirmed personnel actions. The UM System payroll budget was $38 million as approved by the Board of Curators in June 2016.
Vice President of University Relations Steve Knorr, Director of Government Relations Marty Oetting, Director of Internal Communications Michael Kateman, Chief Communications Officer John Fougere and Strategic Communications Manager John Wells all learned Wednesday that they were no longer employed. By Thursday afternoon, the entire organizational chart for the 19-employee department and the staff listing had been removed from the UM System website.

Oetting and Knorr handled most of the lobbying duties in Jefferson City. The future of Sara Spreitzer, an employee paid $175,000 a year to lobby for UM in Washington, D.C., is uncertain.

Statehouse Strategies LLC, the lobbying firm of Andy Blunt, son of U.S. Sen. Roy Blunt, is under contract through June 2018 to lobby on behalf of UM, Wiemann wrote. Blunt was hired in November 2015 to lobby for a fee of $10,000 a month.

Details of the layoffs at University Relations, as well as other administrative changes, included in the budget plans that will be revealed at 1 p.m. Friday when President Mun Choi will make a budget address in Stotler Lounge of the Memorial Union. At that time, Choi “will outline the reallocation and strategic investment decisions made at the campus and system level,” an email notice from the UM System stated.

There will be additional changes in the university’s lobbying and communications but they have not been completed yet, UM Board of Curators Chair Maurice Graham said in an interview Thursday afternoon when asked about Blunt’s contract.

“I think we will find that Dr. Choi and the newly hired chancellor, Dr. Alexander ‘Cartwright and other university leaders will become the most effective voices for the university,” Graham said.

The four campuses have outlined $120 million in budget changes in proposals made public May 19. On the Columbia campus, the proposal included cutting 328 jobs, including 147 vacant positions, 84 layoffs and not renewing 38 annual contracts. In all, the MU campus is making $59.6 million in budget changes for the year beginning July 1 and plans for up to $21.4 million in long-term cuts.

The UM System is under financial pressure from declining enrollment and cuts to state support. Lawmakers cut UM’s state appropriation this year by 6.7 percent. Enrollment declines will cost the MU campus $10 million despite a 2.1 percent increase in most tuition rates.
The campus plans are online but the system plans have remained private while Choi mulled his budget decisions.

“University leadership has made some difficult but needed strategic and staffing decisions designed to result in effective consolidation, improved efficiency and important reallocation of resources and, most importantly, the prudent use of state funding, tuition dollars and loyal donor and alumni support,” Graham wrote in an email to the Tribune.

Kelly Wiemann, assistant to Fougere before Wednesday who did not lose her job, wrote in an email that she had no details to share about personnel changes in University Relations. Oetting and Knorr handled most of the lobbying duties in Jefferson City.

Fougere said he was told of his dismissal shortly after he arrived at work Wednesday.

“It has been an honor to serve my alma mater for the last four years,” Fougere said. “I will always love the University of Missouri.”

Fougere graduated from the MU Journalism School in 1989 and was a broadcaster with KMIZ and KFRU before taking a job with the Missouri Department of Corrections. Fougere has been a spokesman for various agencies for 20 years.

Oetting has been with the university for 29 years and Knorr has been employed by the university since 1994.

Neither Oetting nor Knorr could be reached for comment Thursday.
UM System strategic communications workers laid off
NADAV SOROKER AND GABRIELA VELASQUEZ

COLUMBIA — The UM System began a round of administrative layoffs in its University Relations Office on Wednesday.

UM System Interim Vice President for Human Resources E. Jill Pollock said that there were several layoffs in University Relations and that the people involved were notified Wednesday.

“These separations are a response to the budget cuts and a reorganization of university relations,” she said.

But she wouldn't confirm the exact number of layoffs, saying that more precise information would come during UM System President Mun Choi's scheduled budget address at 1 p.m. Friday in Memorial Union's Stotler Lounge.

Kelly Wiemann, assistant director of strategic communications, declined Thursday afternoon to confirm the layoffs, saying she couldn't comment on personnel matters.

University Relations offices at University Hall were mostly vacant Thursday afternoon. The department's staff directory was unavailable on the system website Thursday morning.

Former chief communications officer John Fougere confirmed Thursday that he had been fired shortly after arriving for work on Wednesday.

"It has been an honor to serve my alma mater for the last four years," Fougere said. "I will always love the University of Missouri."
Fougere referred further questions to the communications department.

In a public Facebook post, former internal communications director Michael Kateman updated his employment status to show that he had left his position at MU.

And Tracey Westfield, assistant director of internal communications, changed her voicemail. "As of June 1, 2017, I am working at a new job outside of the university," it says.

Pollock said there have been additional cuts, notably through the elimination of positions.

MU is facing approximately $60 million in budget cuts for fiscal 2018, according to previous Missourian reporting.

Maurice "Marcy" Graham, chairman of the UM Board of Curators, told the Missourian he was receiving many media inquiries Thursday and had prepared a statement:

"University leadership has made some difficult but needed strategic and staffing decisions designed to result in effective consolidation, improved efficiency and important reallocation of resources and, most importantly, the prudent use of State funding, tuition dollars and loyal donor and alumni support," Graham wrote.

"All decisions being implemented are made to enhance the status of the four campuses" of the UM System, he wrote. "And to further ensure Mizzou remains a major respected research university. These are challenging times throughout the country in higher education; and, MU is being proactive and meeting these challenges head-on."
University of Missouri lays off communications, governmental staff


By: Joey Schneider

COLUMBIA - The University of Missouri is laying off many members of its governmental and communications staff, according to UM Systems Chief of Staff David Russell.

He said he could not confirm who was being laid off or how many people are affected, but said the layoffs are part of a plan to reorganize university relations.

Russell said the cuts were the "consequence of efforts to deal with budget cuts we need to take."

UM System President Mun Choi plans a news conference tomorrow to address how the university is addressing a multi-million dollar shortfall. *(KOMU will live stream the event, scheduled to begin at 1 p.m.)*

Russell said there will be additional layoffs ahead.

"It's really a small part of a much bigger list of initiatives we are going to undertake," he said.

Part of the plan is to find funds the university "can reinvest to make us stronger," Russell said.

"We've got to really think transformationally about what the university can do to be more efficient, but also serve the students more effectively," he said.

Choi has ordered all schools, colleges and divisions to slash their budgets by 12 percent.

State funding cuts and declining enrollment have combined to create a substantial gap for MU.
University of Missouri system employees laid off ahead of budget announcements

By: Taylor Petras

COLUMBIA, Mo. - The University of Missouri System is beginning to cut costs for the upcoming budget year by letting go top positions within its University Relations Department.

ABC 17 News confirmed Thursday that Chief Communications Officer John Fougere was laid off from his position Wednesday. Director of Internal Communications Michael Kateman posted on his personal Facebook page Thursday morning that he was no longer employed at the UM System.

"At this time, we have nothing to share regarding personnel matters," said Kelly Wiemann, the assistant director of strategic communications in University Relations, in an email Thursday. ABC 17 News is working to confirm the layoffs of other top positions within the department that were also reported Thursday.

The news of layoffs come less than 24 hours before UM System President Mon Choi is scheduled to talk about the FY2018 budget.

In a news release sent by Wiemann Thursday, it stated: "President Choi will outline the reallocation and strategic investment decisions made at the campus and system level which support the University’s areas of excellence and its critical mission of teaching, research and outreach."

More than 80 layoffs and more than 300 jobs are expected to be eliminated at the Columbia campus. In a proposed budget submitted to President Choi on May 19, Interim Chancellor Garnett Stokes said MU is facing approximately $60 million in cuts for fiscal year 2018.
President Choi will address the community about the expected cuts at 1 p.m. Friday at the Memorial Union. ABC 17 News will livestream the event online at abc17news.com.

University of Missouri Layoffs Begin

Watch the story: http://mms.tveys.com/PlaybackPortal.aspx?SavedEditID=afd0bcaf-e4eb-420c-942a-0a8fb1943472
When UM System President Mun Choi reveals Friday afternoon his plan for cutting the system budget by $90 million and reconfiguring the institution for the years ahead, chances are that the pep band won’t be playing, as it was the last time he invited us in.

After all, the band doesn’t do dirges.

We can also expect that there won’t be much, if any, talk about just who dug the budget hole Dr. Choi and his planners are trying to fill. It wasn’t an accident.

In fact, the hole was dug quite deliberately by the Republican legislative majority to benefit the state’s wealthiest and most influential taxpayers, individual and corporate.

The digging tool was a series of top-heavy tax cuts that have reduced state revenue to the point that vital services such as higher education, assistance to the needy and even maintenance of basic infrastructure have been crippled.

Unless there’s a change in direction, which seems unlikely from our current legislature and governor, the damage will get worse each year.

The nonpartisan, nonprofit Missouri Budget Project points out that these tax cuts have left Missouri ranked 47th in the nation in state revenue per capita, 42nd nationally in spending on higher education and 34th in spending on K-12 education.
The Budget Project also reminds that our tax structure is “upside down,” with workers earning less than $53,000 a year paying 9 percent or more of their income in state and local taxes, while those earning more than $407,000 a year pay just 5.5 percent.

One especially bizarre tax break rewards businesses that collect sales taxes for merely remitting those taxes to the state on time. You might think the law should just require that.

Instead, only Colorado is more generous in allowing this "timely filing discount," which permits businesses to keep 2 percent of the sales taxes they collect if they turn in the rest promptly. The cost to the state: $114 million last year.

We’re the only state that provides a similar discount to businesses for remitting their payroll taxes on time. The hit to state revenue: $29 million last year.

Wouldn’t that $143 million have done a lot of good in 2017?

But the biggest boondoggle is just on the horizon. It’s one I’ll bet you haven’t thought of lately. I know I hadn’t. That is the looming impact of Senate Bill 509.

That massive set of cuts was passed in 2014 over the veto of Gov. Jay Nixon. It begins to take effect in the next fiscal year. When fully implemented, those cuts are expected to reduce state revenues by more than $600 million a year.

The principal beneficiaries are some, but not all, businesses, which will get tax cuts of 25 percent. Also the top-earning individual taxpayers, whose rate is reduced from 6 percent to 5.5 percent.

The losers? All those who depend on the state for basic services, which is to say the rest of us.

As the Budget Project explains, legislators were trying to “keep up with Kansas.” We’ve seen, of course, how similar cuts in taxes, revenue and services have worked out there. Not well, is how.
So what’s to be done? If you go to the website mobudget.org you’ll find a set of reasonable suggestions from the experts at the Missouri Budget Project. None is likely to be adopted by our current rulers.

To me, at least, there appear to be just two possible routes to a change in direction: Change minds in Jefferson City or change officeholders. Neither will be easy. You might want to start by asking your representative and senator how they voted on SB509 and what they think now.

Next Tuesday, members of the Boone County legislative delegation are scheduled to discuss the recent session with members of the university retirees’ organization.

I suspect those questions will come up. They certainly should.

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Program looks to improve healthcare for adolescents with autism


By: Kyah Davis

COLUMBIA – ECHO Autism, a virtual learning network of health providers, is working to train health care providers to overcome roadblocks when treating adolescents with autism.
“A significant part of adulthood is managing health care, which includes regular trips to the doctor, following treatment plans, and being aware of symptoms and changes in health,” said Nancy Cheak-Zamora, an assistant professor in the MU School of Health Professions. “This can be especially challenging for adolescents and young adults with autism.”

An MU study finds that there is a lack of developed health care transition services for not only adolescents, but the caregivers and providers also. MU released a statement on Wednesday that said the problems act as a barrier to independence for adolescents and caregivers feel they lack the skills necessary to support them.

“Many caregivers said they felt forced to remain involved in their adolescent’s care, even when their goal for the adolescents was independence,” Cheak-Zamora said.

The statement said communication between providers, adolescents, and their caregivers is the key to helping those with autism transition to independence. MU released a second statement on Thursday that explored options to improving health care for children with autism.

Long wait times and travel costs are among issues families with autistic adolescents face when seeking health care. To address these issues, ECHO Autism, an MU program, trains primary care providers to better diagnose and manage autism spectrum disorders.

“The program effectively increases the capacity for health care in under served communities,” Dr. Kristin Sohl said. “Which means that families can get the answers they need without traveling or waiting to see a specialist.”

ECHO Autism is preparing to expand with partner sites serving Alabama, Alaska and under-served Navajo communities in New Mexico and Arizona.
Missouri health chief pledges crackdown on abortion law

BY JIM SUHR/ASSOCIATED PRESS, 14 hrs ago

KANSAS CITY — Missouri's only licensed abortion provider said Thursday it was unaware until recently that it had to report any complications from the procedures under a 38-year-old state law that Missouri's new health chief is pledging to enforce more rigorously.

The acknowledgement by the Reproductive Health Services arm of St. Louis' Planned Parenthood came a day after the director of the Missouri Department of Health and Senior
Services, Randall Williams, suggested in an email to media outlets that previous administrations have been lax in enforcing the 1979 law.

That statute mandates that any abortion-related complications be reported to the state within 45 days, though it was not immediately clear Thursday whether such requirements also apply to other medical procedures.

The criticisms by Williams — a native North Carolina obstetrician and gynecologist appointed earlier this year under Missouri Gov. Eric Greitens, an abortion opponent — come amid an expected proliferation of abortion services across the state by Planned Parenthood affiliates, given a federal judge's recent rulings allowing that expansion.

While offering no specifics, including a quantification of the suspected violations under the 1979 law, Williams wrote that when the statute "requires complications to be reported, each and every complication should be reported."

"It has recently come to my attention that this law was not complied with under previous administrations. This is unacceptable," he said, pressing that he "will rigorously enforce this law in the future."

A spokeswoman for Williams, Sara O'Connor, declined The Associated Press' request for elaboration Thursday.

Jesse Lawder, a spokesman for the St. Louis region's Planned Parenthood, told the AP that the abortion provider wasn't aware of the reporting requirement at issue "until very recently" and has never been asked by the state for such reports.

"To our knowledge, no other health care providers in the state, including hospitals, were aware of the requirement either," Lawder said, adding that Planned Parenthood has shared complications-related details with the state health department during inspections and when requested.
"Now that we have been made aware of it, we will of course comply as we do with all state requirements," Lawder said.

The status of St. Louis' Planned Parenthood as the state's only licensed abortion provider is partly a result of Missouri's restrictions, including requirements that doctors who perform abortions have admitting privileges at nearby hospitals and that clinics meet hospital-like standards for outpatient surgery.

But U.S. District Judge Howard F. Sachs recently issued a preliminary injunction blocking those rules at the request of Planned Parenthood affiliates with Missouri health centers.

Sachs said he was bound by a U.S. Supreme Court ruling in a Texas case and that Missouri has been denying abortion rights "on a daily basis, in irreparable fashion."

The state has asked a federal appellate court to intervene.

Planned Parenthood’s Kansas City center has offered medication-induced abortions and has said it would resume doing so if Missouri regulations in question were deemed unconstitutional. Its Columbia center stopped offering the procedure — a nonsurgical type, induced with a pill — in 2015 after its only doctor performing medication-induced abortions lost needed privileges with University of Missouri Health Care.

The regional Planned Parenthood affiliates said last month that the agencies have applied for licenses for their clinics in Kansas City and Columbia. They're hoping to offer abortion services at those locations by this summer and are preparing related applications to the state for the Joplin and Springfield sites.