

FEB 08 2012

Windfall from settlement could help higher education

By Rudi Keller

JEFFERSON CITY — A preliminary settlement with five major mortgage lenders could soften the blow of coming budget cuts for state colleges and universities, Gov. Jay Nixon announced Tuesday.

Nixon announced his decision just minutes after Attorney General Chris Koster sent out a notice that he expects to sign a multi-state settlement that will bring \$40 million into the treasury and provide \$100 million of benefits to Missouri homeowners.

For the past 15 months, Koster said in a news release, the attorneys general of every state and the federal government have been negotiating a settlement with the five largest mortgage lenders over allegedly flawed and fraudulent mortgage foreclosure practices.

“This has been a lengthy and extremely complex settlement process, and I commend Attorney General Koster for his dedicated and persistent leadership at every stage of the negotiations,” Nixon said in a news release. “This settlement with America’s largest mortgage banks will help the states and individual consumers continue their economic recovery.”

When he announced his budget plans in January, Nixon cut \$106 million from current spending levels for higher education institutions. The cuts have brought him intense criticism from Republicans who accused him of balancing the budget at the expense of students. Almost half the cuts were from the University of Missouri, which has reported to lawmakers that it would cost up to 800 jobs on the four campuses if the cuts were all taken as personnel reductions.

Nixon announced he will meet Thursday with the presidents and chancellors of Missouri’s two- and four-year colleges and universities in his office to brief them on the changes to his recommended budget.

In his release, Koster said that if the final agreement meets his expectations, he intends to sign it, “returning more than \$100 million directly to mortgage holders in our state and adding tens of millions of dollars to the state’s general revenue fund in these difficult economic times.”

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Settlement could soften the blow to higher education cuts

By JORDAN SHAPIRO/Missouri Digital News

February 7, 2012 | 7:56 p.m. CST

JEFFERSON CITY — Gov. Jay Nixon announced Tuesday he plans to soften his proposed **cuts to Missouri's public universities with \$40 million from a pending national mortgage settlement.**

Nixon proposed a 15 percent cut to all higher education institutions for the 2013 fiscal year, which would affect Missouri's 33 two- and four-year public colleges and universities. The pending settlement is worth \$140 million, but \$100 million will go directly to homeowners. The other \$40 million would cushion Nixon's higher education cuts and reduce them to 9 percent from what the legislature appropriated last year. The Associated Press reported that the UM System would receive an additional \$18.8 million from the pending settlement.

Attorney General Chris Koster said he supported the proposed national settlement, but negotiations were still ongoing.

"My intention is to settle this portion of the state's case against the banks returning more than a \$100 million directly to mortgage holders in our state and adding tens of millions of dollars to the state's general revenue fund in these difficult economic times," Koster said in a statement. Koster is part of a lawsuit other attorneys general filed against the five largest mortgage companies in the country, which are part of the proposed settlement for fraudulent foreclosure practices during the 2008 budget crisis.

The Missouri General Assembly would still need to approve the use of additional funds. State Budget Director Linda Luebbering said the funds would not be available until the start of the fiscal year in July. Rep. Chris Kelly, D-Columbia, said he was "delighted" Nixon listened to the higher education community on restoring some of his cuts. **The Missouri Students Association encouraged students to write their legislators to voice their concerns. On their first day at a booth in the MU Student Center they collected about 1,000 student signatures.**

"I am so proud of higher education," Kelly said.

Kelly, a member of the House Budget Committee, said that he has no problem appropriating the additional money even though the state does not have it yet. He said it could be used at the end of the fiscal year if it does not come in on time. Nixon praised Koster's work and announced his amended proposed cut to public universities immediately after Koster's statement.

"My administration remains committed to working with our colleges and universities to make higher education more affordable and accessible for Missouri families," Nixon said in a statement. Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, expressed support for the additional funds, while still criticizing the governor's initial planned cuts.

"I am glad he realizes the cuts were unreasonable and unsustainable, but I will continue to work on this issue," Schaefer said. Rep. Mary Still, D-Columbia, also said she was happy to see the cuts to universities partially restored, but that there was still a long way to go.

"We need to decide our values as a state and make investments in higher education," Still said. Still said the state needed to focus on increasing revenue such as raising the state's cigarette tax, currently one of the lowest in the nation.

The announcement is obviously good news for the university, said Mary Jo Banken, executive director of the MU News Bureau.

"Members of the administration and budget planners will be analyzing this new information closely in the next few weeks to determine specifically what it means for MU as the legislative process continues," she said.

University of Missouri System Spokeswoman Jennifer Hollingshead wasn't able to comment on the proposed addition to the higher education budget but said the Board of Curators is still planning a special meeting for mid- to late- February to finalize tuition rates.

The Missouri House just started the process of reviewing the governor's proposed budget. When the House passes its version, the budget will then move to the Senate. The 2013 budget must be passed by May 11, according to the state Constitution.

Missourian education reporters Celia Ampel and Zach Murdock contributed to this report.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

How expected settlement money would be divided for colleges, universities

MU Mention on Pg. 2

By The Associated Press

February 7, 2012 | 8:25 p.m. CST

JEFFERSON CITY — Gov. Jay Nixon on Tuesday proposed using \$40 million from a possible settlement with mortgage lenders to boost funding for the state's colleges and universities. This is the budget recommendation for each school based upon figures from Nixon's budget office.

School	Governor's Original Proposal	Additional Money	Governor's New Recommendation
Crowder College	\$3,806,046	\$205,261	\$4,011,307
East Central College	\$4,417,791	\$238,253	\$4,656,044
Jefferson College	\$6,482,087	\$349,581	\$6,831,668
Metropolitan Community College	\$26,929,752	\$1,452,328	\$28,382,080
Mineral Area College	\$4,246,939	\$229,038	\$4,475,977
Moberly Area Community College	\$4,259,563	\$229,719	\$4,489,282
North Central Community College	\$2,096,499	\$113,065	\$2,209,564
Ozarks Technical Community College	\$8,686,108	\$468,444	\$9,154,552
St. Charles Community College	\$6,579,860	\$354,853	\$6,934,713
St. Louis Community College	\$38,722,613	\$2,088,320	\$40,810,933
State Fair Community	\$4,502,914	\$242,843	\$4,745,757

College			
Linn State Technical College	\$4,039,706	\$217,862	\$4,257,568
University of Central Missouri	\$46,034,654	\$2,482,660	\$48,517,314
Southeast Missouri State University	\$37,525,333	\$2,023,750	\$39,549,083
Missouri State University	\$69,425,030	\$3,744,109	\$73,169,139
Lincoln University	\$15,258,838	\$822,913	\$16,081,751
Truman State University	\$34,837,403	\$1,878,790	\$36,716,193
Northwest Missouri State University	\$25,532,375	\$1,376,967	\$26,909,342
Missouri Southern State University	\$19,745,543	\$1,064,882	\$20,810,425
Missouri Western State University	\$18,195,956	\$981,312	\$19,177,268
Harris-Stowe State University	\$8,390,113	\$452,481	\$8,842,594
<u>University of Missouri</u>	<u>\$348,250,548</u>	<u>\$18,781,236</u>	<u>\$367,031,784</u>



Schaefer vows to seek funding for higher ed

By Rudi Keller

JEFFERSON CITY — Senate budget writers will “turn over every couch cushion in state government” to look for money to aid education, state Sen. Kurt Schaefer said today.

After hearing dire warnings of eroding quality and reluctant donors, Schaefer, chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, said every agency is a target.

During a hearing on higher education funding, Schaefer questioned the effectiveness of the Department of Economic Development, an agency that has numerous programs that cost \$7 million to \$30 million a year.

But the agency charged with job creation isn't the only one that will be judged on performance as lawmakers balance priorities, Schaefer said. “We have to look everywhere.”

The committee was discussing Gov. Jay Nixon's proposal to cut \$106 million, or 12.5 percent, from this year's spending for state colleges and universities. The cut comes on top of cuts in each of the past two years and would, if left unchanged, mean a total cut of 26 percent over three years.

“We are at a very pivotal moment in the way we resource public higher education in Missouri,” said Charles Ambrose, president of the University of Central Missouri. Ambrose was speaking on behalf of the Council on Public Higher Education, which represents the state's 13 four-year colleges and universities.

“Up until this budget, institutions have maintained an ability to keep our costs low,” Ambrose said. “We are at a point where once we cross that threshold, ... that is a very difficult trend to reverse.”

University of Missouri interim President Steve Owens responded to questions about using the system reserves to plug funding gaps. Although political opposition scuttled a plan from Nixon to borrow from the UM reserves and those of other schools to cover this year's shortfall, the use of reserves became an issue this morning.

Sen. Rob Schaaf, R-St. Joseph, said the Missouri Consolidated Health Care Plan had spent its reserves to keep rates low. “Should the university spend down some of its reserve?” Schaaf asked.

Owens, who told the committee the university has \$425 million in “uncommitted fund balances,” said last year’s cuts were covered by administrative efficiencies, delays in filling open jobs and dipping into reserves.

“This year I suspect we will have to use some of those reserves to fill some of that gap,” he said.

The cuts make it more difficult to persuade donors to give to UM, Owens said. Donors aren’t motivated to provide money to fill gaps in state support, he said.

“They want to give to the margin of excellence,” Owens said.

It will be difficult for lawmakers to offer major changes in Nixon’s budget. It adds about \$200 million of general revenue to public schools to make up a loss of federal education funds, and demands from mandatory programs such as Medicaid are growing.

Schaefer hinted that the discussion could include whether the state has too many four-year universities. None of Missouri’s surrounding states supports as many.

“Part of the discussion ... is that this is the day of reckoning on what higher education is going to look like,” Schaefer said. “We have responsibility to fund it as a public institution as it was supposed to be.”

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Mo. Primary: Mizzou Tuition May Soon Spike, As Missouri Votes

You don't have to be a student at the Missouri University of Science and Technology to do the math on Gov. Jay Nixon's mid-January budget.

The Missouri governor's proposed 12.5 percent cut to higher education funding will likely result in an average 6.5 percent tuition hike for the University of Missouri system. And Nixon's budget would increase the amount yanked from the state's public university system over the last three years to 25 percent.

A week after the Democratic governor unveiled his proposal, President Barack Obama performed a different kind of calculus in his State of the Union Address. He noted that "Americans owe more in tuition debt than credit card debt," the very scenario Nixon's budget would appear to exacerbate.

"We're an easy target," said Missouri University of Science and Tech senior Laura Confer, referring to higher education in general. Confer has a unique perspective. Though she plans to graduate this year, until last week she served as an appointed member of the public university system's board. She carried the weight of her peers' futures on her shoulders in a very real way, having been part of the discussions to set tuition rates, such as the proposed 6.5 percent hike.

But the burden would not be shared equally: Mizzou's Columbia campus would experience an increase of 7.5 percent. Later this week, the board will meet to confirm the number. Other campuses such as Confer's might have a lower rate.

This tension over disappearing public funding for higher education is front and center as the bellwether Show-Me State takes part in today's primary.

And many of Mizzou's students are up in arms. On Monday the Missouri Students Association began setting up tables around campus to take action against the tuition hikes. By midday Tuesday, the student association had solicited from dismayed students 3,000 letters against the proposed funding cuts.

As students scramble to figure out how they would pay for next semester's tuition, some are asking is Nixon's proposal the only way to proceed. At least one student noticed that President Barack Obama raised the issue of college affordability, tying it to the fate of America's middle class, during his recent State of the Union address.

"Nixon can learn a lesson from our president about how important education is to Missourians," said Ben Levin, a Columbia, Mo., student active in the student association. Levin, who interned for Nixon last summer, declined to state which candidate he'll vote for.

The office of Gov. Nixon did not return repeated phone requests for comment.

The issue of education affordability might prove fertile ground for Obama's candidacy not only in Missouri but across the country. "At a time when college education has never been more important, it's also never been more expensive," said Justin Hamilton, press secretary for U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. "While we understand and appreciate that we're in very tight budget times, we want to be very careful about putting a college education out of reach because Missouri's students can't afford it."

An official familiar with the Obama administration's thinking said there is a strategy under consideration to challenge states that drastically cut higher education funding this budget season.

Even as Republican candidates have unveiled jobs plans, the GOP debates have rarely focused on education. The Obama administration has been hammering away at its middle-class message in battleground states such as Florida with events headlined by the likes of Joe Biden aimed to stir the empathy of voters, with a focus on college costs.

"This election is going to be about what things do we want government to be cutting back on, and what things we think government should be investing in," Levin says. "It's disappointing that some politicians who have primaries today think that education is something that can be cut back on without very damaging consequences. The candidates who are running today and in November are going to get student support for realizing that education is something that is incredibly valuable to the state of Missouri."

According to experts, while it is indeed common for states to trim higher education budgets, Nixon's budget would be doing so at a rate higher than most others.

Missouri is among 41 states that cut their higher education budgets this year, according to a recent report out of Illinois State University.

"Overtime, we've seen a disinvestment by states in higher education," says Jennifer Engle, who directs higher education research and policy at the Education Trust, a nonprofit think tank. "It's led to a continual increase in the share of costs being covered by students and their parents. Tuition as opposed to state subsidies now covers half the cost of higher education at a public institution, up from 37 percent. The burden [is] moving away from states and toward students."



The★Star.
THE KANSAS CITY STAR

University of Missouri sees more interest from out-of-state students

COLUMBIA -- The University of Missouri's flagship campus in Columbia says it's receiving more applications from prospective out-of-state students than from Missouri residents.

The school recently opened recruiting offices in Denver and Minneapolis to boost enrollment from outside the state. The school hired regional representatives in Dallas and Chicago in 2003 and a second Chicago recruiter in 2007.

University officials credit heavy interest from neighboring Illinois for the enrollment shift, which is a first in school history. Tuition rates for out-of-state residents are more than double the rates paid by Missourians.

The university also is considering adding recruiters in Atlanta and other Southern hubs as Missouri prepares to join the Southeastern Conference later this year.

The Mercury News

AP Associated Press

With a few rules, dogs and offices can mix well

No one at the Ohio chapter of The Nature Conservancy enjoys going to meetings more than Annie. Once, she was even disciplined for attending a meeting to which she was not invited.

Annie, a mixed-breed dog who belongs to a staff member, is a welcome addition to the office, said Josh Knights, the chapter's executive director, in Dublin, Ohio. "It gives the office a kind of warmer feeling," he said. "Just because we're nonprofit doesn't mean we're non-stress. There's something about having a dog there to pet."

Dogs in the workplace are "a growing phenomenon," said Rebecca Johnson, director of the Research Center for Human-Animal Interaction at the University of Missouri's College of Veterinary Medicine, in Columbia.

"People are realizing we need to do things to reduce stress in the workplace," she said.

Dogs can build connections among co-workers and create a healthy diversion from work, Johnson said. People interacting with dogs experience a hormonal reaction that causes them to "feel more relaxed and more positive," she said.

The programs work best, however, when there are rules, human resources officials stressed.

For instance, the experts said, dogs should be prohibited from certain rooms, such as eating areas and restrooms. And companies should allow only dogs who get along with people and other animals.

"Manners matter," said Keeli Hyde, human resource manager at G5, a marketing firm in Bend, Ore.

Not every dog can handle an office setting, she said. A few workers at her company have found that their dogs are too noisy or rambunctious for work.

Pet owners usually make good decisions about whether to bring their animals, added Jeanine Falcon, vice president of human resources at Replacements, Ltd., a china retailer that has allowed pets in the workplace for about 15 years.

"Trust your employees," Falcon said from her office in Greensboro, N.C. "People know their animals."

The 25 or 30 dogs that routinely visit the company create a positive atmosphere, she said. They provide an opportunity for employees to get to know each other better.

"When someone comes walking down the middle of the warehouse carrying a new puppy, how can you not connect or smile?" she said.

Dorothy Wetzel has noticed that when she or other staff members bring their dogs to work at Extrovertic, a New York-based marketing firm, the office is more jovial.

"There's a smile on everyone's face," said Wetzel, the firm's founding partner. "It causes us to interact more."

The pet-friendly policy also underscores the company's desire to "offer a different work experience" than more run-of-the-mill offices, she said.

"We want people bringing their whole self to work," she said.

Allowing employees to bring their dogs in lets them know that the company cares about their life outside of work, Falcon added. "It says a lot about who we are as a company," she said.

Replacements, Ltd., employee Steve Hyatt appreciates the benefit because it means he does not have to leave his dogs home alone during the day. He brings, Charlie, a beagle, and Mitzi, a mixed-breed, to work three to five times a week.

"I don't have to worry about them," said the Greensboro resident. "There's peace of mind when they're with me."

Dogs also promote some healthy habits for workers, Hyde said.

Walking a dog "forces them to go out and get some fresh air and stretch their legs," she said.

Johnson agreed, even if it's just a short walk during a 15-minute break: "The dogs need it, and the humans need it even more," she said.

In Dublin, Erin Neeb has found a park near The Nature Conservancy where she can take Annie on her lunch hour. And sometimes Neeb, who lives in a condominium and doesn't have a yard, stays late and lets the dog run up and down the hall for exercise.

"I love to bring her in the winter because she doesn't get out to walk and interact with people as much," Neeb said. "It's a good way for her to stay socialized."

Here are some tips from Pet Sitters International for bringing dogs to work:

1. Keep dogs on a leash, unless they are in the employee's office or cubicle. Not everyone loves puppy kisses, even from the best-behaved dogs, so respect your co-workers' space. Co-workers who want to pet your dog will likely come to you.
2. Use a baby gate to prevent a dog from leaving your office unsupervised. You don't want Fido dashing out of your office in the middle of an important sales call or during a visit from a business partner. Try to give the dog space to roam in your office.
3. Certain areas such as bathrooms or dining halls should be designated as dog-free. Work with management and co-workers to determine which areas those will be.
4. Have a backup plan for taking the dog home if it isn't comfortable in the work environment. While many dogs love spending a day at the office, some might not be ready for it. See if a spouse, friend or professional pet sitter can take care of a pet who needs to leave the office.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Tiger Town location proposed for area north of Elm Street

By Grace Lyden

February 7, 2012 | 1:50 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA — Several Columbia businesses would be affected **on SEC game days by Tiger Town, the proposed downtown venue for fan tailgates and celebration.**

Streets would be closed for three to four hours before each game and for about two hours after, according to Greg Steinhoff, one of the three businessmen who originally proposed Tiger Town.

The proposed area consists of the five to six blocks north of Elm Street. Fans would congregate at the intersection of Elm and Eighth streets, where the nine-block Tiger Trail to the stadium begins.

"We're being strategic to pick an area that has minimal businesses affected," Steinhoff said. There are fewer than 10 businesses in the proposed region, and the Tiger Town committee has been meeting with them.

Street closures can be negative for banks and cleaners, whose customers then struggle to get in. But that's not the case for restaurants — for them, street closures mean being open in a hub of thousands of visiting fans. This played a role in selecting the location.

"We've worked hard to minimize any negative kind of impact and to try to create as positive an environment for businesses as possible," Steinhoff said.

At Monday night's City Council meeting, Mayor Bob McDavid said the proposal "requires a lot of private sector coordination along with the city." He also said that although it's too early to vote on the proposal, it "seems to have a lot of momentum."

Similar to The Grove at University of Mississippi or The Coop at University of South Carolina, Tiger Town would be a site for vendor booths, restaurants and radio stations to provide entertainment before and after the four SEC home games.

"It's a gathering point for fans," Steinhoff said. This includes visiting fans, who would tailgate "on the periphery."

Steinhoff, along with fellow businessmen Rick Means and Bob Gerding, first proposed the idea to the council on Jan. 10 and now chair the Tiger Town committee. When the friends were in Norman, Okla., for the Missouri game at Oklahoma last season, they decided that if Missouri were to join the SEC, it would need a new venue for the thousands of visitors to Columbia.

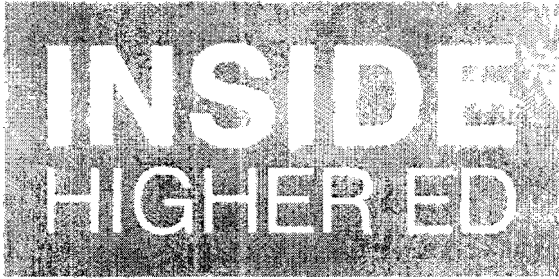
"This is our only time to have a first impression, so we want to go all out, make something unique," Steinhoff said.

The SEC requires that 7,000 stadium seats be reserved for visitors, or about three times the visitor turnout Missouri had in the Big 12, Steinhoff said. Many Columbia hotels are already booked for the SEC game weekends, he said.

"This is our chance to show our beautiful downtown and our beautiful campus," Steinhoff said.

The proposal includes a designated "family area" near Stankowski Field, four blocks down the Tiger Trail and halfway to the stadium. This area would be alcohol-free and offer games and face painting.

Tiger Town would also be the setting for a Friday night event before an SEC game, such as a concert or pep rally.



insidehighered.com

Vet School Surge

Veterinary schools expand, with focus on large animals

MU MENTION PAGE 2

By

Mitch Smith

Schuyler County -- in New York's Finger Lakes region -- is home to 18,000 people; 14,000 farm animals; one NASCAR track and exactly zero livestock veterinarians.

That dearth of vets is a common problem in rural America, and one reason behind a push by the country's veterinary colleges to admit more students.

Cornell University's College of Veterinary Medicine is seeking approval of a \$22 million plan that would allow it to enroll 120 of its annual 1,000 applicants by 2017, improve its facilities and train more students to treat livestock. That expansion would be part of the state budget approved in 2013. In the meantime, the college is seeking funds that would allow it to keep its entering class size at 102 instead of 90, its number a few years ago.

If the plans are approved, Dean Michael Kotlikoff said, Cornell hopes to increase enrollment in its food animal program from 20 in each entering class to 30.

Those extra vets -- as many as 100 graduating every decade -- could help ease a well-documented trend of veterinarians in New York and elsewhere leaving food animal practices for more lucrative careers treating domestic pets.

Adding a couple dozen students to an entering class might be a rounding error at a large university. But Cornell is part of a trend among veterinary colleges -- generally very small and incredibly selective -- making what are seen in the field as historic increases in their size. And much of the motivation for this growth is money and agriculture, not St. Bernards from the suburbs.

Schuyler County, not far from Cornell's campus, is among dozens of counties across America with thousands of farm animals but no veterinarian specializing in their treatment. Farmers have to call in vets from elsewhere to tend to their cattle, goats and sheep. Brett Chedzoy, who runs a beef operation in the county and is a senior resource educator for Cornell's extension office there, said that inconvenience has become a fact of life. "You've got to kind of get on their good side and their Christmas card list to get them to come to your farm," he said, "but they seem to be making it work."

Chedzoy said large animal vets are known for their dedication and work ethic. But he suggested it might take more than expanded college programs to attract new veterinarians.

"I think most students today in vet schools like Cornell see that there's more money and an easier lifestyle in treating dogs and cats than to be out on farms in less than ideal conditions," he said. "I kind of liken it to logging or funeral directing, you almost have to be born into it today to want to do it."

The need for more rural vets, combined with a growing pet population and higher expectations for their medical care, has created a shortage of animal doctors in some disciplines and regions. In response, more than half of America's 28 accredited vet colleges have increased their class size in recent years, some by up to 50 percent. Also, a new veterinary program is set to open this year at Lincoln Memorial University, while colleges like Genesee Community College, the University of Tennessee at Martin and Texas A&M University at Kingsville are increasing access to veterinary technician training.

The University of Georgia is nearing the end of a 10-year fund-raising effort for a new veterinary complex. Construction is slated to start in the next year, and the facility will give the college the capacity to gradually increase its enrollment from 102 students in each class to 150. Dean Sheila Allen said the growth has been a long-term goal as her college seeks to replace aging facilities and meet the needs of a growing state.

Similar growth has been seen at the University of Missouri at Columbia, where 80 students enrolled in its veterinary program four years ago. The latest first-year class had 120 students.

Dean Neil Olson said that growth could play a small role in filling unmet demand for farm animal care, a need that is especially acute in the Midwest. But Olson said the main reasons behind the 50 percent enrollment growth were the chance to increase tuition revenue and fill veterinary positions across all specialties.

Still, he said, the lack of rural vets is a challenge his college is trying to address. Missouri has five counties with more than 25,000 food animals but no food animal vets, according to American Veterinary Medical Association data. Daviess County, in the state's northwest corner, has 160,199 heads of livestock but no veterinarians specializing in their care. That places vet schools in a difficult position. In Missouri, Olson said more students are pursuing "mixed" practices where they might have an office in St. Louis or Kansas City while also serving small farms near the city.

“You can’t expect someone with seven, eight years of college education to go out into a rural area and not make a decent living,” Olson said. “It’s a real problem for us.”

But Bennie Osburn, interim executive director of the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges, said the country’s vet programs are working to fill those needs by providing loan repayment incentives to rural vets and emphasizing large animal programs.

The number of seats in vet schools has grown by about 2 percent annually for the last decade, Osburn said. The growth has multiple causes, with institutions interested in filling unmet rural needs while also generating new revenue and responding to an explosion of foreign veterinary schools that, according to U.S. vet school administrators, have been recruiting Americans.

Kotlikoff, Cornell’s dean, said all those issues are at the heart of his college’s expansion plan. But he also sees the growth as a chance to bring financial stability and improved infrastructure to a top-notch vet program with some outmoded facilities. When the college’s home was built in 1957, its student body was largely male. Now it’s 70 percent female, making locker rooms and other facilities a challenge.

Skeptics question whether the university should be graduating more vets, but Kotlikoff said those concerns are misdirected and that the expansion is a chance to help the college while meeting growing needs in both rural and urban New York. He said the state funding, available to Cornell because of its unique status as both a private college and a land-grant institution, would accomplish that. “Practicing veterinarians are saying, ‘Do we really need Cornell to produce more veterinarians?’ ” Kotlikoff said. “The combination of the operating costs and the additional tuition will do something that’s very important – stabilize the quality of the top-ranked veterinary college in the world.”

The logo for NPR (National Public Radio) is displayed in a stylized, lowercase font. The letters 'n', 'p', and 'r' are white and set against a dark, textured background that is divided into three vertical sections.

Meaningless In Missouri? Not In Santorum's View

MU MENTION PAGE 2

For an election that shouldn't matter on paper, Missouri's primary on Tuesday may carry a lot of weight.

The state's Republican electorate tends to be both populist and conservative. That could give former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum, who has campaigned in Missouri the most — and the most recently — among GOP presidential candidates, the chance for a strong showing.

"The more conservative people are going to come out for Santorum," says Eugene Dokes, GOP chairman in St. Charles County in suburban St. Louis, which is the state's largest source of Republican votes. "I think Santorum definitely is going to carry St. Charles County."

Missouri's primary is nonbinding — it's strictly a "beauty contest," with the state's convention delegates set to be chosen through caucuses on March 17. And Santorum's main rival for the conservative vote — former House Speaker Newt Gingrich — is not on the Missouri ballot.

But a win or close second-place finish there, added to his momentum in Minnesota and Colorado — which are holding caucuses on Tuesday, and where he has been polling relatively well — could bolster Santorum's claim that he, and not Gingrich, is the true alternative for mainstream Republicans dissatisfied with front-runner Mitt Romney.

"Beauty contest or no beauty contest, Santorum has a real chance to win two out of the three races on Tuesday," says Tom Jensen, director of Public Policy Polling, which has surveyed Missouri Republicans repeatedly. "Even if that's pointless from a delegate standpoint, it might have a huge effect on uniting conservatives nationally around him."

Weak returns for Romney, the former Massachusetts governor, would also signal potential problems in the fall, even if he does end up being the nominee.

Missouri was the only swing state that President Obama failed to carry in 2008 and has been trending Republican. But it's a state where Democrats are starting to like their chances, up and down the ballot.

"You'd think in a year like this, Missouri would be a state Republicans would expect to pick up in the Electoral College," says Marvin Overby, a political scientist at the University of Missouri. "But down-ticket problems with GOP candidates may join with lack of enthusiasm about the [GOP] candidate to make Barack Obama more competitive than he should be, come November."

The Classic Bellwether

Missouri used to be considered the most reliable bellwether in American politics. Throughout the 20th century, in every election except one following 1904, Missouri rewarded its electoral votes to the eventual winner.

The one exception was in 1956, when the state supported Adlai Stevenson, its Illinois neighbor.

But the state failed to extend the same courtesy to another candidate from Illinois, then-Sen. Obama. Arizona Republican Sen. John McCain carried Missouri in 2008 by the narrowest of margins — fewer than 4,000 votes out of nearly 3 million cast.

Still, a loss is a loss. Because Obama's national vote margin four years ago was larger than anyone expects him to enjoy this fall, many are skeptical that he can win a state he lost last time around.

"We used to think that Missouri was right smack in the middle, or among the two or three states that could go either way in an election," says Stu Rothenberg, editor of the Rothenberg Political Report. "It's no longer the bellwether it once was."

Still Potential For Democrats

Missouri has taken on a "red tinge," as Rothenberg suggests. Republicans swept to huge majorities in both state legislative chambers in 2010 — 106 to 56 in the House, and 26 to 8 in the Senate.

Not only have Republicans carried the last three presidential contests in Missouri, but they have prevailed in the top race on each ballot — whether the presidency or U.S. Senate — every two years since 1998, points out John Hancock, a GOP political consultant in the state.

That is, with the exception of 2006, when Democrat Claire McCaskill unseated Republican Sen. Jim Talent. She won narrowly in what was a strong Democratic year nationwide.

McCaskill's seat is considered a cornerstone for the GOP's hopes of taking back control of the Senate this year. But she is now benefiting from what is generally considered to be a weak field of Republican candidates lined up against her.

The latest polls suggest McCaskill is tied with any of her likely challengers. Democratic Gov. Jay Nixon, meanwhile, attracted even weaker opposition.

The main threat he had been facing, Lt. Gov. Peter Kinder, had to drop out owing to his relationship with an exotic dancer. Nixon is now enjoying a comfortable 20-point lead in polls.

"That sets up a situation where Democrats at the national level could possibly do better than they expected in Missouri six months ago," says Overby, the University of Missouri political scientist.

As Goes Missouri

Overby predicts that Romney, if he is the eventual Republican presidential nominee, will have a hard time appealing to the state's GOP electorate, which has grown more conservative as it has become more dominant in Missouri politics.

"It's hard to see him campaigning all that well in Missouri," says Overby, who notes that the state has a long history of hostility toward Mormons. "So much of the enthusiasm in the Republican Party tends to be on the populist side."

The Obama campaign has not been talking up Missouri as one of its top targets and has yet to devote many resources to the state. Still, polls show him running even there with Romney.

"It's a state where Romney is a hard sell," says Jensen, the pollster. "We've polled Republicans four or five times over the past year and Romney never does well. Whenever there's a flavor of the month among Republicans, he's always ahead of Romney."

Most analysts still expect Missouri to end up in the Republican column come the fall. If Obama does manage to win the state, it will be a sign that he's going to win a big victory nationwide.

"It's going to be hard — it's going to be the hardest election we've ever had in our lifetime," says Maxine Rader, GOP chairwoman in Barton County in western Missouri, which gave 74 percent of its vote in 2008 to McCain.

"But we're going to stay in there," Rader says. "That's the only thing I know."