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The Busy Little Robot on a Quest to Help Humanity Feed Itself

This story was generated by an MU News Bureau press release: [Fighting World Hunger: Robotics Aid in the Study of Corn and Drought Tolerance](#)

By Matt Simon

I'm not going to tell you to stop having babies, but the hard truth is that the population of *Homo sapiens* will skyrocket to perhaps 9 billion by 2050. More people means more emissions, which means runaway global warming, which means the agriculture required to feed those 9 billion people is in peril.

Call humanity a cancer, call it a virus, but neither of those things ever invented a robot to eyeball corn plants. Allow me to introduce you to Vinobot, the little rover on a mission to make sure crops weather global warming.

Vinobot has a partner in this, a solar-powered tower that keeps watch over a field. Using 3-D cameras, it builds a picture of the crops, looking for individual plants under stress. Should the tower spot something awry, it dispatches Vinobot. The rover uses its robotic arm to create a detailed 3-D model of the plant, showing scientists the exact angles of leaves, for instance, to determine how different kinds of corn handle drought. (Corn leaves tend to droop in the heat, reducing the surface area exposed to the sun.)

Vinobot also collects humidity, light intensity, and temperature data at the bottom, middle, and top of the shoot. **"We collect those at three different heights because we're trying to study how the density of planting is affecting the individual plants," says the robot's developer, Gui DeSouza, of the University of Missouri.** If humanity expects to feed itself in the coming decades, it must figure out how to increase yields, which means packing more crops into the same amount of land.

All of this data will help scientists understand how corn will fare in a warming world. And corn is just the start: Vinobot could trundle into fields of other crops as well. "We have a growing

population that demands more and more food,” says DeSouza. “We have to produce more, we have to optimize the field, we have to optimize the planting, we have to increase the density. How are we going to adapt to those needs?”

Robots are certainly a start. Because good luck getting humans to stop making babies.

St.LouisPublicRadio



Predictions of a mild, wet summer could mean higher yields for Missouri farmers

By Eli Chen

Generated from News Bureau press release: [Mild, Wet Summer in the Midwest Predicted By Mizzou Weather Expert](#)

Missouri corn and soybean farmers may see higher yields this year, as scientists from the University of Missouri-Columbia forecast mild weather and moderate rainfall this summer.

Meteorological records show that dry, mild winters typically are followed by average to slightly more than average rainfall in the spring and summer.

"The reason why that would be is just a switch in the jet stream pattern and now is the time of the year when we expect there to be wetter conditions in April and May," said Tony Lupo, a professor of atmospheric science at Mizzou.

That could translate into a 5 percent to 10 percent increase in corn and soybean yields, according to Lupo's research. However, data he collected for a study published last fall showed that yields are expected to be slightly lower for farmers in southeast Missouri. The reason why the data projected that is unknown.

Weather forecasters also project that El Niño, or the warming of eastern Pacific Ocean, is returning again this year, which also could be responsible for the moderate weather expected this summer.

Following an El Niño effect last year, forecasters expected to see La Niña, the cooling of Pacific Ocean, occur this year, Lupo said, but that didn't occur. He and his colleagues are studying what triggers such patterns, which remain mysterious to meteorologists.

While moderate rainfall is good for crops, the amount of rain isn't the only factor that matters when it comes to yields. For example, too much rain at the wrong time can interfere with some crops, such as hay.

"The timing of the precipitation is important, not just the quantity," Lupo said. "Of course, in our forecast, we can't speak to the timing."



Syndicated agriculture news show that is broadcast on 121 television stations nationwide

University of Missouri Meteorologist Predicts Wet and Mild Summer for the Midwest

Generated from News Bureau press release: [Mild, Wet Summer in the Midwest Predicted By Mizzou Weather Expert](#)

Watch the story: <http://mms.tveyes.com/PlaybackPortal.aspx?SavedEditID=e3d6c432-8966-4681-8937-f66f9e872533>



Mid-Missouri groups stand behind helping United Airlines

Watch story: <http://www.abc17news.com/news/top-stories/mid-missouri-groups-stand-behind-united-airlines-help/446124763>

By Lucas Geisler

COLUMBIA, Mo. - Some public agencies in mid-Missouri spending to bring United Airlines to Columbia are standing behind their investment.

Videos of a man being dragged off a United flight Sunday, leaving him bloodied, circulated social media. The airline overbooked a flight from Chicago to Louisville, and asked people to voluntarily give up their seats in exchange for money. When not enough people took them up on the offer, the company randomly selected four people and ordered them off, including the man seen in the videos screaming as officers pulled him his seat.

"When we approached one of these passengers to explain apologetically that he was being denied boarding, he raised his voice and refused to comply with crew member instructions," Munoz wrote in a memo to employees on Monday, according to ABC News. "He was approached a few more times after that in order to gain his compliance to come off the aircraft, and each time he refused and became more and more disruptive and belligerent. Our agents were left with no choice but to call Chicago Aviation Security Officers to assist in removing the customer from the flight."

United Airlines will begin service at Columbia Regional Airport on Aug. 1, offering flights to and from Chicago and Denver. It will be just the second airline to work out of COU, joining American Airlines.

To bring United in, the Columbia City Council guaranteed \$600,000 to the company in its first year at the airport. The city will also advertise the new route for United, an estimated cost of \$250,000. City spokesman Steve Sapp said they will meet with Clear Vision, the ad agency handling the United ads, this week.

Sapp said the Chicago situation did not dissuade the city in its business with United Airlines. He said while investigators there determined what happened, he did not want to give a "knee jerk reaction" to it.

Several other local governments either have or plan on contributing to the air service guarantee. Jefferson City leaders approved \$100,000 for the agreement, while Boone and Cole counties are slated to give \$50,000 each to it. Boone County commissioners will vote Tuesday morning on its share. None of the commissioners responded to ABC 17 News' request for comment.

MU spokesman Christian Basi told ABC 17 News the school remained committed to its part of the guarantee. It will dedicate \$100,000 for the fund.

"A strong airport is a key factor for our researchers, entrepreneurs and students," Basi said. "We will continue to support the development of the airport."

The city is also waiving rent for United to use the terminal space, as well as landing fees for the Denver flight. United plans to offer a 50-passenger flight to Denver daily that leaves at 6 a.m., and one that lands in Columbia from Denver at 10:49 p.m.

New data from the city shows a 24 percent increase in ridership at the airport. For the first quarter of 2017, 17,491 people arrived at Columbia Regional Airport, while 17,446 people departed from mid-Missouri. Numbers from that same time in 2016 show 14,215 arrivals and 13,987 departures.



MOCHA program now offered on high school level

Watch story: <http://www.komu.com/news/mocha-program-now-offered-on-high-school-level>

By Kristen Harris

COLUMBIA- The MOCHA program for high schoolers will begin it's interviewing process today. MOCHA stands for men of color honor and ambition.

The program is currently a UM System-wide program on the collegiate level that is employed on all four campuses. This is the first time it is being done on a high school level in Missouri.

The program is a partnership between CPS, MU Division of Inclusion Diversity and Equity and Dale Carnegie and associates and is geared towards underrepresented students.

The program is geared towards current 9th graders, upcoming sophomores. Elijah Ruffin, MOCHA program applicant, said he's applying for the program for multiple reasons.

"I want to go to college, get better grades, and better friends. I want to plan for college. I think it's a good opportunity for students," said Ruffin.

40 students were identified and recommended for the program. After the 40 students are selected they go through an interviewing process. Only 10 students will be selected. The program targets students with a gpa between 2.0 and 2.9. However, students may be recommended and considered with gpa's above that.

The cost of the program was underwritten by MU and is free for the students.

Annelle Whitt, CPS coordinator for MOCHA, said the program consists of class work and professional development.

"This summer the students will be coming to an academy where they'll be having rigorous academics where they'll be taking English, science, social studies and math. They will also have three full days where they will be trained by Dale Carnegie's organization," said Whitt.

Throughout the year the students will meet once a month and work on things such as academics, etiquette, and mentorship.

The students will receive elective credit and a suit, tie and shirt upon completion of the program.

Whitt said she wants the participants to see they can be successful in life.

"What I hope they take away from the program is the idea of knowing that they are capable of doing and being whatever they want to be. And they will have role models who have been there and done it," said Whitt.

The program will start this June and continue until May 2018.

Construction for new School of Music building to begin in January

By Olivia Garrett

Faculty of the School of Music are currently spread out across six buildings on campus, including a repurposed gymnasium and cafeteria. But in January, construction on a new building for the school will begin, bringing the various faculty and students together under one roof.

“[Separate locations] are not great for musicians, because musicians need to collaborate,” School of Music Director Julia Gaines said. “So that means they need to be near each other. The singers need to be around the instrumentalists, the composers need to be around other people, and right now we have them segregated all over campus.”

Plans for the new facility, which will cost an estimated \$45 million and include a 500-seat concert hall, were revealed March 21.

The current space for the school, the Fine Arts Building, also houses art and theater and was built in 1961.

“From the get-go, we have had no large ensemble rehearsal spaces,” Gaines said. “[The Fine Arts Building] was pretty much inadequate the minute it was built.”

Many of the spaces currently used by the school were never intended to be music buildings. McKee Gymnasium used to be an athletic facility and is now used as a space for the choir and opera to rehearse. Another, Loeb Hall, used to be a cafeteria, but is now used by bands and orchestras to rehearse.

“[In Loeb Hall] there’s a giant column in the middle of the rehearsal area,” said Stefan Freund, artistic director of the Mizzou New Music Initiative. “It’s basically where first and second flute would be in an orchestra. So, when there’s an orchestra rehearsal in Loeb, the conductor has to use a very unconventional setup.”

In McKee Gymnasium, musicians are hampered by the building’s loud window air-conditioning units, Freund said.

“I’ve done recordings in McKee and we have to basically cool off the room and then turn off the air conditioning and record a little bit and then take a break and turn it back on because it’s so loud,” Freund said.

Two of the buildings currently used by the School of Music, Loeb and the Fine Arts Annex, are in such bad condition and so expensive to maintain that they will be demolished when the school moves out, Gaines said.

“Our facilities are awful compared to most any of our peers,” Gaines said. “Students are coming from high schools with much better facilities than ours.”

Gaines hopes the new facility will help attract students and faculty to MU.

“We do have excellent faculty, but they have to work so hard in connecting with new students because we are overcoming such awful facilities,” Gaines said. “It’s a big impediment towards recruiting. We still have great students that come here and we still have fantastic faculty, so I’m thrilled that they’re still coming even though we have awful facilities. I can’t imagine what it’s going to be like when we have facilities to match the talent level of our students and faculty.”

Current plans for the new building include rehearsal spaces, a recording studio, learning labs and performance halls.

“It’s funny, I was thinking the other day that a number of the composition students that we had and ended up coming to the University of Missouri didn’t see our facilities here,” Freund said. “They did not visit Columbia. And I wonder if it’s actually a positive not to come here and see our desperate situation.”

Talk about a new building for the school has been going on for decades. The current initiative comes as a result of a \$10 million donation to the project from long-time supporters of the school, Jeanne and Rex Sinuefield.

“We gave money and basically it’s because I want to make Missouri a mecca for musical competitions,” Jeanne Sinuefield said. “I want to find and grow our composers, which means we need musicians and we need audiences and concerts.”

The Sinuefields have previously given money to support composition competitions and summer camps for high school students and the Mizzou New Music Initiative, which provides scholarships and supports the Mizzou New Music Ensemble.

“I’ve been doing this program for 11 years, and you get to a point that if you want to grow, you need a space,” Jeanne Sinuefield said. “I typically don’t like to give money to buildings unless there’s a clear need. In this particular case, it meant that we could do some really interesting things. Think about it, attracting the best students and the best faculty.”

The School of Music has raised an additional \$6 million in private funding, and the university has promised \$8 million to the project. The school had hoped to receive state funds to match the money raised from private donors, but that might not happen this legislative session.

“The problem is the state is in a deficit this year, and clearly we’re already fighting for funding just to run MU, let alone what might be considered as extra projects,” Gaines said. “That \$16

million that we were hoping for has definitely caused us to be a little bit more aggressive seeking out private funding.”

The project will likely be completed in two phases, unless the school can raise additional funds before construction starts. The Board of Curators approved the first phase of the project in December. If the school does not raise another \$20 million soon, the 500-seat concert hall will wait until phase two.

“I think that if people want a great university, then they need to give the money to make things happen,” Jeanne Sinquefield said. “I think private individuals are going to have to step up and add value.”

The school has hired Kansas City-based architecture firm BNIM and St. Louis-based acoustician Kirkegaard Associates. Right now, the school hopes to move into the new building in summer 2019.

“I look forward to having my office and rehearsal space and hopefully concert space all in the same building,” Freund said. “That would be amazing and just having nice aesthetic, pleasing and also effective rehearsal spaces.”

The new building will be located at Hitt Street and University Avenue. The 500-seat concert hall will primarily serve the School of Music, but might also provide opportunities for other community groups to perform, Gaines said.

“I think it will provide the community’s citizens with a listening experience unlike what they’ve ever had before,” Gaines said. “Nowhere in this town can somebody really go and hear an orchestra the way an orchestra is meant to be heard.”



[12-year-old subject of recent Amber Alert met suspect online](#)

Generated from News Bureau expert pitch

Watch story: <http://www.abc17news.com/news/12-year-old-subject-of-recent-amber-alert-met-suspect-online/445915352>

By Sara Maslar-Donar

COLUMBIA, Mo. - An Amber Alert for a missing 12-year-old ended with a 22-year-old arrested and accused of sex crimes on Sunday.

Apple Briscoe allegedly ran away from home at about 1:00 a.m. Sunday and asked 22-year-old William Dela Cruz to pick her up.

The two had met months before on an online video game called Onigiri and were in a relationship.

"It's like this paradox," said Lissa Behm-Morawtiz, an associate professor of communications and mass media at the University of Missouri. "We know less about the person we're talking to online, but we feel like we know them better than anyone else we've ever communicated with."

According to the FBI, the two communicated outside the game by Facebook Messenger, Skype and an app called DISCORD that features free voice and text options for those involved in gaming culture.

Court documents say "some of the messages were explicitly sexual in nature to include discussion about masturbation and sex with each other."

"There's just so many red flags in the situation," said Detective Tracy Perkins with the Boone County Cyber Crimes unit.

Behm-Morawitz said adolescents are in a state of heightened identity exploration and are oftentimes enticed by internet predators.

"When you're in this state, you're just trying to figure out who you are and then you meet someone who reaffirms how wonderful you are and tells you wonderful things about yourself," she said. "I think that's a recipe for some adolescents making some choices that might not be the best."

"What happens the younger you get, the naiveness you have, the conversation starts leading to a point where they are believable, they're likable, they're trustworthy," said Perkins. "It turns into more of a potentially romantic or intriguing conversation where it entices them to get away from their problems and they begin to have a lust or a like of the person."

In an interview with FBI agents, Briscoe said that she told Dela Cruz when she ran away from home Sunday morning and so he and his brother went to pick her up.

The brother, Jason Dela Cruz, eventually left the two in Wentzville and turned himself in in Ohio. He cooperated with police and said he left because he was nervous about Briscoe's age.

William Dela Cruz said in an interview with agents that he got a Facebook friend request from Briscoe's mother and learned that she was 12, but that didn't stop him from pursuing Briscoe.

"They're not wanting you to come out and have ice cream with them. Don't be naive and don't be silly about this," said Perkins. "I have to just always preach that parents have to be involved in their child's life no matter if it's a game app."



89.3 FM
KANSAS CITY PUBLIC MEDIA

Did Platte County Prosecutor Overstep Legal Bounds In Child Molestation Case?

By Dan Margolies

The Platte County Courthouse, ordinarily a sleepy rural outpost, is abuzz these days with intrigue.

That's because a leading candidate to be the next U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Missouri is the subject of an ethics complaint that questions the propriety of his conduct in a sexual abuse case prosecuted by his office.

Platte County Prosecutor Eric Zahnd, who is reported to be a contender for the job of the region's top federal prosecutor, has denied any wrongdoing. But his office's conduct has triggered a legal brawl with one of the area's leading criminal defense attorneys, prompting a cascade of court filings and questions about how certain witnesses in the case were treated.

Many of the court documents are sealed, but a petition filed last month with the Missouri Court of Appeals referred to their contents, including the ethics complaint.

The legal saga dates to August 2015, when Dearborn, Missouri, resident Darren L. Paden pleaded guilty to sexually abusing a girl over the course of a decade, beginning when she was 5 years old.

Through court records and interviews with more than a dozen individuals and lawyers familiar with the case, KCUR has reconstructed what happened and how Zahnd and Paden's lawyer came to be at loggerheads, culminating in the current legal imbroglio.

Letter writers subpoenaed

The case deeply divided the small Platte County town, where Paden's parents were respected members of the community and Paden was a one-time chief of the all-volunteer fire department and a junior deacon at his church. Some townspeople refused to believe he was guilty and were convinced he was coerced into confessing.

More than a dozen friends and relatives of Paden wrote letters to the judge pleading for leniency. The letters cited his work on behalf of his neighbors, community and church and asked the judge to take that into account at his sentencing.

The letters had little effect: On Oct. 30, 2015, Platte County Circuit Judge James Van Amberg handed Paden two consecutive 25-year sentences, equivalent to a life sentence for the 52-year-old defendant.

But before the sentencing, Zahnd's office did something highly unusual: It contacted the people who had written character letters on behalf of Paden and told them to get in touch with assistant prosecutor Chris Seufert. When they did, Seufert told them that, unless they withdrew their letters, he would expose them as supporters of a defendant who had engaged in pedophilia.

Zahnd's office also subpoenaed the letter writers, ordering them to appear at Paden's sentencing hearing. But when they showed up, none of them were called to the witness stand.

Some of the letter writers contacted Paden's attorney, John P. O'Connor, and told him what happened. O'Connor, concerned that Zahnd's office was trying to intimidate witnesses, asked for advice from a former attorney for the Missouri Office of Chief Disciplinary Counsel, the agency responsible for investigating and prosecuting attorney misconduct.

Bar complaint

The attorney, Sarah Rittman, told O'Connor he was duty-bound to report what she regarded as clear-cut ethical violations by Zahnd and Seufert to the Office of Chief Disciplinary Counsel.

Reluctantly, O'Connor later told a judge, he did just that. So did a retired Platte County Circuit Judge, Abe Shafer, who represented one of the letter writers and also filed a report about Seufert with the Office of Chief Disciplinary Counsel.

O'Connor declined to comment on his bar complaint. Shafer also declined to comment.

Criminal defense attorneys and legal ethics experts contacted by KCUR say they have never heard of a prosecutor subpoenaing character witnesses and threatening to expose their names unless they withdrew their testimony. It's not uncommon for people to submit character letters on behalf of criminal defendants before they're sentenced, but those letters are not typically viewed as an endorsement of the crime.

“It is just one of the most egregious breaches of ethics that I’ve heard a prosecutor do,” said Sean O’Brien, a former chief public defender in Kansas City and later head of what’s now known as the Public Interest Litigation Clinic, which represents clients in death penalty cases.

“I mean, he’s literally threatening people to get them to withhold relevant information from the court.”

O’ Brien said it is a violation of due process for a prosecutor to prevent witnesses from disclosing to a sentencing court information that they believe to be truthful and relevant to the court’s decision.

“He should be disbarred for conduct like this,” said O’Brien, now a law professor at the University of Missouri-Kansas City.

Michael Downey, a legal ethics lawyer with the Downey Law Group in St. Louis, said that “if a defense attorney had called in a bunch of prosecution witnesses and said, ‘I’m going to out you for being against my guy,’ there’d be a very good chance the defense attorney would be prosecuted.”

He added: “Subpoenas are supposed to be used to get discovery, and here he’s not looking for discovery, he’s looking to bring in people so that he can intimidate them, which is not proper.”

But R. Lawrence Dessem, a legal ethics professor at the University of Missouri, said the subpoenas were aggressive lawyering but didn’t necessarily cross an ethical line. The real concern, he said, was the pressure put on the letter writers and the public scolding after Paden’s sentencing.

“We don’t want people in our communities holding back on relevant information they’ve got out of fear that if they come forward with that relevant evidence, there’s a possibility of retaliation from the prosecutor,” Dessem said.

Zahnd, in emailed answers to questions about the subpoenas, categorically denied that he or anyone in his office did anything wrong, but said he was limited as to what he could say about the case.

“I would like to discuss every detail of my office’s interactions with his supporters, but Rule 5.31 states that ‘all proceedings and records’ involving complaints to the bar ‘shall be confidential,’” Zahnd wrote, referring to one of the Missouri Supreme Court’s Rules of Professional Conduct. “That rule applies regardless of whether the complaints are valid or completely baseless.”

Zahnd said he was “firmly convinced that my office handled every aspect of Mr. Paden’s case in a lawful and completely ethical manner that resulted in justice for the victim, the defendant, and the State of Missouri.”

“Generally speaking, I fully appreciate that people who want to provide character evidence for a convicted child predator would prefer to argue for leniency outside the public eye and without being confronted with challenging facts,” Zahnd continued. “But that’s not the way our system of justice works.”

Zahnd pointed to the child molestation case against former U.S. Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert, in which the judge refused to consider character letters without making them public.

“Our country has always believed in open court proceedings and the right to confront witnesses—even if that makes some witnesses uneasy,” Zahnd said.

Public shaming

Zahnd’s office, however, did more than subpoena Paden’s character witnesses. When they refused to withdraw their letters, it publicly shamed them in a news release that was published on the front page of *The Landmark*, a weekly newspaper covering Platte County, and on the Platte County Prosecutor’s Facebook page.

After recounting the details of Paden’s confession that he abused the girl two or three times a month from 2001 to 2012, the news release stated:

“Nevertheless, many members of the Dearborn community wrote letters on Paden’s behalf following his guilty plea. Prosecutors met with most of them to make sure they understood that Paden had fully confessed to his crimes, yet many of those community leaders continued to stand by Paden.”

The release then listed the names (and some of their occupations or affiliations) of the 16 people who wrote letters on behalf of Paden. One was a former bank president, two were former schoolteachers, three worked for the North Platte School District and another one was a nurse practitioner.

The public shaming had repercussions. In May 2016, Kathie Ousley, a member of the Platte-Clay Electric Cooperative, sought to change the way board members are removed from office after expressing her unhappiness that one of the letter writers, Jerry Hagg, served on the board. The *Clay County Courier-Tribune* reported that Ousley said she and other board members did not want to be represented by directors they felt were morally corrupt.

Hagg declined to comment. But Darla Hall Emmendorfer told KCUR that her character letter had been cited disparagingly in places as far away as Pennsylvania.

“What I did not expect was that the prosecuting attorney would get hold of my letter and use it the way they did use it,” she says.

Emmendorfer said she received a phone call from Zahnd’s office asking her to come to the office the next day. When she did, she said, she was pressured by Seufert to rescind her letter.

“He said, ‘How can a good mother support a child molester with the evidence that we have like this?’”

“It’s still emotional for me,” Emmendorfer said, “because it’s kind of a scary thing to think that a prosecuting attorney would want to win, or put this case on their badge of honor as making a conviction without what I felt was due process. And also with using the people who have a right to tell the judge what they think.”

More repercussions

The repercussions have now spread to other cases being prosecuted by Zahnd’s office.

In June 2016, while O’Connor was in the Platte County courthouse on an unrelated case, Zahnd, Seufert and another Platte County prosecutor asked him to meet with them in front of Van Amberg, the Platte County Circuit Judge who presided over the Paden case. At that meeting, they told Van Amberg about O’Connor’s bar complaint and said they didn’t trust him.

They then told Van Amberg that they would only communicate with O’Connor if the exchanges with him were recorded or on the record before a judge.

For O’Connor, who has practiced for 35 years and is one of the Kansas City area’s most respected criminal defense attorneys, those restrictions posed a huge problem. Besides Paden, O’Connor at the time represented five other defendants in criminal cases in Platte County – one of them a death penalty case – and he contended he couldn’t represent them effectively under those circumstances.

As a result, O’Connor’s clients moved to disqualify Zahnd’s office from handling their cases and asked that a special prosecutor be appointed instead. The Missouri Supreme Court appointed Glen Dietrich, a retired Nodaway County judge, to hear the motions after judges in Platte County were recused.

Dietrich, however, didn’t disclose that he had been a law partner of Zahnd’s uncle, Larry Zahnd, for 19 years. (Larry Zahnd died on March 28 at age 83.) O’Connor learned of the relationship only weeks later and promptly moved to have Dietrich recused.

Another judge appointed by the Supreme Court, Teresa Bingham, heard the recusal motion and in December she denied it. In her four-page ruling, she concluded: “In this matter, the proceedings as to the Motion for Change of Judge for Cause were open, and this Court finds that a reasonable person would NOT (caps in original) have a factual basis to find the appearance of impropriety or have any reason to doubt the impartiality of Judge Glen Dietrich.”

Motions seek to disqualify prosecutor

Meanwhile, Dietrich had sealed some of the records in the motions seeking to disqualify Zahnd’s office from handling cases involving O’Connor’s clients. Those motions were heard on Jan. 25 during a session in the Platte County courthouse that lasted all morning.

At the hearing, Zahnd argued that O'Connor bore an animus toward his office and was merely trying to gain a tactical advantage on behalf of his clients.

“If the court were to grant Mr. O'Connor's motion, I suspect that we will see defense attorneys all across the nation, particularly in capital cases, intentionally creating one-sided animosity, making complaints and filing motions to disqualify, simply to make serious capital litigation harder, longer and more expensive by replacing prosecutors whenever they have a chance,” Zahnd told Dietrich.

As proof of O'Connor's hostility, Zahnd said that O'Connor had repeatedly used profane language against Seufert in the past.

O'Connor countered at the hearing that he harbored no animosity toward Zahnd or his office but was obligated as an officer of the court to file the bar complaints against them.

Although he wasn't allowed to make direct reference to the bar complaints – Dietrich had ruled they were confidential – O'Connor was clearly referring to them when he said that filing them “was not something I set out to do personally.”

Dietrich took the motions to disqualify Zahnd's office under advisement, and on March 16 he handed down a 25-page decision finding that O'Connor and his clients had failed to show Zahnd's office could not treat them fairly or impartially.

O'Connor, who otherwise declined to be interviewed on the record while the matter remains pending, said, “I respect the ruling of the court. However, we intend to appeal the decision of the judge both to not recuse himself and the judge's order not disqualifying the prosecuting attorney's office.”

That happened on March 27, when O'Connor's clients took the matter up with the Missouri Court of Appeals. Four days later, without explanation, the court denied their petition. The clients are now considering whether to take the matter up with the Missouri Supreme Court.

Questions continue

In the meantime, questions continue to swirl. Zahnd, who was first elected as the Platte County Prosecuting Attorney in 2002, has been re-elected three times since then. He is the longest serving elected prosecutor in the Kansas City area and was named Prosecutor of the Year in 2014 by the Missouri Association of Prosecuting Attorneys, an organization he served as president.

Criminal defense lawyers say they're mystified by the subpoenas Zahnd's office issued, not only because they seemed to serve no real purpose but because they could violate various Rules of Professional Conduct – the ethical strictures that govern attorney conduct – and even, in an extreme scenario, amount to witness tampering, which is a criminal offense.

Lawyers and legal ethics experts say that lawyers are obligated to present mitigating evidence on behalf of their clients after they have entered a guilty plea. That includes letters like the ones written on behalf of Paden.

“These individuals were entitled to be heard and they were entitled to address the court on their friend or family member or acquaintance’s character, so certainly what they had to say is relevant,” said O’Brien, the former public defender who now teaches at UMKC. “Whether the judge was moved by that is a whole different consideration.”

For now, the bar complaints filed by O’Connor and Shafer remain confidential. If the Office of Chief Disciplinary Counsel determined that an investigation was warranted, Zahnd will have been given a chance to respond and O’Connor to reply.

The records only become public if there’s a finding that a Rule of Professional Conduct was violated and the matter is taken up by the Missouri Supreme Court. Only the court is empowered to reprimand, suspend or disbar lawyers.

By all accounts, Zahnd is now poised to reach what many prosecutors see as a career pinnacle: a job as U.S. Attorney, the top federal law enforcement officer in the region. The position has been vacant since President Trump ordered all holdover U.S. Attorneys to resign in March. If the recent past is any guide, it may be months before a candidate is nominated, vetted, appointed and confirmed by the U.S. Senate.

Story continues here: <http://kcur.org/post/did-platte-county-prosecutor-overstep-legal-bounds-child-molestation-case#stream/0>



The More Things Change

Compensation survey from AAUP says faculty salaries are up slightly year over year, but institutional budgets continue to be balanced “on the backs” of adjuncts and out-of-state students.

NO MU MENTION

BY COLLEEN FLAHERTY APRIL 11, 2017

Pay for full-time faculty members rose 2.6 percent this academic year over last, according to “Visualizing Change,” the American Association of University Professors’ Annual Report on the Economic Status of the Profession. But professors shouldn't get too excited: adjusted for inflation, that amounts to just 0.5 percent.

Although average faculty salary increases this year are fairly close to the increases the past two years, a relatively high Consumer Price Index in many metropolitan areas “means the real buying power of any increases [is] substantially diminished,” said Samuel J. Dunietz, a senior program officer at AAUP who helped write the report.

Released today, AAUP’s annual survey finds that the average salary for full-time ranked faculty members was \$80,095 in 2016-17, while the average total pay for part-time faculty members at a single institution was \$20,508. Average pay for part-time faculty members teaching on a per-section basis only (excluding professors teaching part-time during phased retirement, for example) was \$7,066, with serious limitations to the data.

The compensation data above are collected annually by the American Association of University Professors. Participation in the AAUP survey is optional; 1,022 institutions submitted data for the 2016-17 academic year.

Full professors earned \$102,402, on average, across ranks, disciplines and institution types. They also saw the largest increase in salary from 2015-16, of about \$2,956, on average. Associate professors earned \$79,654 and enjoyed a \$2,462 average bump in pay. Assistant professors made \$69,206, up by about \$2,224 from the year prior.

Salaries for continuing faculty members, who have served one or more years at the same institution, increased at all ranks, by about 1 percent, adjusted for inflation, according to AAUP. For continuing full professors, the bump was about 0.6 percent, and 1.2 percent and 1.5 percent for the entire population of associate and full professors, respectively. Yet AAUP found no evidence of widespread salary inversion or compression, in which junior faculty members make the same or more than their more senior colleagues.

While the gap between junior and senior ranks “may be narrowing slightly,” reads AAUP’s report, “it would take a long time for assistant professors to catch up even to associate professors at the current rate. In addition, a very high increase in salaries at a few institutions could skew the average.” *Story [continues](#).*