



MU News Bureau

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ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

Mizzou's endowment reaches \$1 billion

By ASHLEY JOST

RAN ON FRONT PAGE OF PAPER

Generated from News Bureau Press Release: [MU endowment surpasses \\$1 billion, reaches record high](#)

With the help of some recent big gifts and positive trends in the market, the University of Missouri-Columbia hit a new milestone: Its endowment reached \$1 billion.

A hearty endowment makes universities look good when they're competing for top faculty who are going to bring in grant money, as well as for top students.

It's all about competition, and for a while, some other universities have had an advantage over Mizzou, according to Tom Hiles, vice chancellor for advancement.

Despite misconceptions about what a university endowment exists for, it's not a pool of money that schools can tap for whatever they want.

Endowments don't fix ongoing budget issues caused by declining state money and tuition revenue. Most schools pull only 3.5 percent to 5 percent of their endowment to spend on an annual basis. For Mizzou, it's 4 percent.

About 95 percent of the gifts made to the university are restricted, Hiles said. At Mizzou, about one-third of the almost 4,000 active endowments are used to cover more than 1,200 scholarships. Just over 20 percent are used for more than 900 endowed faculty positions.

And almost one-third of the money covers specific programs, such as the Thompson Center for Autism.

Hitting the \$1 billion mark for the overall endowment was a goal when the school kicked off its "Our Time to Lead" fundraising campaign back in 2012. A [\\$21 million gift in September from the co-founder of Taco Bell](#) pushed the campaign to \$940 million. As is the case with capital campaigns, most of the larger gifts are pledges. A big payment on that \$21 million gift — the sixth largest gift in the school's history — helped push Mizzou into 10-digit territory.

Reaching the milestone hasn't always been easy.

There was mounting concern after 2015 when some donors said they wouldn't give to the university again. They were angry with the way the flagship campus handled a series of incidents including on-campus protests.

A former Mizzou assistant professor, Melissa Click, [was infamously filmed denying media access to student campus protesters](#), and ultimately, two top leaders stepping down from their posts.

The school has been plagued since with declining enrollment and [donations](#).

Mizzou reported in July that the school collected in \$152 million during the budget year, which was down about \$19 million from the previous year.

Leaders say they've bounced back from the donation dip.

José Gutiérrez, a co-chairman of the Our Time to Lead campaign, said the people who threatened not to donate again "became a minority." As one of three co-chairs for the campaign, Gutiérrez is a major donor and advocate for the fundraising effort.

"I think everyone needed to vent, depending on what opinion they had on different issues, but ultimately I think we all reached the same conclusion," said Gutiérrez, a retired AT&T executive. "When a person or an institution you love is going through its worst time, that's when it needs help from its loyal ones."

Overall, Mizzou's endowment has grown by more than 85 percent in the last 10 years.

A chart from Hiles' office shows the endowment at \$540 million in 2008 before it dropped to \$466 million the following year. It has recovered steadily since.

According to the [National Association of College and University Business Officers annual catalog](#) of university endowments, schools holding an endowment just over \$1 billion after budget year 2016 included St. Louis University (\$1.05 billion) and the University of Tennessee (\$1.1 billion).

Mizzou is the seventh school in the Southeastern Conference to hit the milestone. The highest-ranking SEC school by endowment measures is Texas A&M University, which reached \$10.5 billion in 2016.

Fewer than 40 public universities in the country have hit the \$1 billion mark.

Leading all institutions in endowment size is Harvard University with \$34.5 billion in 2016. During the same year, Washington University ranked No. 16 nationwide with \$6.5 billion.

THE KANSAS CITY STAR.

Even as MU's enrollment sags, its endowment reaches 'major milestone'

By MARA ROSE WILLIAMS

The University of Missouri may be struggling to grow its enrollment, but its endowment has reached a record level, topping \$1 billion.

In announcing the total Wednesday, university officials said such financial support is bound to attract “quality students and faculty” to the Columbia campus.

The new endowment total, university officials said in a statement, represents “a major milestone for the university.”

MU's endowment hit the billion-dollar mark — \$1,003,739,236, to be precise — through new private gifts and stock market growth. The endowment has increased by more than \$400 million in the six years since the university launched its “Mizzou: Our Time to Lead” campaign.

“Generations of donors have graciously invested in our students and faculty, and we cannot thank them enough for their long-term vision and generosity,” said MU Chancellor Alexander N. Cartwright. “Our students and faculty achieve great things when we give them the support they need to pursue their passions in education, research and engagement.”

Some of the top donors include Rich and Nancy Kinder, who made a \$25 million gift to establish the Kinder Institute in 2015; the William Reynolds Foundation, which gave \$30.1 million for the Reynolds Journalism Institute in 2012; and David Novak, who gave \$21.6 million to establish the Novak Leadership Institute.

University officials said building the endowment is one of their top priorities.

The endowment consists of 3,800 endowed funds. To preserve the principal, the university spends only 4 percent of each fund's value annually. The spending breakdown: 33 percent on scholarships, 29 percent on programs, 22 percent on faculty positions and 14 percent on other categories. Two percent is unrestricted.

“The vast majority of donors direct where their dollars are spent,” said Tom Hiles, vice chancellor for advancement. “It is very much the exception for endowed dollars to go to capital or operations.”

The endowment's value dropped in 2009 during the economic recession.

“The markets got killed that year,” Hiles said.

The endowment slipped in 2016, a year after race-related protests erupted on the Columbia campus. The fallout from those protests, university officials agree, blemished MU’s reputation, drew criticism from state legislators and slowed enrollment. The 2017 incoming class was down 33 percent from two years earlier, and total enrollment is down nearly 13 percent since 2015.

MU is the seventh school in the South Eastern Conference to achieve a \$1 billion endowment. Texas A&M has the largest endowment at \$9.7 billion, Vanderbilt is at \$4.1 billion and University of Alabama is at \$1.2 billion. The smallest endowment is \$470 million at Mississippi State.

Of the 1,644 public higher education institutions in the nation, MU is the 37th to reach the billion-dollar mark. The University of Kansas had an endowment of \$1.4 billion as of June 30, the official end of the fiscal year for the universities. It has since risen to \$1.5 billion.

Some elite private schools have endowments larger than the gross domestic products of many small nations, including Harvard, which has a \$36 billion endowment, the largest in the United States. Yale’s endowment is \$24.5 billion.

“Endowed gifts are a great way to leave a lasting legacy,” Hiles said. “It is inspiring to know that a hundred years from now, these gifts will continue to make a difference.”



University of Missouri endowment tops \$1B for the first time

COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) — The endowment of the University of Missouri’s flagship campus in Columbia has topped \$1 billion for the first time even as the campus struggles to recover from race-related protests and drops in enrollment.

Chancellor Alexander Cartwright said in a news release Wednesday touting the achievement that “overwhelming support from donors attracts quality students and faculty.”

The university is eager to grow its enrollment. Since the protests in 2015, enrollment has dropped by almost 13 percent. Seven residence halls that would have been used for freshmen

either didn't open this fall or were repurposed as office space or to house out-of-town football fans and international students enrolled in an engineering program.

The endowment shrank during the recession, but through new private gifts and stock market growth, it's increased by more than \$400 million since the campus launched its latest fundraising campaign six years ago.

"Generations of donors have graciously invested in our students and faculty, and we cannot thank them enough for their long-term vision and generosity," Cartwright said.

Some of the top donors include Rich and Nancy Kinder, who gave \$25 million to establish the Kinder Institute in 2015; the William Reynolds Foundation, which gave \$30.1 million for the Reynolds Journalism Institute in 2012; and David Novak, who gave \$21.6 million to establish the Novak Leadership Institute.

The release said the university is the 37th of the nation's 1,644 public higher education institutions to reach the billion-dollar mark.

The AP version of this story ran in several media outlets throughout the country and the state of Missouri.

T COLUMBIA DAILY
TRIBUNE

MU endowment tops \$1 billion mark

By RUDI KELLER

RAN ON FRONT PAGE OF PAPER

When Mark Wilkins, a 1990 graduate of the University of Missouri, said Wednesday why he created a scholarship in the name of former admissions director Georgeanne Porter, he had a hard time getting out the words.

His voice choking, Wilkins described himself as a scared 17-year-old from Waynesville — a town of about 3,000 people in Pulaski County — scared by the prospect of attending a school with more than 22,000 students. Porter, whose husband Gil Porter was a professor of English, befriended him after they met when Wilkins was volunteering with a student group.

They became friends for life and he visited her for the last time earlier this year, just before she died in August at age 68.

“The least that I could do was to set up another endowment and a scholarship fund in her name to perpetuate the things that she gave to me — human beings helping other human beings to be the absolute best that they can be, to live up to their potential,” Wilkins said.

Wilkins’ gift, along with others received recently and the rapid rise in stock market values this year, have helped push MU’s endowment pool to more than \$1 billion for the first time. Since June 30, 2016, the pool has increased in value by \$161 million, with \$55 million of that increase in just the past five months. The endowment pool includes money contributed to support scholarships, professorial chairs and other university academic activities.

The university celebrated the milestone with a news conference in Jesse Hall featuring Wilkins, who has endowed three funds in all; Susan Empson, the Richard G. Miller Chair of Mathematics Education; and Alicia Curran, project coordinator at the Thompson Center for Autism.

Empson came from the University of Texas, lured away by the salary and support the Miller endowment provides. Curran, the mother of an autistic child, was a client of the Thompson Center before she became employed at the research and treatment program endowed by Bill and Nancy Thompson.

At the end of fiscal 2012, when the Mizzou: Our Time to Lead fundraising campaign was just getting underway, the endowment stood at \$620 million. Donations have added \$300 million to the total, Chancellor Alexander Cartwright said in his remarks. Growth in the value of investments has provided the rest.

The university has raised nearly \$1 billion of its \$1.3 billion fundraising goal and increasing the endowment is one of the major goals of the campaign. In his remarks, Vice Chancellor for Advancement Tom Hiles said the continued success of the campaign is a counter to the stream of bad news about enrollment, state budget support and other issues.

“I have even heard some people rooting against us along the way,” Hiles said. “As I have said a couple of times, to all the people who count us out or root against us, you are going to be sorely disappointed.”

On Tuesday afternoon, the endowment pool’s exact value stood at \$1,003,739,236. That makes MU the seventh of 14 Southeastern Conference schools to achieve that mark and only the 37th of 1,644 public colleges and universities with an endowment that large.

The first endowment was \$6,000 donated by James Rollins, a fund that is now worth \$250,000. Unlike other universities, MU did not focus on growing the endowment until 2000, Hiles said, but it is beginning to catch up with competitors.

“Many of our peer flag institutions have much larger endowments and that gives them a competitive advantage,” he said.

The push is on to secure more large donations by Dec. 31 in anticipation that federal income tax laws could be less generous toward charitable gifts, Hiles said Tuesday.

“We certainly are making them aware of it,” Hiles said of the potential loss of deductions.

Under the budget policies governing endowments, MU spends 4 percent of an endowment’s value each year, counting on income from investments to avoid spending the principle in the fund. That means the \$1 billion endowment pool can provide \$40 million annually to support the campus.

Most of the funds are dedicated to particular projects. The smallest endowment is \$25,000, an amount that would provide \$1,000 a year for a partial scholarship, Hiles said. One of the largest endowments, \$31 million, supports the operations of the Reynolds Journalism Institute.

About \$20 million of the endowment pool is unrestricted, meaning that the \$800,000 of income it provides can be used for anything the university needs. Of that pool, \$12 million is in the Chancellor’s Fund and most of the remainder is in unrestricted funds held for various academic units, Hiles said. Wilkins, managing director at Wilkins Group, an office of UBS in St. Louis, has also provided money to endow the ROTC and to fund projects for the College of Arts and Science dean’s office. Honoring Porter was extremely important so she is remembered, he said.

“For me as a human being I have had no greater mentor and I couldn’t think of a better way to honor her and to honor her legacy than to start a scholarship fund in her name,” Wilkins said.

To the students who receive the support, Wilkins said he hopes they find MU is a place that expands their world the way it did his.

“I don’t ask anything specific of them except to dream big and to dream bigger than they thought,” he said.

MISSOURIAN

MU becomes seventh SEC school to surpass \$1 billion endowment mark

By KATHERINE WHITE

RAN ON FRONT PAGE OF PAPER

MU endowment has passed \$1 billion, making it the 37th public higher education institution in the U.S. and the seventh in the SEC to do so, university leaders announced Wednesday morning at Jesse Hall.

Tom Hiles, vice chancellor for advancement, said the university still has a ways to go when it comes to building endowments. He said this is because many other public institutions started fundraising efforts in the 60s and 70s, while MU started its first major campaign in the 2000s.

"This is a notable achievement and a real tribute, but it is just a starting point for us," Hiles said at the announcement. "We're still behind many of our peers from a competitive basis, so we're very determined to continue this process."

Increasing MU's endowment is one of three main goals of the "Mizzou: Our Time to Lead" campaign, a [comprehensive funding campaign that was launched six years ago and announced October 2015](#). Since the launch of the campaign, the university's endowment has grown by more than \$400 million, according to an MU news release. New private gifts and stock market growth contributed to this increase.

An endowment is a private donation, usually toward a specific purpose or program specified by the donor. These gifts are put in investment accounts so the endowment's principal is preserved while the annual income generated by the account can be used according to the donor's wishes. The university spends 4 percent of each endowed fund's value each year.

Hiles directs MU's fundraising and alumni programs, which head the campaign through tasks like coordinating volunteers and soliciting donors. He stressed the value of endowments.

"The No. 1 thing I want people to remember is how inspiring it is to see people willing to provide resources through endowment for people years from now," Hiles said. "They'll never meet these people, but they're supporting a legacy that goes well into the future. We all work hard in different ways and we hope something we did helps other people, and this one is one way to ensure that."

Chancellor Alexander Cartwright introduced the event, which featured three stories of endowments' impact. Mark Wilkins, a cabinet member for the Our Time to Lead campaign, spoke about how his time at the university inspired him to help fund scholarship endowments.

"That fund doesn't solve world peace either, but I strongly, strongly believe in a liberal arts education," Wilkins said.

Susan Empson, who holds the endowed mathematics education chair in the College of Education, spoke about how endowment funds allow her to design ways to implement her research results in classrooms.

"I wouldn't be here at Mizzou if it weren't for the endowment," Empson said.

The third featured speaker was Alicia Curran, who became a project coordinator at the Thompson Center for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders, one of the endowment-supported centers at MU, after her family received support from the center while raising a son with autism.

"The care we received is exactly why I wanted to be a part of the Thompson Center," Curran said.

MU has seen a decline in state funding, but endowments, which are mainly restricted, cannot replace the operating dollars given by the legislature. Hiles said increased endowments do help, though, because schools with large endowments are not as subject to fluctuation in state support.

"It doesn't replace (operating dollars) but it can help you work through the process," Hiles said. "We appreciate and depend on the state support we receive, and we hope the legislature would be excited that we've achieved this mark. This is a testament to our alumni saying, 'We want to help as well.'"

According to a handout from the event, the three largest endowment purposes are scholarships, program support and faculty enhancement.

The campaign is MU's largest-ever fundraiser with a \$1.3 billion goal. Besides increasing endowments, its other main goals are developing signature centers and institutes with endowments of \$10 million or more and creating new academic buildings.

"Campaigns are a framework that focus universities on priorities, so it's been very important because we've got a whole group of volunteers who are dedicated to the success of the campaign," Hiles said. "That framework has been really critical in communicating these priorities and educating on why endowment is so important."

Hiles thanked the donors who helped push MU to the \$1 billion mark.

"I've been at six universities during my career, and I will put our alumni and friends against anybody in the country in terms of their success and their loyalty to Mizzou," Hiles said. "They've been the critical part to this achievement."

According to Hiles, the actual endowment size is \$1,003,739,236. Endowments range from \$25,000 to \$30,100,000.

The six other SEC schools with \$1 billion-plus endowments are Texas A&M University, Vanderbilt University and the universities of Florida, Kentucky, Georgia and Arkansas, according to information from the MU News Bureau.



MU endowment surpasses \$1 billion

By **ELIZABETH DUESENBERG**

COLUMBIA, Mo. - University of Missouri officials announced Wednesday that the endowment had crossed the \$1 billion mark, a major milestone for the university.

The university's endowment has grown by more than \$400 million in the six years since the launch of the "Mizzou: Our Time to Lead" campaign.

"Generations of donors have graciously invested in our students and faculty, and we cannot thank them enough for their long-term vision and generosity," Chancellor Alexander Cartwright said. "Our students and faculty achieve great things when we give them the support they need to pursue their passions in education, research and engagement."

"When I was recruited to become a faculty member at Mizzou, I saw potential for the university's growth and I see that potential being enacted today," Susan Empson said. "I'm excited to be a part of a college that is building new things and is engaged in forward-thinking scholarship and research to help teachers, students and schools."

The university spends 4 percent of each endowed fund's value annually, based on donor wishes. The strategy will not only preserve the endowment's principal in perpetuity but enables it to grow through investment returns.

Mizzou is the seventh school in the SEC to achieve a \$1 billion endowment. Of the 1,644 public higher education institutions in the nation, MU is the 37th to reach the billion-dollar mark.



MU endowment tops \$1 billion

By DAN CLAXTON

COLUMBIA — An endowment fund at the University of Missouri has passed the \$1 billion mark, according to MU officials.

At a press conference Wednesday morning at Jesse Hall, Chancellor Alexander Cartwright and other top administrators announced the 'Mizzou: Our Time to Lead Campaign' had reached the milestone. According to an MU press release, only 36 other universities have reached the billion-dollar mark.

The statement says the endowment will be invested, with about four percent being spent annually on projects and the rest being allowed to grow through investment returns.



MU Endowment Surpasses \$1 Billion

By CATHERINE WHEELER

The University of Missouri announced today that its endowment has surpassed \$1 billion, according to a news release.

MU's endowment reached a record high through private gifts and stock market growth. The endowment has grown by more than \$400 million during the Mizzou: Our Time to Lead Campaign, which launched six years ago.

MU is the 37th public higher education institution to reach a one billion dollar endowment and is the seventh in the SEC to do the same.



[MU endowment reaches \\$1 billion](#)

By ALEXIS REESE

Watch video at: <http://www.komu.com/news/mu-endowment-reaches-1-billion>

COLUMBIA – **The University of Missouri hit a major fundraising milestone, announcing Wednesday it reached the \$1 billion mark.**

The endowment has grown by more than \$400 million since the start of the Missouri: Our Time to Lead campaign.

The university is the seventh SEC university to reach this mark.

Chancellor Alexander Cartwright said this mark helps the university show they are doing all they can for those invested in it.

“It demonstrates that people really care about this institution and understand that we’re doing the right things for our faculty and for our students and for the community,” Cartwright said.

Members of the community and key donors spoke about the importance of the endowment.

Mark Wilkins, the managing director for The Wilkins Group, said the endowment and the university helped him achieve all of his goals.

“The university, not just the endowment, but the university in general, helped me to dream bigger than I’d ever dreamed up,” Wilkins said.

Wilkins said the endowment is important to all the university supports.

“The endowment supports the university and again, it supports the students, it supports the faculty, it supports the entire mission and it’s critical,” he said. “And now I’m thrilled to be able to small things- I’m not going to solve world peace- but I’m thrilled to small things, my part at least, to give back.”

One way Wilkins is giving back is by opening up a scholarship fund in the place of Georgeanne Porter, who was the director of admissions at the university when Wilkins was a student.

“She was more than a staff member at the university. She became like a family member, truly like a surrogate mother or an older sister to me.”

Porter died recently and Wilkins, along with other members of the community, wanted to uphold her legacy.

“I wanted to do something, along with other people in Columbia, to honor her,” Wilkins said. “Honor her service to the university and really just honor her impact on the world one human being at a time.”

MU is the 37th of more than 1,600 public higher education institutions to reach this \$1 billion mark.

Boone County Journal

[MU endowment surpasses \\$1 billion](#)

University officials announced Wednesday morning that the University of Missouri endowment has crossed the \$1 billion mark, a major milestone for the university. Through new private gifts and stock market growth, the university’s endowment has grown by more than \$400 million in the six years since the launch of the Mizzou: Our Time to Lead Campaign.

Chancellor Alexander N. Cartwright said that this overwhelming support from donors attracts quality students and faculty to the university because they know they will have the backing to pursue their goals.

“Generations of donors have graciously invested in our students and faculty, and we cannot thank them enough for their long-term vision and generosity,” Cartwright said. “Our students and faculty achieve great things when we give them the support they need to pursue their passions in education, research and engagement.”

EDUCATION WEEK

Does Flipped Instruction Work? New Study Looks to Find the Best Tactics

By MADELINE WILL

Generated from News Bureau Press Release: [Flipped Instruction](#)

More and more teachers are "flipping" their instruction—but what does that really mean? And does it work?

A University of Missouri team of researchers has received \$450,000 from the National Science Foundation to study these questions over a three-year period. They're going to be observing 40 Missouri algebra classrooms—20 that will be using some sort of flipped instructional tactic more than 50 percent of the time, and 20 that will be using the traditional classroom format.

Traditionally, teachers lecture in class and students work on problems at home. **In a flipped classroom**, students are assigned videos to watch at home in lieu of a class lecture, and class time is spent on hands-on activities and working on problems to demonstrate knowledge.

So far, there is no large-scale research on which instructional method corresponds with increased student outcomes. And Zandra de Araujo, assistant professor of mathematics education in the Missouri University College of Education and principal investigator on the study, said teachers mean different things when they say they have a flipped classroom.

For example, some teachers send home 6-minute videos on a particular concept, others send home 40-minute lecture videos. In class, some teachers use the time to have students solve problems individually while they stand by to help, and others use the time to have all the students working together to collaborate and solve problems.

De Araujo said she hopes the study will yield data on what flipped instruction tactics work best, so that the researchers can then support teachers with resources and professional development.

Right now, she said, "practice is outpacing research."

De Araujo and Samuel Otten, an assistant professor of mathematics education at the college and a researcher on the study, said they don't anticipate flipped instruction in itself being the driving determinant of student learning. [Sound mathematics teaching practices](#), like purposeful questions and problem-solving, are still key, Otten said.

But "if aspects of flipped instruction help the teacher do that better, that would be a positive correlation," he said. For example, flipped instruction may give teachers more class time to let students dig into rich problems.

Otten said that while more and more teachers have embraced flipped instruction, some are still reluctant.

"It is very time-intensive," he said. "A lot of teachers feel the need to make their own videos to have their voice [represented] and connect with students. That's a large time commitment, at least when they get started."

Other challenges include ensuring that all students have internet access—something he said some teachers get around by having students download the videos while at school.

"It does seem like largely the teacher's decision," Otten added. "We have not seen that as a mandated thing from a district or a leader. It was always their initiative."

That makes it fitting that this study will follow the teachers' lead, the researchers said, instead of prescribing methods for the teachers to implement in their classrooms.

"It's an opportunity for researchers to learn from the teachers," Otten said.



[Babies born closer to fracking sites are more likely to be underweight](#)

By: Nsikan Akpan

Babies born near hydraulic fracking sites are more likely to be underweight, according to one of the largest studies ever conducted into how the fossil fuel extraction technique actually affects our health.

The study, [published Wednesday in Science Advances](#), found Pennsylvanian children born within 1 kilometer (0.62 miles) of a fracking site were 25 percent more likely to experience low birth weight. That risk decreases the farther away a child is born. Low birth weight, defined as being born under 5.5 pounds, has previously been linked with an increased risk of childhood mortality and poorer educational outcomes.

While the results could influence local policy surrounding the zoning of fracking sites, they fall short of pinpointing exactly what's causing low birth weight in these areas. Here's what we know.

What the study explored: The study, conducted by a trio of economists, combed through Pennsylvania state records of 1.1 million children born between 2004 and 2013, which included not only health information like birth weight but also personal data like home addresses. The team compared these addresses to the locations of 7,700 fracking wells, the majority of which were dug after 2009.

This dataset not only allowed the team to assess how birth weights changed before and after fracking took place, but also how they varied geographically. The team also accounted for some parental characteristics that influence birth weight, such as the mother's race, her education and her marital status. Paternal data wasn't included in the main analysis because fathers were not always present at birth.

But the team did attempt to partially control for genetic variables by looking at pairs of siblings, particularly in situations in which one child was born near a fracking site and the other farther away.

What the study found: "What is really striking is how localized those impacts are," said Michael Greenstone, director of the Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago, who co-led the study. "We find a 25 percent increase in the incidence of low birth weight within 1 kilometer. From 1 to 3 kilometers [1.8 miles], we find a smaller effect. And then after 3 kilometers, we were unable to detect an impact."

The team also developed an index that measured health indicators, such as prematurity and congenital abnormalities, for infants in the study. Using these metrics (almost like a stock market), they noticed a small but statistically significant decline in the overall health of babies born closer to fracking sites.

What caused the low birth weights? It's unclear.

“As the authors point out, that is the major limitation of study,” said Susan Nagel, a reproductive and perinatal research at the University of Missouri, who wasn't involved in the study. “They are inferring exposure from proximity.”

Hydraulic fracturing [pumps a cocktail of water and chemicals into the ground](#). The pressure fractures shale rock, which releases oil, natural gas and wastewater back to the surface. This wastewater is stored temporarily in storage containers, before typically being deposited back underground in sealed storage wells.

Surface-level spills of fracking fluids and wastewater [are common](#), Nagel said, “and certainly the wastewater seems to be the issue when you're talking about water impacts.” She cited past instances of spills into surface water, [such as in Colorado](#) and [West Virginia](#).

But there is “absolutely air pollution related to fracking” too, said Nagel, whose lab published [a systematic review](#) of the connection between oil and natural gas extraction and human reproduction in 2016. Greenstone said the team's best guess for the possible cause, based on the evidence, is local air pollution, maybe from diesel generators or trucks carrying the crew.”

Why it matters: [A companion article](#) from Greenstone's institute states: “Infants born with low birth weight experience a greater risk of infant mortality, ADHD, asthma, lower test scores, lower schooling attainment, lower earnings, and higher rates of social welfare program participation.”

Much remains unknown about the health impacts of fracking, Nagel said, due to relative “newness” of the procedure and the extensive time required for human studies.

The reproductive dangers of older oil and gas activities — such as preterm births, miscarriages and birth defects — are [well-documented](#). And Nagel said these new findings mirror [prior research in Pennsylvania](#). Together, the similarities between the two studies — both found

reductions in birth weight due to fracking — suggest a pattern. But to determine exactly what moms are exposed to and the relationship between that and newborn health, future research needs to focus on direct measurements, she said, perhaps by taking urine samples during pregnancy.

“Hydraulic fracturing is the biggest innovation in the energy sector in the last half century. It’s produced lots of benefits for the nation and the world. But those benefits are widely dispersed,” Greenstone said. “It has also had a very large impact communities where hydraulic fracturing takes place. Ultimately, whether or not the world or the United States will be able to access these resources is going to depend on what local communities decide.”

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

All clear given after bomb threat near sports complex at Mizzou

By: Ashley Jost

COLUMBIA, Mo. • Nothing suspicious was found after a bomb threat was made at a shuttle bus stop near the University of Missouri-Columbia's Hearnese Center just after 3:30 p.m. Wednesday.

The Hearnese Center is the home of multiple sports at Mizzou.

A notice that was [tweeted out by Mizzou's alert system](#) urged people to stay away from the area while police investigate. A police dog was being brought in to help check the area.

Later tweets said no suspicious or explosive device was found, and that the campus was back to normal.

COLUMBIA DAILY TRIBUNE

[Nothing found after University of Missouri bomb threat](#)

Authorities are investigating after a bomb threat was reported on a University of Missouri bus.

The [MU Alert Twitter account](#) operated by the University of Missouri posted a warning about the threat a little after 3:30 p.m. Wednesday, advising people to stay away from the area that is just off Stadium Boulevard. MU Alert also reported that traffic is being rerouted and police were using a bomb-sniffing dog to investigate. MU Alert tweeted at about 4:15 p.m. that no explosive was found and campus was back to normal operating conditions.

MUPD Maj. Brian Weimer said the department was notified of a threat to a specific campus bus, and the bus was stopped at the Hearnes Center bus stop so police could investigate. The bus was evacuated as a precaution and students who had parked in the commuter lot were prevented from heading to their vehicles while police searched the bus.

Weimer did not provide any information about how MUPD received the threat, citing the ongoing investigation.



UPDATE: Authorities give all clear in Hearnes Center bomb threat

By: Joshua Kranzberg

COLUMBIA - Authorities have given the all clear after investigating a possible explosive device around the Hearnes Center shuttle bus stop.

MU Alert previously sent out notifications, saying there was a bomb threat near the bus stop, and authorities evacuated the area.

KOMU 8 News has a crew at the scene, and will have updates when they become available.

Be sure to follow KOMU on Twitter @KOMUnews.

[This story was updated with the latest information at 4:18 p.m.]



UPDATE: MUPD reports no explosive device found after bomb threat

By: Elizabeth Duesenberg and Taylor Petras

Watch the story: <http://www.abc17news.com/news/update-mupd-reports-no-explosive-device-found-after-bomb-threat/672439270>

COLUMBIA, Mo. - **UPDATE 4:20 pm:** Police report that the investigation is done and no explosive or suspicious device was found.

Officers said the campus is back to operating under normal conditions.

UPDATE 3:56 pm: Police said no suspicious or explosive device has been found but police continue to investigate the area.

Officers are continuing to ask residents to stay away from the area.

UPDATE 3:45 pm: Police said the area around the Hearn Center shuttle bus stop has been evacuated.

Traffic is being rerouted and a police K9 is enroute.

ORIGINAL STORY: MU police are investigating reports of a bomb threat on Wednesday afternoon.

Police said the threat was reported at the Hearn Center Shuttle Bus Stop.

MUPD is asking students and residents to stay away from the area.

Police are currently investigating the threat.

MISSOURIAN

Task force hasn't given up on Missouri Hyperloop

By JEREMY TURLEY

Plans to bring Hyperloop, a high-tech transportation system that could allow for a 30-minute trip between St. Louis and Kansas City, to Missouri was the talk of a task force meeting Wednesday.

The idea sounds like it's straight out of "The Jetsons," but it could become a reality in the very near future, Andrew Smith of the St. Louis Regional Chamber said at a meeting of the 21st Century Missouri Transportation System Task Force.

With a Hyperloop transportation system, the 250-mile trip from St. Louis to Kansas City would take only 25 minutes. The [new technology](#), developed by California-based Hyperloop One, uses magnetic levitation to propel a train-like pod at incredible speeds.

The company will pick a place in the next two years to build its first completely operational Hyperloop, and Missouri is one of three American finalists. The Show-Me State is a particularly attractive destination because of its central location, Smith said.

"There's a reason why the U.S. interstate system started in Missouri," Smith said. "It's because of where we're located. It's a good place to start building a national network."

Under the current proposal, the route would extend from St. Louis to Lawrence, Kansas, with stops in Columbia and Kansas City. The whole trip would take just over half an hour.

The proposal was created by the Missouri Hyperloop Coalition, a public-private partnership, and has been heavily supported by the Missouri Department of Transportation. **UM System President Mun Choi has also expressed support for the plan.**

To remain in contention for the project, the coalition would need to conduct a \$1.5 million feasibility study to determine the actual implications of building a Hyperloop across Missouri. The other American finalists in Texas and Colorado have already taken strides in that direction, Smith said.

If Missouri's bid for the project is successful, it could have far-reaching significance for economic development and growth. With plans to build a Hyperloop, the [state would be more appealing to Amazon](#) as the company considers where to build its second headquarters, Smith said.

Hyperloop One will make its final decision on where to build its first route in late 2018 or early 2019. The company plans to complete construction on the route by 2021, according to its website.

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

The FCC should abandon Title II and return to antitrust

By THOM LAMBERT

The Federal Communications Commission will soon vote on whether to repeal an Obama-era rule classifying internet service providers as “common carriers.” That rule was put in place to achieve net neutrality, an attractive-sounding goal that many Americans — millennials especially — reflexively support.

In Missouri, voices as diverse as the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, the Joplin Globe and the Archdiocese of St. Louis have opposed repeal of the Obama-era rule.

Unfortunately, few people who express support for net neutrality understand all it entails. Even fewer recognize the significant dangers of pursuing net neutrality using the means the Obama-era FCC selected. All many know is that they like neutrality generally and that smart-sounding celebrities like John Oliver support the Obama-era rule. They really need to know more.

First, it’s important to understand what a policy of net neutrality entails. In essence, it prevents ISPs from providing faster or better transmission of some internet content, even where the favored content provider is willing to pay for prioritization.

That sounds benign — laudable, even — until one considers all that such a policy prevents. Under strict net neutrality, an ISP couldn’t prioritize content transmission in which congestion delays ruin the user experience (say, an internet videoconference between a telemedicine system operated by the University of Missouri hospital and a rural resident of Dent County) over transmissions in which delays are less detrimental (say, downloads from a photo-sharing site).

Strict net neutrality would also preclude a mobile broadband provider from exempting popular content providers from data caps. Indeed, T-Mobile was hauled before the FCC to justify its popular “Binge On” service, which offered cost-conscious subscribers unlimited access to Netflix, ESPN and HBO.

The fact is, ISPs have an incentive to manage their traffic in whatever way most pleases subscribers. The vast majority of Americans have a choice of ISPs, so managing content in any manner that adversely affects the consumer experience would hurt business. ISPs are also motivated to design subscription packages that consumers most desire. They shouldn't have to seek government approval of innovative offerings.

For evidence that competition protects consumers from harmful instances of non-neutral network management, consider the record. The commercial internet was born, thrived, and became the brightest spot in the American economy without formal net neutrality rules. History provides little reason to believe that the parade of horrors net neutrality advocates imagine will ever materialize.

Indeed, in seeking to justify its net neutrality policies, the Obama-era FCC could come up with only four instances of harmful non-neutral network management over the entire history of the commercial internet. That should come as no surprise. Background antitrust rules, in place long before the internet was born, forbid the speculative harms net neutrality advocates envision.

Even if net neutrality regulation were desirable as a policy matter, the means by which the FCC secured it was entirely inappropriate. Before it adopted the current approach, which reclassified ISPs as common carriers subject to Title II of the 1934 Communications Act, the FCC was crafting a narrower approach using authority granted by the 1996 Telecommunications Act.

It abruptly changed course after President Barack Obama, reeling from a shellacking in the 2014 midterm elections, sought to shore up his base by posting a video calling for "the strongest possible rules" on net neutrality, including Title II reclassification. Prodded by the president, the supposedly independent commissioners abandoned their consensus that Title II was too extreme and voted along party lines to treat the internet as a utility.

Title II reclassification has resulted in the sort of "Mother, may I?" regulatory approach that impedes innovation and investment. In the first half of 2015, as the commission was formulating its new Title II approach, spending by ISPs on capital equipment fell by an average of 8 percent. That was only the third time in the history of the commercial internet that infrastructure investment fell from the previous year. The other two times were in 2001, following the [dot.com](#) bust, and 2009, after the 2008 financial crash and ensuing recession. For those remote communities in Missouri still looking for broadband to reach their doorsteps, government policies need to incentivize more investment, not restrict it.

To enhance innovation and encourage broadband deployment, the FCC should reverse its damaging Title II order and leave concerns about non-neutral network management to antitrust law. It was doing just fine.

Thom Lambert, a law professor at the University of Missouri, is the author of "How to Regulate: A Guide for Policymakers" (Cambridge University Press 2017).



Reliant owner: Medicare fraud settlement was a ‘business decision’

By: Eric Dundon

Rick DeStefane maintains company was right in providing services; blames government for not wanting to pay for it — Part 2 in a series

By the end of this year, Reliant Care Group — owned by Hannibal businessman Rick DeStefane — will make its third six-figure-or-higher payment to the federal government as part of Medicare fraud settlement. The first payment, made in July, totaled more than \$2.8 million. The second was in the amount of \$461,460. The third will cost DeStefane’s company the same amount.

When the settlement is paid off, the Maryland Heights, Mo., based company will have paid more than \$8.368 million to the United States.

When news broke over the summer that Reliant settled the case and signed a corporate integrity agreement, people on social media cast DeStefane as a “Medicare fraudster” or worse.

A subsequent media report tying Reliant and DeStefane to U.S. Sen. Claire McCaskill’s policies regarding the senior care industry further fanned the flames of malcontent toward the Hannibal resident.

While DeStefane, in an interview with the Courier-Post, said he can handle attacks on him, he said it’s unfair for people to use the Medicare settlement to paint a picture of him and his company as abusing the system to make a buck. He contends the company provided necessary services, and that the settlement was “a business decision.”

Understanding the False Claims Act

The False Claims Act allows the federal government to go after people and businesses to recoup damages for defrauding government programs. Most often, health care businesses are the target, since the federal government provides health care funding in various capacities.

“Health care fraud is a major and increasingly serious problem that costs taxpayers millions in lost and wasted dollars while depriving vulnerable beneficiaries of the care and support they need,” Steven Hanson, special agent in charge with the Health and Human Services Department’s inspector general arm, told the Associated Press when Reliant’s settlement was

finalized. “Every dollar that we save or recover allows us to better serve those who really need and deserve our help.”

In Reliant’s case, the government alleged Reliant Care Rehabilitative Services — a company under the umbrella of Reliant Care Group — provided medically unnecessary therapies to residents in some of Reliant’s facilities and other facilities that contracted for rehab services. Reliant billed the federally-funded Medicare program for those services.

A claim may originate from a whistleblower, who can claim a portion of an award against a company, if a settlement is reached or the company is found liable after litigation. But often, the government initiates its own investigation, and no specific whistleblower or instance triggers an investigation. In the case against Reliant, the Office of the Inspector General published a report in the late 2000s finding skilled nursing homes provided therapy services at a greater rate than what patients needed.

From that report, the government launched an investigation that included Reliant, along with dozens of other health care providers.

The case against Reliant

In 2011, the government issued a subpoena to Reliant for documents related to the rehab services it provided to residents at many of the company’s Missouri facilities, including Levering Regional Health Care Center in Hannibal. DeStefane estimated that the company turned over at least 850,000 documents to federal investigators. Lawyers for the company placed that figure at more than one million documents.

“It took all my staff’s time trying to pull those documents. That’s the biggest thing. It took months and months and months,” DeStefane said. “We’re here to give patient care, not to pull documents.”

Many of the documents were related to rehab services provided to mental health patients. Reliant, which is one of the few Missouri companies to accept residents with severe acute mental illnesses, provided physical or occupational therapy to many of these patients, who are generally younger and more independent than geriatric patients.

The government alleged that these mental and behavioral residents did not need physical, occupational, or speech therapies.

DeStefane strongly disagrees.

“They don’t understand the type of residents we take. They never came in and looked at what we were doing,” he said, referring to government inspectors. “There’s plenty of research out there, including some from Missouri... on the impact of psychotropic medications that are taken by these patients. They have such a deleterious impact on the body — the kidneys, the pancreas, the muscles — that a 50-year-old person will be illogically 70 years old if they’ve taken these drugs for a period of time.”

DeStefane said in his company alone, 144 board-certified doctors and more than 200 physical, speech and occupational therapists say the rehab services were needed to counteract the physical effects of psychotropic medications.

“I contend back in 2011 we were right,” he said. “I contend during the process we were right. And when I signed the settlement agreement as president, and I contend today, that we were right.”

Instead of fighting the government, though, DeStefane decided to settle to avoid lengthy, and very costly, litigation.

The government never filed a complaint against Reliant. The case never went to litigation.

In fact, the settlement likely cost the company less than what it would have to defend itself and prove that the therapies indeed were needed. DeStefane called the settlement “a business decision.”

“After almost five years, and even though Reliant continues to disagree with the government’s findings, it was determined to be in all parties’ best interest to move forward and resolve this matter,” Brian Bewley, Reliant’s lead counsel, said in the statement after the settlement.

Court paperwork does not mention DeStefane, except as a signatory for the company on the settlement. Additionally, the settlement did not require Reliant to change its rehab company executives, nor did it exclude Reliant from the Medicare program.

Scope of health care claims

From 2008 through 2016, the government has recovered more than \$53 billion in False Claims Act monies. In 2016 alone, the government recovered \$4.7 billion through 143 cases investigated by the government and 702 initiated by a whistleblower.

And while Reliant’s \$8.3 million dollar settlement seems large, it pales in comparison to many settlements. In the past two years, Kindred and Life Care Centers — two health care companies — settled for \$125 million and \$145 million respectively. Those cases involved similar complaints to the case against Reliant.

In Missouri, an examination of records by the Courier-Post shows companies have settled with the government to the tune of \$600 million since 2000. That figure excludes cases that went to litigation.

Other recent Missouri cases include a May settlement involving Mercy Hospital Springfield agreeing to pay \$34 million for allegedly engaging in improper financial relationships with referring physicians. **In June 2016, the University of Missouri paid \$2.2 million to settle allegations that it submitted false claims for radiology services.**

“I think that Reliant’s settlement based on an industry-wide investigation, in my opinion, is not newsworthy,” Bewley, a False Claims Act expert and shareholder at the national law firm

Polsinelli, said. “Because if you just do a modicum amount of research, you’ll find FCA settlements, for lack of a better phrase, is part of being a healthcare provider.”



Apparent Relief for Grad Students

NO MU MENTION

Reports indicate congressional negotiators have dropped repeal of tax-exempt tuition waivers for graduate students and other provisions affecting higher ed from final tax-reform bill.

By

[Andrew Kreighbaum](#)

December 14, 2017

Senate and House negotiators meeting this week to craft compromise tax-reform legislation plan to exclude from a final bill some controversial proposals affecting students and colleges, according to multiple reports.

Lawmakers from the two chambers of Congress agreed to drop provisions that would treat graduate student tuition benefits as taxable income and repeal student loan interest deductions. Both provisions were included in House tax legislation passed last month but left out of a bill that narrowly cleared the Senate Dec. 2.

Another provision of that House bill that was reportedly excluded in negotiations would have eliminated interest-free private activity bonds, an alarming prospect for the many private colleges that use the bonds to save on construction of new campus facilities.

The reports will be welcome news for many in higher ed as congressional Republicans push forward on a rapid timeline to pass and send to the president’s desk this month a bill overhauling the nation’s tax code.

College leaders and higher ed lobby groups have warned for weeks about dire consequences for the sector of proposals in the tax-reform plans. And graduate students across the country have mobilized protests and other actions to oppose the new tax on tuition waivers. Last week, those protests [reached](#) the office of House Speaker Paul Ryan as 40 students and activists demonstrated outside and nine were arrested.

Their concerns appeared to register with some members of Congress ahead of the conference negotiations. Representative Pete Sessions, a Texas Republican, circulated [a letter](#) among colleagues calling on GOP leaders in the House and Senate to drop the tuition-waiver proposal from a final bill.

Bloomberg [reported](#) Wednesday that Senator Steve Daines, a Montana Republican, said the graduate tuition provision would be dropped from a final bill. And Senator Mike Rounds, a South Dakota Republican, told the publication that grad students would be pleased with the final bill. Other [outlets confirmed](#) that report.

Sam Leitermann, president of the National Association of Graduate and Professional Students, said that his organization was pleased lawmakers had listened to the students.

“We believe in the importance of graduate students to innovation and progress in our country and the need to ensure graduate studies are preserved,” he said in an email. “Graduate voices remain strong and we will continue to advocate with them for graduate rights.”

Students who organized against the provision argued that it would essentially tax them on money that never goes into their pockets in the first place. That's because graduate students typically receive a tuition waiver in exchange for work as teaching or research assistants, but don't actually receive that money as additional income. Student organizers said rescinding the tax-exempt status of those benefits would make graduate education unattainable for many by adding thousands to their tax bills.

Steven Bloom, director of government relations at the American Council on Education, said dropping the proposal from a final bill would be an enormously important development for graduate students.

“They've worked very hard around the country, thousands of them, to preserve this provision and talk about why it's important and how it makes graduate education more affordable,” he said. The Association of Public and Land-grant Universities said in a letter to top lawmakers on the House and Senate tax committees last week that about 55 percent of all graduate students made an annual income of \$20,000 or less and nearly 87 percent made \$50,000 or less in 2011-12, the most recent year for which data was available. Repealing the tax-exempt status of their tuition waivers would mean an unaffordable increase in taxable income, the group said.

Another proposal in the House tax bill reportedly left out of a final tax package, the elimination of student loan interest deductions, would exacerbate the debt loads of student borrowers, APLU said. Borrowers currently can deduct up to \$2,500 annually from interest paid on student loans toward reducing their taxable income. Repealing that deduction could add hundreds to borrowers' tax bills. And repealing the deduction would mean the cost of student loans to borrowers would shoot up by \$24 billion over 10 years, APLU said.

The Tax on College Endowments

Also Wednesday, a bipartisan group of nearly 30 lawmakers made the case in a letter to congressional leaders for dropping a proposed tax on the endowment income of private colleges. House legislation would apply a 1.4 percent excise tax to private college investments valued at \$250,000 per full-time student, while Senate legislation would apply the same tax to private college investments valued at \$500,000 per full-time student.

That proposal, the lawmakers told Congressional leaders in the letter Wednesday, would jeopardize the financial aid of current and future students at a handful of institutions that already make generous need-based awards. And it would inevitably be applied to additional private colleges and public universities in the future, they said.

Moreover, the Senate endowment proposal would generate less than \$2 billion in revenue over 10 years for a tax reform bill expected to cost more than \$1.5 trillion, the lawmakers said.

The endowment tax, they said, “is unprecedented and poses a serious threat to higher education institutions and their ability to provide need-based financial aid to their students.”



‘Too Much, Too Fast’? NO MU MENTION

GOP’s Higher Education Act rewrite would give a boost to competency-based education, short-term certificates and alternative providers, but experts worry about the bill’s lack of safeguards.
By

Paul Fain December 14, 2017

The Republican-led Congress's [early attempt at rewriting](#) the federal Higher Education Act uses incentives and deregulation to encourage new twists on college, including competency-based education, short-term programs and nonaccredited providers.

Experts continue to absorb details about the complex bill from Republican leaders on the U.S. House of Representatives’ education committee, which on Tuesday voted to pass a [590-page version](#). Some applauded the innovation push but worry about the bill’s lack of “guardrails” that seek to keep low-quality offerings in check.

“We’re trying to not look at all the negatives, but rather be heartened by the fact that they’re having the right conversations,” said Lexi Barrett, senior director for national education policy at Jobs for the Future.

Likewise, the Business Roundtable, a CEO-led group that has the ear of the majority party in Congress and the White House, praised the bill.

“It wisely shifts policy to focus on the skills the American work force needs, reduces federal regulations and paperwork, and aligns closely with the CEOs’ priorities,” the group said this week in a [written statement](#).

Relatively few colleges had given competency-based education a whirl in 2008, when the Higher Education Act got its last overhaul. But the bill attempts to give a boost to both the [hundreds of institutions](#) now at least mulling the creation of a competency-based program as well as to Western Governors University, the most established and largest institution in the space.

Perhaps most notably on this front, the House GOP’s plan would drop the law’s definition of a credit-hour standard.

This move would give competency-based programs that are self-paced and untethered from seat-time requirements access to federal financial aid programs. In recent years, a handful of these so-called direct-assessment programs have earned approval from the U.S. Department of Education and regional accreditors, but only after a laborious process.

Likewise, the bill would distribute Pell Grant funds more often, on a weekly or monthly basis, which would be particularly helpful given the flexible scheduling used by many competency-based programs.

Several experts said they appreciate the committee’s attempt to move beyond the credit hour and to create room within federal rules for competency-based education, which could encourage more colleges to offer the credentials. But they also said the bill, as currently written, could allow low-quality programs to cash in with federal aid.

For example, New America’s education policy program said in a [written statement](#) that the bill may be “too much, too fast.”

The group instead praised the approach of a bipartisan House proposal to create a “demonstration project” that would serve as a sort of laboratory for what works in competency-based education while also protecting students and taxpayers. That bill would require colleges to evaluate their competencies and translate them to credit hours.

“While competency-based education has significant potential to help students complete their degrees on their own (faster or slower) schedules,” New America said, “opening the floodgates too quickly presents a huge risk, to students and to the field.”

Faculty Interaction Requirements

The bill would drop the law’s definition of distance education, leaving only its current counterpoint definition, for correspondence-course providers. It also would remove federal rules that, beginning next year, would have required online providers to get authorization from each state in which they enroll students.

Likewise, the GOP’s proposal would no longer include the distance education provision’s definition of “regular and substantive interaction” between faculty members and students.

That requirement has caused headaches for Western Governors University because of a [critical audit report](#) released this year by the department’s Office of Inspector General (although experts have said no administration would act on the office’s recommendation that the popular university be labeled a correspondence-course provider).

Tweaked wording for regular-and-substantive interaction appears in the bill’s revision to the definition of competency-based education. It would require that such a program “provides the educational content, activities and resources, including substantive instructional interaction, including by faculty, and regular support by the institution, necessary to enable students to learn or develop what is required to demonstrate and attain mastery of such competencies, as assessed by the accrediting agency or association of the institution of higher education.”

The new phrasing appears to subtly address the inspector general’s line of critique of WGU and competency-based education more broadly, said Russ Poulin, director of policy and analysis at WCET, which is a division of the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education. One reason, he said in a [written statement](#), is because the bill does not necessarily limit instructional interaction to a faculty member.

Over all, Poulin said, he likes the bill's support for competency-based education and its move to drop the distance-education requirement.

"It's time to come up with updated safeguards," he said, that don't "keep us from innovating." But Deb Bushway, who has worked on competency-based education as a former administrator at Capella University, the University of Wisconsin Extension and as a senior policy adviser to the department during the Obama administration, and others worried about how far the shift goes on regular-and-substantive interaction.

"Right now faculty interaction, as I read it, is completely optional," she said. "I'm not sure that's a quality program."

Alternative and Short-Term Programs

The bill would reduce the amount of time an academic program must last in order to qualify for federal financial aid, extending aid eligibility to more short-term certificates and subdegree credentials.

Currently, federal aid cannot be used for programs that are shorter than 600 clock hours or 15 weeks in length. The GOP's proposal would drop that requirement to a minimum of 300 hours or 10 weeks. A [bipartisan U.S. Senate bill](#) also seeks a shorter time requirement for Pell. Such a change could be good news for community colleges, many of which offer short-term credentials.

"Providing federal aid to students enrolled in shorter programs has been one of our top reauthorization priorities," the American Association of Community Colleges and the Association of Community College Trustees said in a joint letter distributed this week. "If enacted, this will dramatically enhance the ability of students who are focused on specific work-force and related aptitudes to take advantage of program offerings."

Work-force-oriented groups and experts generally applauded the proposal. However, some worried about the bill's lack of an attempt to ensure that short-term credentials have value in the job market.

For example, the bill does not include the terms “stackable” or “work-force ready,” said Kermit Kaleba, federal policy director for the National Skills Coalition. “The fact that those terms show up nowhere is disappointing,” he said.

New America also criticized the bill’s lack of quality-assurance measures for short-term programs, such as minimum floors for student completion and job placement. That could be problematic, the group said, given data that shows many short-term credentials fail to lead to well-paying jobs.

“This provision will undoubtedly lead to more students taking on debt for credentials of little to no value,” New America wrote.

Another somewhat controversial piece of the House bill would allow colleges to tap alternative education providers -- meaning nonaccredited ones that are unable to access federal aid programs -- to offer all educational and instructional content of programs and courses.

Currently, colleges can only outsource half of the academic side of a program or course, except through the limited EQUIP experiment started by the Obama administration, which [features eight partnerships](#) between colleges and nonaccredited providers.

Poulin said he generally supports the move to drop the 50 percent requirement, but only with “more guardrails” than the current language includes.

Going farther was Barrett from Jobs for the Future. While she said EQUIP and nontraditional providers, including those that offer competency-based credentials, show plenty of promise, they also pose challenges to regulators and accreditors.

“Because these sorts of players are new ... that makes the risks that much greater,” said Barrett. “We don’t want the door opened too wide.”

THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Proposed Tax on Graduate Students' Tuition Waivers Appears to Be Dead

NO MU MENTION

By *Adam Harris* DECEMBER 13, 2017

A legislative provision that would have effectively taxed tuition waivers used by graduate students to offset their educational costs will not be in the final tax package in Congress, [Bloomberg](#) reports. A House-Senate conference committee met on Wednesday to discuss the compromise bill, which Republican leaders hope to put on President Trump's desk as soon as possible.

Sen. Mike Rounds, Republican of South Dakota, told Bloomberg: "Folks who are in grad school will feel pretty good about the final result." The provision appeared in the House's version of the tax bill, but not the Senate's.

Nonetheless, several House Republicans voiced opposition to the waiver last week, sending [a letter](#) urging congressional leaders not to include the provision in the final tax bill. Thirty-one lawmakers signed the letter, which was sent two days after eight graduate students [were arrested](#) on Capitol Hill while protesting the proposed tax.

"A tax on graduate tuition waivers would be unfair, would undermine our competitive position, and would inhibit the economic growth that tax reform promises," the lawmakers wrote.

Though the tax on tuition waivers appears now to be dead, it was not the only provision in the tax legislation that people in higher education [sharply opposed](#).

"At a time when our economy is demanding more education for more of our citizens," Margaret Spellings, president of the University of North Carolina, [wrote late last month](#), "we cannot erect new barriers for the millions of Americans who need affordable higher education."