

Politicking delays renovation funding

John Priest
Staff Reporter

The \$22 million to renovate Pershing Building might arrive with extra baggage if Missouri House leaders get their way.

House leaders vowed to hold up the Missouri Higher Education Lending Agency spending package unless the Senate passes a separate bill that calls for a cap on both higher education funding and tuition.

House Speaker Pro Tem Carl Bearden, R-St. Charles, sponsored the bill and told Senate that colleges and universities would not receive the promised construction funds from the sale of MOHELA unless the bill passes. It passed the House with an 84-71 vote.

"This bill is the student component of the MOHELA capital bill," he said. "If we're not going to pass the student component, there's no need to pass the capital component."

Yet all 13 public four-year institutions, including Truman, signed a letter opposing Bearden's bill.

Others question whether this bill presents a conflict of interest for Bearden. He works as a fundraiser for Lindenwood University, a private university in St. Charles, Mo.

"There's no conflict of interest," he said. "If Lindenwood were the sole beneficiary, it would be a conflict of interest. But the real beneficiaries of this bill are Missouri's students."

Although Bearden claims his bill would provide more money for scholarships and hold higher education accountable for funding, critics claim it could cripple state colleges and universities.

Bearden said his bill empowers students, giving them a choice, and he said choice means competition.

"I think competition in higher education would solve a lot of problems," he said. "Universities will have to listen to their students."

But after the Senate Education Committee gutted his bill Tuesday, its passage in the Senate seems doubtful.

"The speaker's attempt to hold the MOHELA bill hostage until we pass this bad voucher bill is the worst kind of strong-arm politics," said Minority Leader Jeff Harris, D-Columbia. "These things should stand and fall on their own merit and on their own weight."

Freezing higher education funding is the last thing the legislature needs to be doing, Harris said. Senior Sarah Saheb, who helped organize Missouri Students United!, agrees.

"[Bearden's] blatant blackmail is just the latest example of how people in our legislature are trying to privatize higher education," Saheb said. "They want to get rid of their responsibility to educate when they should be giving it better funding."

Saheb refers to a provision in Bearden's bill calling for the organization of a new scholarship. The new program would give up to \$1,000 to Missouri high school graduates who have at least a "C" average and want to attend a Missouri public or private college.

"The bill takes public tax dollars and redirects them to private universities," Harris said. "In effect, it's just another voucher bill."

But students can use existing scholarships such as Bright Flight at both private and public universities, Bearden said.

Only one provision remained when the bill left the Senate Education Committee on Tuesday.

Senators maintained the establishment of the new scholarship program.

Bearden said he will fight for his original plan so more funding will be spent on education instead of administration.

Saheb said she agrees that colleges and universities misappropriate funds, especially at Truman, where Truman's professors are the second-lowest paid in the state.

But she said she thinks this bill will create more problems than it solves.

"Something tells me that President Dixon's salary won't be used to help with the funding loss," Saheb said.

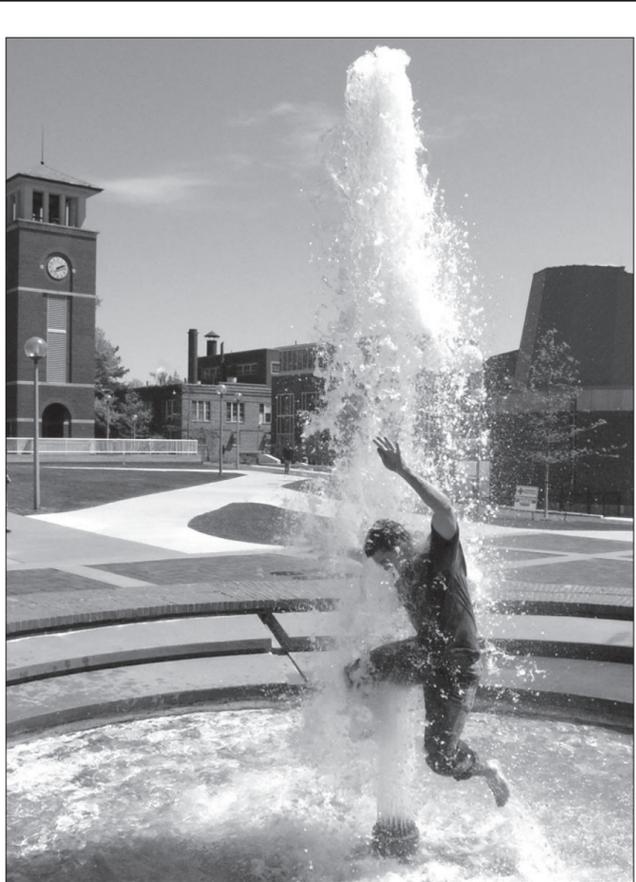
Michael McManis, dean of planning and institutional development, said Truman hopes to receive the \$22 million promised for Pershing's renovation by the sale of MOHELA.

But with House leaders linking the MOHELA bill to the Bearden bill, that money will come with a restriction on future higher education funding.

Less than three weeks remain in the 2006 legislative session, which adjourns May 12, and progress could halt on both issues.

Saheb said one benefit might arise from this deadlock. She said that if the MOHELA sale isn't approved by deadline, the General Assembly might allocate the funds to another area to make higher education affordable.

"You can keep making your buildings prettier," she said. "But it won't matter if the students can't afford to get there in the first place."



Spontaneous Shower
Photo by Phil Jarrett
Freshman Brycen Marner takes a dip in the fountain on the mall Wednesday afternoon. Marner said he needed a break from schoolwork and decided to frolic through the fountain.

Banquet praises three Women of Distinction

Lauren Durand
for the Index

Out of 13 nominations, the Women's Resource Center chose three deserving Women of Distinction.

The annual Women of Distinction banquet honors a Kirksville community member, a Truman student and a Truman faculty member. On April 12, the WRC presented awards to Daryl Fazio, assistant professor of art; junior Sarah Martin; and Diane Johnson, assistant professor of communication. Also honored for the first time was the professional organization Victim Support Services.

Awards are given based on the nominees' involvement in the com-

munity. Barks said narrowing down and selecting the Women of Distinction for each category is always a difficult decision because so many of the candidates deserve the award.

Kim LeBaron, executive director of VSS, accepted the award as well as a \$500 donation. She said the money will cover client services, such as paying for medical bills, providing prescriptions and helping clients to pay rent or make a deposit.

The WRC also gave \$500 in goods to VSS at their Safe-House Shower on March 25. Both donations came from proceeds generated by "The Vagina Monologues" in February.

VSS has been a part of the

Kirksville community for 18 years, working with women and women's issues, LeBaron said. She said donations allow VSS to continue offering comprehensive services for interpersonal and sexual assault victims.

"Our goal is to make it a safer place for women and children," LeBaron said.

She said this goal is on par with the WRC's mission.

"I think there is a natural interest considering what their goals are and ours are," she said. "It's a great collaboration."

Senior A.J. Barks, co-director of the WRC, said she is glad the WRC honors VSS as an organization that offers so much to the community.

"They're well known for their protection of women because of their 24-hour crisis hotline," Barks said. "But I didn't even know they did rape victim advocacy. They offer an enormous amount of services that I wasn't even aware of."

LeBaron said she is grateful for the donation and the distinction.

"It's really nice that they recognize women in the community who really make a difference," she said.

Fazio received the Kirksville community award for her local efforts on preventing animal abuse and abandonment. She is the founder and coordinator of People for the Prevention of Animal Cruelty in Kirksville. Martin was chosen for her in-

volvement on Truman's campus. She is the vice president of the International Club, president of Sierra @ Truman Leadership, a member of Hablantes Unidos and an intern for the University composting project.

Barks said Martin's work with the International Club stands out.

"It's only her second year at Truman, but she has really invested herself here," Barks said. "It's obvious how much work and time she's put into this campus."

Johnson said she was shocked when she won the faculty category.

"I know this is cliché, but I think I learn as much from my students as they do from me," Johnson said.

Barks said Johnson won because

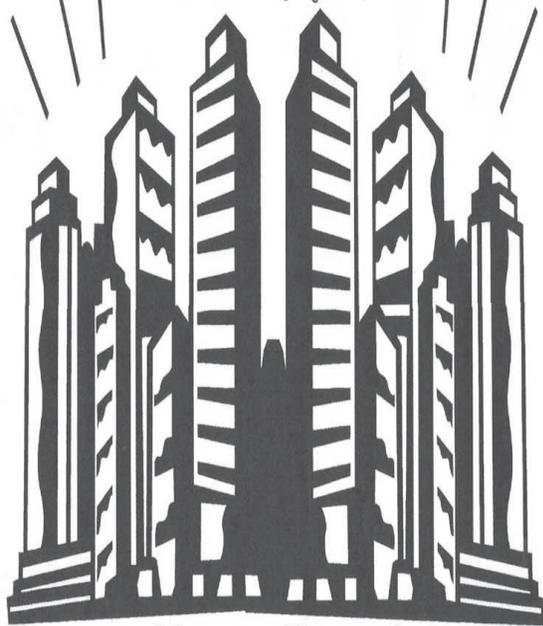
of her willingness to work with students despite her busy schedule.

In addition to teaching, Johnson is the coordinator for the Truman in Washington Program and all communication internships, adviser for Advertising and Public Relations Organization, a board member of VSS and the head of outreach and hospitality at her church. However, she said her biggest commitment is taking care of her father, who has Alzheimer's, 20 to 30 hours a week. Johnson said she learned from her family early on the value of giving back.

"My father used to tell me, 'Community work is the rent you pay for existing on this planet,'" she said.

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