

State debates gas tax

BY JASON QUALLS
for the Index

Although soaring gasoline prices continue to set records, Missouri residents might have to pay even more for their fuel in the near future.

Missouri state legislators recently discussed several possible sources for revenue increase. One of these possible sources might stem from an increase in state gasoline taxes, state Representative Rebecca McClanahan, D-Kirkville, said. Gasoline taxes have accounted for large portions of transportation funding since the November 2004 approval of Amendment 3, which authorized the use of gasoline tax money exclusively for the Missouri Department of Transportation. McClanahan said this short-term rise in the department's spending will end relatively soon.

"The problem is that around 2009 is the end of that bubble of [transportation] spending, and then we'll need to start paying back our obligations with those bonds," McClanahan said. "So as of about 2010, suddenly we will be without additional funds to do anything but maintain what we have."

McClanahan said that since the approval of Amendment 3, Missouri has enjoyed substantial improvements in road conditions.

"We've gone from something like 46 percent [of Missouri roads] being rated as good condition to having 74 percent of our roads in just this four- to five-year period,"

McClanahan said.

Truman students have seen the effects of Amendment 3 directly with the expansion of Highways 63 and 36 in the past three years. Senior Adam Yanick said he appreciates MoDOT's efforts to improve the state's transportation system.

"I think Missouri roads are great," Yanick said. "And we don't have to pay tolls anywhere in Missouri, which is really nice."

MoDOT has many concerns in addition to roads. According to a September article in "The Hill," the federal government and many state legislatures around the country have discussed the possibility of revenue increases for the federal and state departments of transportation in the aftermath of the I-35 bridge collapse in Minnesota on Aug. 1 that killed 13 people.

Jeff Briggs, MoDOT public relations officer, said revenue increases would fund not only state programs improving the conditions and sizes of the interstates (in particular, I-44), but increases in revenue also would fund the Safe and Sound Program, a program seeking to repair Missouri's 800 most worn-out bridges.

"Many of these bridges are 40 to 50 years old, and they are going to be very expensive to repair," Briggs said.

The cost of such repairs could reach as much as \$500 million, Briggs said.

Briggs said MoDOT did not support or lobby for any specific means of increasing revenue, but

he also said that the flat 17-cent state gasoline tax has not increased since 1996 and the federal gasoline tax has not increased since 1993.

"As the price of gas increases, the revenue that the government receives hasn't been able to keep up," Briggs said.

With pressing needs for revenue increase, legislators will not ignore the possibility of a variety of tax increases. A gasoline tax increase would take effect before 2010, McClanahan said, adding that the gasoline tax would probably not be the sole factor in increasing revenue.

"A combination of legislative action and perhaps an additional vote of the people would be most likely," McClanahan said. "Perhaps some changes could even be made administratively, such as raising licensure fees and that sort of thing."

Still, the issue of rising gasoline prices continues to affect most people on a daily basis, and a tax increase might be undesirable to some Missouri residents.

Junior Jessica Ridenour said it is not surprising to hear that prices might increase.

"It's upsetting that I'm probably going to have to pay more, but I'm just kind of used to it at this point," Ridenour said. "And it just makes you wonder exactly where that money [from taxes] is going to be going."

McClanahan said some legislators have proposed a four-cent increase on current 17-cent gasoline taxes, the flat rate in the state



Mark Hardy/Index

Kirkville resident Cathi Louder refuels her SUV on Wednesday afternoon.

of Missouri. In addition to the 18-cent federal gasoline tax and a possible four-cent increase on the federal level, Missouri residents could be paying 43 cents in tax for every gallon of gasoline they purchase in the future.

About 14 percent of what consumers pay for gasoline goes toward federal and state taxes combined, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation. This does not discount the impact that four or eight extra cents per gallon might have on consumers, but it suggests that other larger factors determine the rising gas prices.

"It's the price of oil," Professor of economics Bruce Coggins said. "If there's some big disruption in supply, like we had after Hurricane Katrina — that's when refining capacity was cut way back — the price has to rise to corroborate supply with demand."

Coggins said such an increase in prices would not have bad repercussions necessarily, regardless of why the prices are rising.

"If the price stays high for a long time, the market works by creating incentives to go find more oil or to find alternative energy sources," Coggins said. "And that's why the rise in the price does a good thing in the long run."

McClanahan elaborated on the possible decrease in demand because of a gas tax increase.

"Technically, gasoline tax is a user tax — only the people who buy gasoline have to pay that tax," McClanahan said. "But a lot of low-income people have to drive to work. [A tax increase] would have a pretty substantial impact on people who are already spending significant portions of their income on gas."

McClanahan said the possibility of the state legislature funding

alternative transportation sources is not substantial.

"What if we did something completely different?" McClanahan said. "But I'm hearing that as the little voice. I think MoDOT is doing a really good job of marketing their ideas."

According to the United States Department of Transportation, only eight states pay lower taxes on gasoline than Missourians, including none of the state's neighbors except Oklahoma.

"The truth is, Missouri has some of the lowest gas prices in the country," Yanick said. "And we're lucky to be paying under \$3 as it is."

But as oil prices rise as steadily as the need for public service, the \$3 mark will come nearer for Missourians. In fact, all Missourians soon might consider \$3 for a gallon of gasoline to be crudely cheap.

University works toward gubernatorial debate bid

BY ANSHU THAPA
for the Index

If all goes well, University students might have a front-row seat at a debate between candidates running for the office of Missouri Governor.

Committee member Jay Self said the University's Gubernatorial Debate Steering Committee is negotiating the details of a possible debate between the major candidates running for governor in the election next fall. Candidates will be invited based on a list of criteria the committee created, Self said. The deadline for candidates to turn in their applications to participate is Labor Day 2008, according to the committee's Web site.

Self said only Jay Nixon fits the criteria so far, but no candidates have been formally invited. He said the planning still is in the works.

"We can go ahead and invite people,

but that doesn't mean they're going to come," Self said.

Self said candidates have not debated often in the northern part of the state but that some candidates like Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-MO) have found it to their advantage to campaign in a place like Kirkville.

Self said Gov. Blunt has made several trips to Kirkville. This includes a visit last week, according to the Nov. 29 issue of the Index.

"You look back on the 2006 campaign for Senate," Self said. "Claire McCaskill, after losing the gubernatorial race in 2004, said, 'My mistake was that I ignored the rural areas.'"

So in 2006, she made a specific effort to campaign in rural Missouri, which included Kirkville."

Self said nothing is decided yet, but the committee is planning a year ahead to put together all the necessary efforts.

"We're hoping to put together an

attractive enough package that they're going to want to come to Kirkville," he said.

Self said another important thing to look for is to have good media coverage of the debate to attract the candidates. He said the process still is in the PR planning stage.

"Ideally, we want television coverage," Self said.

He said such an event is important because it is an educational experience for college students and an opportunity for the Kirkville committee because it brings civic engagement. Self said the steering committee is partnering with Chamber of Commerce to put together the debate so students can engage in the political process.

Self said he hopes rural areas will be considered in this election.

"We are at a distinct disadvantage in Kirkville because we have a small media market opposed to St. Louis or Kan-

sas City," said junior Courtney Robbins College Republican Chairwoman. "The last election, most of the debates and the meetings and the big press rallies happened in the southern side of the state below I-70. ... We want to remind the candidates that there is a big hunk of the population up here, and also to get the word out about our school because it would be a televised event."

Robbins said it would set precedent if the University were to host a debate of this scope.

"Even though I'm College Republican Chair, I am not really there to voice my opinions politically or give a partisan response," Robbins said. "But just to be aware that I'm there to represent the student body as a whole."

She said some important issues in this election include taxes, fuel costs and education.

"Education funding is obviously really important to Truman because we

are a public university," Robbins said.

Robbins said she hopes this will revitalize political awareness in students.

"I hope that it would awaken the spirit of knowledge in people and that they would really pursue and really want to know what the candidates really stand for," Robbins said.

She said it is part of the liberal arts tradition for students to be well rounded. She said all majors can get something out of political debate — especially communication and political science majors.

Sophomore political science major Kevin Richardson said he would be interested in attending a gubernatorial debate if it at Truman.

"I would hope that it would be ... student-oriented more instead of just random questions that are brought before them," Richardson said. "I just think that it should be more student-run questions."

Congratulations
to the ladies of Alpha Sigma Gamma's Fall 2007
pledge class for becoming Active Members!

Mallory Bass

Brianna Cook

Heather King

Heather Rush

Melissa Berns

Jen Cunningham

Sarah Koch

Alexis Simmons

Sara Besserman

Hannah Dumey

Alyssa Lewellen

Risa Suzuki

Lauren Boatright

Allison Foster

Mandy Love

Meredith Turner

Amelia Bobzien

Krystal Foster

Kait Maloney

Alyssa Vorhies

Christine Buneta

Laura Greaver

Sarah Neuman

Joan Williams

Emily Cannell

Danielle Henry

Ashley Nixon

Jessica Yardley

Susan Cheung

Hillary Hugelman

Becca Nolle

Congratulations again and you all are an
amazing addition to the sorority!
Ducky Love,
ASG Active Body