

Missouri must re-prioritize in financial crisis



Toby Hausner

It is officially time to panic in Missouri. Since the adoption of the fiscal year 2010 budget, more than \$700 million has been cut from the \$23.7 billion total budget. Depending on which you believe, the state government or the Missouri Budget Project, we will be facing either a \$600 million shortfall or a one billion dollar shortfall, respectively. Unbeknownst to most of our citizens, we have been running our state government on borrowed time, and it is starting to catch up to us.

The federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act gave Missouri

\$870 million, which we have used for the past few years to delay the hard decisions on looming program cuts. Instead of using these funds to help during a long process of governmental cutbacks, we've used it all up front. Ladies and gentlemen, it will be gone before 2012. The cuts will now come at us hard and fast and will drastically change the ability of our state government to provide services.

Major cuts are looming, and education — particularly higher education — appears to be the first in line to the guillotine. Large cuts to education programs have already been made, like \$50 million from the Missouri Access Scholarship program and \$70 million from school transportation funds. Oh, yeah, and one-quarter of the state's Bright Flight program.

My complaint is not necessarily that cuts are being made — at this point they need to be made in virtually every facet of the government. I am simply disturbed by the prioritizing of our state officials. Who is our govern-

ment protecting first and foremost, the needy or the interest groups? We cut programs for the mentally handicapped and for the education of the next generation yet allow the maintenance of protectionist tax policies.

Does it seem right to cut programs that people rely on for their future and their present well-being when we are providing a safe haven for tobacco and alcohol companies? Literally no state has a lower tax rate on cigarettes, according to a media report with the campaign for tobacco-free kids called "Tax Burden on Tobacco." Missouri has a 17 cent tax per pack — the national average is \$1.45.

Missouri ranks 9th in the prevalence rate of smokers, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. We are continually prioritizing industries such as these at the expense of the people. I personally would much rather pay half a dollar more for luxury goods like alcohol than have our scholarships taken away. In Texas, they increased rates

on "sin taxes" — taxes on goods like alcohol or cigarettes that are generally considered harmful or sinful — and were able to use the millions of dollars the increased garnered toward state needs. They also saw a decrease in the state levels of cigarette use. In the long term, this will increase state revenues because the citizens are healthier, able to work longer and — here is your incentive, Missouri — pay more taxes in the long run.

I get the feeling that part of what has stalled our government from viewing this situation in its proper light is their understanding that the citizens do not want any new taxes. After all, we have tried to pass multiple "sin tax" increases throughout the years and the people of Missouri voted against the acts. Today, though, we have Kansas City shutting down nearly half of the city district's schools, we have a financial black hole one billion dollars deep staring at us and we have more people than ever struggling to make ends meet.

Perhaps we could try to pass this legislation again, only this time provide citizens with the proper framework. The Missouri government will be unable to serve their constituents at anywhere close to its previous levels if they do not get the funds from somewhere.

I ask you this — what do we value more, cost effective cigarettes and beer or the education of our families? I do not hold our government entirely responsible because, truth be told, we are sending them mixed signals. I think they have a burden to continually seek out what is best for us and not for special interests, but to some extent we have continually closed the other doors of opportunity for them.

Missouri, hard times are coming, and it is imperative that we get our priorities straight.

Toby Hausner is a senior political science major from Kansas City, Mo.

AROUND THE 'VILLE

Should Missouri sin taxes be increased?



"Yes, because the products aren't necessary in life."

*Yvonne Brown
Schuyler county resident*



"They should find a way to raise money without putting it on the backs of addicts."

*Kim Moody
Kirkville resident*



"No, any excuse to raise taxes at this time would lead to a bigger black market."

*Rosalie Caldwell
Kirkville resident*



"No, I'm a smoker, and they are high enough."

*Candy Graham
Milan resident*

Cartoon didn't progress with times



Anna Meier

"It's funny because it's true!" I invariably hear these five words when one of my friends reads the cartoons section of the paper. In some cases, the cartoons are funny because they parallel real life experiences, but in the long-running comic strip "Cathy," I'd like to think that's not the case.

Most of us know Cathy, the short, stout, line drawing of a woman with long brown hair; an aerobics outfit always at the ready and no nose to speak of. She theoretically has everything a person needs, including her own job, apartment and dog. She is intensely unhappy, though, and not about the fact that she doesn't have a nose, which seems to be the only visible problem in her life, but about the fact that she doesn't have a man.

"Cathy" was syndicated in newspapers all over the country for more than 30 years. When the strip first began running, society's view of women was certainly less progressive than it is today, and yet, for some reason, Cathy never evolved to fit a newer, more freeing version of women. When the strip

first ran, her usual habit was to wait by the phone for a call from a man. This call, more often than not, never came. Sometimes this would send Cathy into an emotional tirade, and other times it would simply send her to the freezer, where she conveniently kept a lifetime supply of ice cream.

Eventually, the cartoon woman did marry, but having a man did not, of course, alleviate any of her problems — one of the only aspects of her character that seems to resemble reality. Even with her husband around, she found ways to be an emotional bag of tricks, complete with her anxiety about the size of her thighs, her propensity for mood swings and her love/hate relationship with her tirelessly critical mother.

Cathy is the epitome of the neurotic, needy, body- and food-obsessed woman. She has been recreated every single day in a multitude of newspapers for 34 years, and no one has batted an eye. I find it hard to believe that we, as a reading public, are really that inundated by patriarchal hegemony. We don't really think women are like Cathy all the time, do we?

Of course women are relentlessly needy and tiresome creatures. Humans are relentlessly needy and tiresome by nature. That doesn't mean, though, that all, or even most, women are sitting at home every night hating men and their mothers and stuffing their faces with a pint of Ben and Jerry's.

The comic was funny. It had to be to

have lasted as long as it did. But it was funny for other reasons than its similarities to real women. I'm a little disappointed with the comic behind little Cathy — Cathy Guisewite, who has been a real pioneer in her profession. She is a terrific example of women crossing boundaries and empowering themselves. What she put on the page on a daily basis was something close to degradation.

Cathy is now gone from the papers, and although I won't go into a rousing chorus of "Ding, Dong, the witch is dead," I will say that I think it's about time. In the progressive world we live in, there doesn't seem to be space for this antiquated relic of 19th century gender ideology. For some reason, Cathy's character didn't evolve, but the rest of the world did. It's a wonder she lasted so long out here where women wear pants and vote and run for president.

Cathy was certainly cute, and she was funny in her own way. But what she stood for, the mockery of an entire gender wrapped up in her little line drawing, was an invitation to take two steps back into the stale world of pre-feminist America. Her absence from the papers just might be a harbinger of even more advancement on the road to a fair representation of women.

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Imagination fuels society's intelligence



Molly Skyles

As a child, my best friends weren't like everyone else's. I had more than 70 in all. They were each equipped with individual hair styles, names and personalities, all, of course, decided upon by me. They had friends and enemies: The gymnast and the ballerina remained at opposite ends of the shelf at all times. Dresser drawers became their homes, and tissues acted as blankets when it was nap time for all of us. My imagination and the miniature Barbies from the McDonald's Happy Meals I collected provided hours of entertainment.

This sounds silly now, but at the time my imagination ran wild, and this was my world — a world that only I had control over. Today, though, intelligence is trumping imagination in kid's worlds.

Picture book sales have gone down, according to a recent article in The New York Times. Parents have ditched simple books for more advanced learning possibilities. Stories like "Goodnight Moon" and "Curious George" no longer suffice for toddlers. No, parents think moving into chapter books without pictures at the critical developmental ages of three or four will stimulate their children to become the next Einstein.

It is also starting at an even younger than toddlers. Pregnant women wrap headphones playing classical music around their bellies, which supposedly triggers something in the unborn babies' brains that leads to a higher IQ. And there is even an entire product line called Baby Einstein, providing new parents with DVDs and electronic books to stimulate brain activity before the baby can even hold its head up.

Why can't babies and children develop at their own pace? These ideas force them into a learning schedule before they are even old enough to know what is going on. However, by having picture books read to them and being taught to count on their fingers and toes, they will still learn

the basics, but in a way that allows their imaginations to flourish.

So what does this all mean? Yes, the next generation might be brilliant, but they will be lacking something even more important — imagination. They will be able to discover the next major chemical breakthrough, but they won't be able to put it to practical use. They can do all the complex physics needed to create the next major roller coaster, but they will be unable to actually create it, because they won't be able to dream outside of what the textbook tells them.

Brains might be vital, but they are nothing without that creative spark that makes things happen. Take the Disney Imagineers, for example. They are a group of people from various disciplines whose job it is to dream up ideas for Disney parks and attractions. Will theme parks one day cease to exist because we are becoming a society so dependent on high test scores that nothing creative emerges?

Imagination, unlike most other things in life, cannot be taught. A kid can learn to read a chapter book at a young age instead of being exposed to picture books, but he or she cannot learn to imagine the story and the interactions between characters in his or her head.

I love reading. It is something that acts as an escape. I immerse myself in the plot lines and let the characters take over my imagination. I hold very detailed images of the characters and their lifestyles in my head. This is what makes reading fun. My ability to do this, though, stems from spending countless hours on my mom's lap reading books — picture books — together as a kid. Looking at the pictures and creating other plots based off the images kick-started my imagination. I attribute my ability to write and my love of reading today to reading so much as a kid.

I'm not saying kids should not be challenged. Learning and intelligence are important, but imagination and creativity makes that intelligence worthwhile. Someday, if I become a mother, I will break out my old Barbies and picture books to show them how fun it can be to imagine, because I know I don't want to live in a world filled with only brainiacs.

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Importance of terrorism levels should be reconsidered



Nicola Fish

Last week I opened my e-mail box and was faced with a severe-looking e-mail titled "URGENT ACTION REQUIRED". I don't know what was scarier — the capital letters or that my e-mail contained something other than Facebook notifications. The e-mail referred to my flight back to England in December, and I suddenly realized why it was all in capitals. The terrorism level had been raised.

Britain, Japan, Sweden and the U.S. warned citizens Monday about traveling to Europe. They also all raised their terror threat levels, except Britain. Britain's terrorism

level is continuously too high to be raised further, and it's not the only one. France and Germany are in exactly the same position.

My e-mail demonstrated the U.S. way of making flights more secure by asking for more passenger details. Other countries have had different ideas. Britain decided to announce that France and Germany were "high terror risks," and I bet they appreciated this. Sweden, on the other hand, decided to go the more diplomatic route and avoid naming any specific countries. But what does this high terrorism threat actually mean to the public? As far as I can tell, no one in the named countries with high threat levels seems to be panicking — so why warn them at all? Is the terrorism threat not being taken seriously enough or is this just fear mongering?

The terrorism level might not be taken seriously enough because it has been so high for so long. In countries like Britain and Germany, who've seen the level remain high for a prolonged period of time, it

can seem normal. When people are used to seeing the high level but no actual terrorist attacks, they become less afraid of its meaning or what it could mean. If this is true, then why is the terrorism level even necessary?

Terrorism is a buzz word. People hear it and it immediately conjures up images of 9/11. Unsurprisingly, this evokes feelings of fear and worry, making people more suspicious and wary when traveling. At least, this is what it is meant to do. Often it just makes people scared and results in them not traveling at all. An even worse effect is that it allows people to justify their personal prejudices against people who they deem "terrorists."

If any of these effects are true, then why even bother with the terrorism level at all? If it will just cause unnecessary worry and unfounded suspicions, then why warn people? I know that telling people supposedly makes them more proactive and aware, but as the saying goes, "Ignorance is bliss." Living in

fear is not going to help anyone, and a terrorist attack could happen at any time — these are examples of thinking that consider terror threats unnecessary. It can be viewed as just another way for a country to scare its populace into staying within the country's boundaries.

However, there is a point to the terrorism threat level. No one expected 9/11. No one was checking for bombs in shoes on American Airline flights and no one predicted the bombs in backpacks on the London tube. If people actively engage with the warnings, then this could prevent terror attacks from taking place. The shoe bomber was unsuccessful partly because the people around him on the flight reported his behavior to security. Hijacked flight United 93 didn't hit its target because the passengers fought back. This shows the strength people have to make a difference and why awareness of terrorism threats is important.

Nevertheless, I do question the relevance of the levels that

countries issue. Does this actually make a difference? Surely people should always be alert. Does this mean that when it's a low level, we should be more passive? Aren't terrorist groups going to see the low level and think this could be a good opportunity, as we're not expecting it? Wouldn't it make more sense for terrorists to wait until the level is reduced and then attack? In this way, the terrorist level is counterproductive.

In all honesty, wouldn't it just be easier to educate people on how to respond to potential terrorist threats and encourage them to be more alert? Instead of a system of colors and codes, which seem to do nothing more than inspire fear or create passivity, why don't we all make the choice to be more vigilant?

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