

Our View

Let Thomas establish a leadership style

Students were greeted Feb. 10 by an email from the Truman State Board of Governors announcing the Board's decision to hire Interim University President Sue Thomas as president. On the heels of that announcement, Thomas sent out a campus-wide email informing the student body of the Board's decision to establish a \$50 surcharge. The surcharge is part of an effort to raise revenue to cover the \$3.1 million budget reduction following Gov. Eric Greitens' announcement earlier this year of statewide cuts to education funding.

Former University President Troy Paino's tenure at the helm began with similar turmoil. Paino was appointed Truman's president during the recession in 2009. Budget issues don't evade any leader of a state university, but they don't define them, either. We, as a community, can see that with how warmly students remember Paino from the past few years.

The first act students and faculty associate with Thomas as our president is one that is overwhelmingly unpopular. While we, the Truman Media Network Editorial Board, encourage criticism of the surcharge and other Board decisions, we urge students and faculty not to pass indiscriminate, negative opinion on Thomas' administration based on this one act.

As tempting as it is, judging an administration based on its predecessor is a mistake. Thomas' tenure as president begins during an incredibly unstable time for our campus. As a result, her method of leadership might turn out to be drastically different from the way past presidents have lead. It is possible, if not probable, the next year will bring many more difficult decisions like the one announced on Monday. Thomas, by necessity, will have to prioritize issues that previous administrations have not. Thomas might not interact with students in the same manner we're used to. Don't be put off by the simple fact of change, which can often be jarring and difficult to accept, but recognize that times are different, and Thomas is a different person than Paino. Her administration will naturally be different than our perception of what a president should be.

We, the Truman Media Network Editorial Board, ask you to recognize that Thomas' job isn't just to be the public face of Truman. Her job will require her to act in cooperation with the Board and the state government to meet the bottom line and to hand down decisions that might be unpopular.

We are not asking you to accept with blind faith that Thomas will be a good president for this

Matter of Perspective

by August Davis



University. Nor are we asking you to accept every decision she or the Board makes in response to the chaos currently swirling through our education system. In fact, we urge you to continue to question those decisions and to maintain a steady line of communication with Thomas about what you, as members of this community, think should be done to address the budget crisis.

We simply ask that you reserve judgment about Thomas as a president until there is more evidence to base those impressions on. Give her time to communicate what her priorities are, what her plans are and what she intends to do for this University.

Leaders are made, not born. Give Thomas a chance to establish what kind of leader she intends to be.

Budget cuts are an inadequate reaction to economic crisis and revenue shortfalls



Will Chaney
Opinions Editor

Many tragic stories in the newspaper are often easily forgettable, disappearing into our mental trash can if we are unaffected by the issues. Unfortunately, the recent budget massacre is something we can't ignore. It affects every student, professor, staff member and program to an extensive but largely unknown degree — even if we would rather preoccupy ourselves with other more important issues.

In an email last week, Truman State University President Sue Thomas announced the first of many sacrifices the state expects the Truman community to make, which comes in the form of a \$50 fee to be paid by all full-time students. If this policy is representative of future decisions made by the newly-elected administrations of President Donald Trump, Missouri Gov. Eric Greitens, and Thomas, Truman will find delivering its mission statement to its students to be very difficult in the coming years.

To be fair, the Truman leadership is reacting to a situation — largely created by forces beyond its control — that is one of the most alarming in Truman's history. Presiding over a university in 2017 with essentially less money than it had in the late 1990s is very difficult, but this should not keep Thomas from clearly identifying why the shortage exists. She wrote the first sentence of her Feb. 13 email in passive voice, without mentioning who caused the budget cuts — “tax revenues for 2016-2017 in the state of Missouri did not meet the projected level needed to support the state's many publicly funded programs” — implying the crisis is just a natural part of society that was inevitable. In this article, I hope to supplement Thomas' email without the restriction of representing an entire university offering an explanation of why you have to pay the school an additional \$50.

Greitens' budget cuts, like most of his policy proposals, come from the 40-year old political tradition of “neoliberalism” — seeking to address social problems by cutting taxes and government spending. Neoliberal policymakers aim to spur investment in productive activities that generate tax revenue by allowing wealthy individuals and businesses to keep money they would otherwise pay as taxes. Cuts to universities, autism clinics, nonprofit organizations like Planned Parenthood, and so on are seen as necessary to revitalize the rest of the economy through private investment. There are several flaws to this argument in relation to Missouri's current situation, which give undue importance to several issues while ignoring other, more pressing, causes.

In a video announcing his plan to the public — and in subsequent addresses — Greitens placed the blame of low tax revenues on the Affordable Care Act and a bad business environment. Greitens claimed rising health care costs from the ACA decreased the economic activity of individuals and businesses. While this explanation is partially true, health care costs substantially increased before the ACA during former President George W. Bush's administration — an average yearly cost increase of less than \$550 with the ACA versus \$670 with Bush, according to Jan. 19 CNBC and Sep. 2013 Eclecta articles. The current health care cost increases are not enough to make such an extensive cut to social programs necessary.

Greitens is correct in suggesting Missouri is in a bad business environment — the current rate of profit for American businesses is almost as low as it was just before the Great Depression, according to economist Andrew Kliman. With fewer profits, businesses are less able to handle economic shocks and pay for extra expenses like taxes, equipment repairs and investments in new technologies, which often quickly deplete their savings. During 2016, corporate income tax revenue decreased \$64 million, a sizable portion of the planned \$146 million in cuts, according to a Jan. 17 STL Today article. Greitens' solution — to the lack of revenue from businesses that are taking increasingly desperate measures to avoid paying taxes — is not to increase the corporate income tax but to cut spending on fundamental social programs like education. He proposed nothing that would restore business profitability or change our current economic system to one that does cause its own rate of profit to fall and experience recurrent crises.

Furthermore, when Missouri businesses avoid paying taxes in Missouri, they are not forced to invest in and create jobs for Missourians. They could decide to invest

outside of Missouri, place their money in a bank or risky financial scheme, invest in labor-saving technologies that eliminate jobs or pay politicians to lower their taxes in the future. If the economy is bad enough to justify cutting 8 percent of a state university's budget allocation, businesses are also probably having a hard time finding profitable investments, making these options more attractive in a profit-driven economy. There is no guarantee Truman's lost funds will translate into more jobs, but we can say with relative certainty that Missourians will enter the wage-labor market with fewer skills and lower levels of productivity.

When in his policy video Greitens said, “we must come together, tighten our belts,” and “make these tough decisions,” he is really asking us to make decisions that can't improve our performance and don't have right or wrong answers. Is Truman's math or theatre department more important, and which should receive fewer resources? Should Kirk Building get new tables and chairs, or should McClain Hall classrooms get better functioning speakers? Should Truman cut research funding, or reduce institutional pay for student workers? There might be some waste to cut, but most of what Truman does is positive — certainly the waste makes up less than 8 percent of our functions.

As unfortunate as the reactions to the state of the economy and government have been, Truman's leadership should handle this crisis to benefit more people. The University Foundation Endowment value doubled to almost \$40 million between 2009 and 2015, according to the Foundation website. Less than 1 percent of this fund could cover the \$50 surcharge for all students, and the entire fund could cover all cuts for more than 10 years — which is how it would be used if it were an emergency fund. Thomas and other high-level administrators could also consider taking pay cuts, as their salaries tend to be much higher than others' within the Truman community.

Most importantly, students, faculty, staff and administration must politically organize together to demand necessary resources from the state. Truman and the Missouri government's administrations must become more open to the input and participation of the educational community, and we must be ready to accept these responsibilities and do work.

Will Chaney is a junior economics major from Bridgeton, Mo.

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