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TO: MISSOURI SOUTHERN STATE UNIVERSITY
FROM: Kyna Iman
DATE: May 16, 2015
RE: End of Session Report

The 2015 Missouri General Assembly ended its five-month session on Friday, May 15. The session was marked by scandal, tragedy and, in the end, several changes were made to the state's laws.

Republican House Speaker John Diehl resigned on Friday. Representative Todd Richardson, R-Poplar Bluff, was sworn in as the new House Speaker on Friday morning.

In February, Missouri Auditor Tom Schweich took his own life, and a month later, Schweich's longtime spokesman further shook the state's political community by also committing suicide.

On the final day, lawmakers passed a measure preserving more than \$3.5 billion for Medicaid.

Typically, the final day in Jefferson City is marked by frantic negotiations and last-minute deals for final passage of legislation. However, Diehl's stunning departure, coupled with Democratic anger over Republican parliamentary tactics in the Senate, ground most legislative work to a halt.

Senators adjourned three hours before the 6:00 p.m. deadline. The House closed business at 5:50 p.m.

Here are the bills MSSU worked hard on that passed – or stalled – during the 2015 session.

PASSED:

BUDGET: Governor Nixon signed the FY2016, \$26 billion budget, which was sent to him two weeks ahead of schedule. Expecting a bevy of cuts, lawmakers worked to finish the budget early so they could override any vetoes while still in session. However, Nixon made no vetoes but could withhold money in the future.

An increase of \$12 million was included in House Bill 3 for performance funding for the four-year higher education institutions.

For Missouri Southern State University \$24,385,221 is appropriated.
For Access Missouri Scholarships, \$69.5 million is appropriated.
For A+ Scholarships, \$37 million is appropriated.
For Bright Flight Scholarships, \$18,676,666 is appropriated.

For the nurse loan program, \$499,752 was appropriated.

\$15 million in funds were appropriated in House Bill 19, to pay for the debt service on \$160 million of bonds for maintenance and repair projects on college campuses. For Missouri Southern, \$5,228,422 was appropriated for the repair of science laboratories in Reynolds Hall.

Also, MSSU was approved for a 50/50 project in House Bill 17, which would provide \$1.5 million for renovations to Reynolds Hall.

The list of higher education maintenance and repair projects was a major priority of the Senate. Senator Parson passed Senate Concurrent Resolution 9 within the first month of session. I worked with House Budget Chairman Tom Flanigan and MSSU Representative Charlie Davis to ensure funding for these projects in the budget.

OTHER HIGHER EDUCATION LEGISLATION THAT PASSED:

MOST: Senator Schmitt passed Senate Bill 366. The act exempts from state income taxation refunds of qualified higher education expenses received by beneficiaries in connection with withdrawal from an eligible education institution when the refund is contributed to a qualified tuition savings program within 60 days of withdrawal.

Furthermore, the act permits participants in the MOST program to elect to contribute all or part of their income tax refund to his or her MOST account via direct deposit. Such election must be made on a form provided by the Department of Revenue and may not be revoked.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION ON CAMPUSES: Senator Ed Emery brought this bill back to life after death several times, and I am a little surprised it made it to final passage. Senate Bill 93, creates the "Campus Free Expression Act" to protect free expression on the campuses of public institutions of higher education.

This act designates the outdoor areas of campuses of public institutions of higher education to be traditional public forums. Public institutions of higher education may maintain and enforce reasonable time, place, and manner restrictions in service of a significant institutional interest only when such restrictions employ clear, published, content and viewpoint-neutral criteria, and provide for ample alternative means of expression.

Any person may freely engage in noncommercial expressive activity so long as the person's conduct is not unlawful and does not materially and substantially disrupt the institution's functioning. Examples of protected expressive activities are described in the act.

This act may be enforced in a court of competent jurisdiction by the attorney general or any person whose expressive rights were violated under this act. A person may recover compensatory damages, reasonable court costs, and attorney fees. If a court finds a violation of this act, it must award no less than five hundred dollars for the initial violation, plus fifty dollars for each day the violation continues. A suit for violation of this section must be brought within one year of the day the cause of action accrues, as described in the act.

This was one of the last bills passed on Friday before adjournment and is on the Governor's desk.

This bill is different from Rep. Haahr's HB104, that prohibited any public college or university from taking any action or enforcing any policy that denies a religious student association any benefit available to any other student association, or discriminating against a religious student association. Haahr's bill did not make final passage.

MISSOURI DAIRY AND AGRICULTURE EDUCATION ACT: Rep. Bill Reiboldt and Senator Brian Munzlinger passed Senate Bill 12 early in session, and Governor Nixon has already signed the Act.

The Missouri Agriculture Education Scholarship Program is established to be administered by the department to provide, upon appropriation, scholarships for eligible students who enter an agriculture education program and make a commitment to work in the agriculture industry in Missouri as a condition of receiving the scholarship. Subject to appropriation, each year the department must make available up to 100 two-year or four-year Missouri agriculture education scholarships in an amount set by the department to assist with the cost of tuition and fees at a two-year or four-year Missouri college or university.

The funds for the scholarships are to be appropriated to the department from the revenue generated from state taxes paid by the dairy industry. If the number of applicants exceeds the number of scholarships or revenue available, the department may consider the financial needs of the applicant. The Missouri Agriculture Education Scholarship Program Fund is created consisting of appropriated funds and any gifts, contributions, grants, or other sources to be administered by the department and used solely for awarding the scholarships.

A+ SCHOLARSHIPS: Senator Gary Romine passed Senate Bill 224, which requires a student to be a United States citizen or permanent resident in order to be eligible to receive reimbursements from the A+ Schools Program.

DEGREE GRANTING AUTHORITY FOR HARRIS-STOWE: Senator Jamilah Nasheed passed Senate Bill 334, which repeals provisions that limited state teachers colleges from conferring postgraduate degrees except those necessary to the training of teachers or degrees other than those in education and arts and sciences.

This act broadens the degree programs that Harris-Stowe State University may offer. Currently, Harris-Stowe is only authorized to offer undergraduate degree programs with an emphasis on selected applied professional disciplines. This act authorizes Harris-Stowe to offer baccalaureate degree programs and graduate degree programs, upon approval of the Coordinating Board for Higher Education.

HIGHER EDUCATION LEGISLATION THAT FAILED:

House Bill 187: Rep. Fitzpatrick's legislation to limit universities from charging in-state tuition rates to students without a lawful immigration status failed.

Senate Bill 109: Senator Schaefer's legislation to clarify that settlements for public higher education institutions not involving the Legal Expense Fund will not be subject to approval by the Attorney General failed.

Senate Bill 465/House Bill 1165: Senator Schmitt and Rep. Brattin sponsored "transparency" bills. Schmitt's would have required public institutions to post on its internet website information for each course offered that includes the course's syllabus, reading list, attendance requirements, extra credit opportunities, and a description of required assignments and projects. Rep. Brattin's bill would require a public institution to post the cost of a degree, cost of books, housing costs, number of jobs in the industry, and how it will take to get that degree. Obviously, COPHE and even the Independent Colleges lobbyist testified in opposition to these bills.

Senate Bill 71: Senator LeVota sponsored legislation to require the Department of Higher Education to establish a reimbursement procedure through the A+ program for a student's portion of fees for dual credit courses. This bill never made it out of committee.

House Bill 1254: Senator Donna Lichtenegger nearly passed her bill to allow Western Governors' University to participate in the Access Missouri program. Lichtenegger is Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee for Higher Education. Senator Schaefer added language to House Bill 3 to prohibit Access Scholarship funds from going to WGU. The language was in a conference committee report with Career and Technical education and Gifted Education language, but died in the final days of session.

Thank you for the opportunity to represent Missouri Southern State University at the State Capitol during the 2015 legislative session. I look forward to presenting my end of session report to the Board of Governors. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or email me at kynaiman@earthlink.net.