



SUPPORTING EDUCATION

To a higher degree

Story by TERRY JORDAN
Photo by ROB HILL

Fans celebrated MU's triumph over Kansas in 1990 as the basketball Tigers defeated the Jayhawks twice to rise to the top of the national rankings. Tom Ray, then president of the Missouri Students Association, used the occasion to put another spin on the rivalry.

"We're losing here at home," screamed the headline in fliers and newspaper ads distributed throughout mid-Missouri. An MSA task force created the ads, which displayed a basketball, over which was printed the score "Kansas 154, Missouri 107." The numbers represent the dollars spent in the two states per person on higher education.

"We picked Kansas because of the national attention that was focused on the basketball rivalry at the time," says Ray, who graduated this spring with a bachelor's degree in political science and will enter law school at MU in the fall. "The sad thing is that we could have picked 46 others. That's how many states are ahead of us in this category."

Ray has pushed for increased state support of higher education since becoming a Summer Welcome leader

at Mizzou in 1989. The Kansas City native was elected an MSA senator his freshman and sophomore years, but didn't realize the seriousness of the funding situation until he began leading new students around Campus.

"We'd tour Ellis Library and I'd think, 'Why has the library slipped in national rankings?' We'd talk about financial aid, and I'd think, 'Why can't we help more students, particularly minorities?' We'd go around to various departments, and I'd think, 'Why are so many good professors leaving?' It all came down to money."

Ray's concern for Mizzou comes naturally; both parents are alumni. In Kansas City, his father, Robert H. Ray, BS Ag '60, is a sales manager for American Ingredients, and his mother, Virginia A. Smallwood Ray, BS Ed '59, MS '68, teaches home economics at Center High School. The family's emphasis on a good education paid off, as Ray posted a 3.97 cumulative grade point average to graduate second in his class of 250 at Center High.

But it was his involvement in the YMCA's Youth-in-Government pro-

Tom Ray works for an education tax increase.

THE BENEFITS

- Program improvements, \$105.2 million
- Community colleges, \$21.8 million
- Student financial aid, \$21.1 million
- Equipment/maintenance, \$13 million
- Performance-based funds, \$11.5 million
- Research grants, \$11.2 million
- Minority scholarships, \$5 million
- University Extension, \$1 million

THE FUNDING

- A 3/8-cent sales tax
- A 5-cent increase in the cigarette tax
- A 10 percent tax on smokeless tobacco
- An additional 1.5 percent tax on corporations with income over \$100,000
- Limiting state deductions on federal income taxes

gram that gave him a focus for his future. Ray wrote mock bills and met political leaders in Jefferson City during his high-school years, and it affected him as nothing had before. "Politics grabbed me from the start," he says. "I loved dealing with serious issues and realizing that you could help bring about a change."

While serving an internship in Gov. John Ashcroft's office this winter, he learned a little more about the political process. Ray researched legal matters and tracked legislation for the governor, and when appropriate, let his thoughts be known on the education tax increase.

A self-described liberal Republican, Ray was disappointed in Ashcroft's initial reluctance to support the education effort. "He's made a living by defending the status quo, and you can't say that's wrong.

"But the state has an obligation to support higher education to a greater degree. As Missouri's first land-grant institution, MU was established to educate students for the betterment of the state and to conduct research for the betterment of the state. We do

this, and statistics show that a college graduate will return \$48,000 in additional taxes to the state in a lifetime.

"The problem is that the state should pay its share for this work, and it's not."

Ray cringes when he talks about a 12 percent tuition increase that goes into effect at MU this summer and a proposal to raise tuition by 83 percent over the next five years. "I realize that the money is needed, but the students shouldn't have to pay for it," he says. "In many cases, students won't be able to pay for it. They'll lose out, and ultimately, the state will lose out, too."

His work with the tax-increase issue involves more than the basketball advertisement. He and three MU journalism students have put together an advertising and public relations campaign that could be used to influence voters in the November election. He also testified before the state's Business and Education Partnership Commission last year on the need for a tax increase and helped organize a student letter-writing campaign. That effort, led this spring by David Ridley, Ray's successor as MSA president, and Sheliah Gilliland, president of the Alumni Association Student Board, resulted in 1,500 Mizzou students writing letters to their legislators urging more state support for higher education.

Ray has won almost every scholastic award possible during his four years at MU. He's a Curators Scholar, a Bright Flight Scholar, a member of the Mystical Seven and Mortar Board, and was Phi Beta Kappa's outstanding junior at MU in 1990. "Ten years from now, I'd like to be a partner of a law firm in Kansas City, have a family, and be a member of the state legislature," he says. "After that, who knows? Maybe run for governor or U.S. senator."

For now, though, law school comes first. And he continues pressing for an education tax increase as a new member of MU's Graduate Professional Council. "We can't give up on this," Ray says. "We do a great job with what we have, but it's not enough. Something tells me that our parents would have done this for us. We owe it to those who will follow us." □

Alumni can help

A dollar a week. That's all it would cost the typical Missouri resident if the Education Reform and Quality Improvement Act passes at the polls on Nov. 5.

The benefits in higher education alone would far outweigh the expense, Chancellor Haskell Monroe says. A boost in financial aid would allow more students to attend college, with some scholarships geared to minorities. New research would bring additional federal dollars to the state. Mizzou's programs, which already draw one-third of all Bright Flight scholars to the Campus, would be strengthened. So would University Extension programs, which reach all residents.

Alumni, parent and student groups are joining Missourians for Higher Education to persuade voters to approve the \$385 million tax increase for education. It includes \$190 million for higher education and a \$35 million bond issue for repair and maintenance of buildings. The bill also would provide \$190 million for elementary and secondary education and \$5 million for job training and development. The measure would go into effect next year, and MU could gain as much as \$50 million by 1993.

Dick Moore, AB '54, JD '56, of St. Louis, president-elect of the MU Alumni Association, urges alumni to get involved in the campaign. He encourages alumni to show "MU for Missouri's Future," a video produced by the Association that dramatically illustrates the needs of higher education, to alumni chapter meetings, service clubs and other groups. The video may be checked out by calling (314) 882-1989.

Other groups are taking action. LINC, the Association's legislative information network committee, publishes a newsletter and plans to sponsor legislative forums across the state in September and October, says Chairman Joe Moseley, AB '71, JD '76, of Columbia. Harold Crompton of St. Louis, legislative liaison for the MU Parents Association, says he expects his organization to form regional units and operate phone banks. MSA President David Ridley, an economics major from Rolla, says Mizzou students will conduct voter registration drives and write letters to newspaper editors.

Getting the bill through the legislature was the first challenge, says Sean McGinnis, JD '84, of Springfield, a member of LINC's executive committee. "Now comes the task of convincing the people who will be paying the bills — the voters," he adds. But MU supporters are confident going into the campaign; an MHE poll released last month says Missourians support an education tax increase by a 2-1 margin. — Terry Jordan