

MIZZOU

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Around the Columns

Tackling tuition

If state legislators and college governing boards approve a plan Gov. Jay Nixon announced Nov. 16, they will avoid disastrous double-digit reductions in state appropriations that could have been looming for the 2010-11 fiscal year.

At a pair of news conferences in St. Louis and Springfield, Nixon, BA '78, JD '81, said if Missouri's public universities hold tuition to this year's level, he will guarantee approximately 95 percent of the current state appropriation.

That agreement must still be ratified by the institutions' governing boards and also by the Missouri General Assembly when it passes the state budget next session. Nixon's plan for the tuition freeze covers in-state, undergraduate students at Missouri's four-year public colleges and universities. Still up for discussion is the question of whether University of Missouri campuses would decide to raise tuition for graduate and out-of-state students.

Nixon said the reduction of 5.2 percent in state appropriations would add up to \$42 million less for Missouri's public four-year institutions. For the current fiscal year, MU will receive \$189 million from the state; a 5.2 percent reduction of that amount would equal nearly \$10 million. With state tax revenues falling drastically — by 10 percent in the first quarter of this



The MU community gathered Nov. 18, 2009, in the Donald W. Reynolds Alumni Center Great Room to hear Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon announce an agreement to freeze tuition for Missouri undergraduate students at four-year public colleges and universities. Photo by Rob Hill

fiscal year — Mizzou budget planners had worried that state-funding cuts could be significantly higher than 5 percent.

At a Nov. 18 news conference on the MU campus, Gov. Nixon thanked the leaders of Missouri's four-year colleges and universities for helping to make the budget agreement possible. "We've all had to make tough choices about ways we can become more efficient and maximize our limited resources," Nixon said. "By working together, we have been able to preserve our shared priority of making higher education as affordable as possible for Missourians. That's something that should make us proud."

He noted that states all around the country are slashing their funding for higher education institutions. "We really stand alone among states," he said. "We may well be the only state in the country that goes two years without a tuition increase."

Nixon was asked how long Missouri would be able to maintain its support for public higher education with only relatively small cuts. "We're doing these deals one year at a time," he said. "We don't know what the economic conditions will be."

But the governor stressed that keeping college affordable for middle-class Missourians provides them the education and training they will need to be competitive in a challenging economy. "Keeping higher education affordable is one of the best steps we can take to turn this economy around," he said.

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