January 26, 2018

Dear Colleagues,

Recently, UM System President Mun Choi shared reflections about his conversations with many state legislators during his 11 months in Missouri. He has noticed an important and consistent theme — elected officials want the University of Missouri System and its four campuses to demonstrate what we are doing with the approximately $400M in state-appropriated funds.

In addition to this central theme of accountability, he shared another consistent theme he’s heard from legislative leaders — they have a significant appreciation for the hard work and contributions of the many men and women involved in our extension and engagement programs.

As the 2018 legislative session approached, President Choi challenged his team to define objectives and propose concepts for the annual UM System Legislative Day scheduled for Feb. 28, 2018, in Jefferson City. Based on feedback from legislators and staffers as to what advocacy approaches are most effective, and taking into account the legislature’s keen interest in fund accountability, the planning committee developed a new and exciting vision.

We are writing to ask for your support as it will be crucially important for the success of this program.

The day’s agenda will include an opportunity for the president and chancellors to visit with individual legislative leaders for in-depth meetings to discuss our core budget and requests for capital programs. In response to the deep interest in accountability, an early evening legislative showcase will provide a dynamic opportunity to engage legislators and state agency heads. The evening time frame better accommodates their work schedules.

The UM System Showcase will take place in the Magnolia Ballroom at the DoubleTree Hotel in Jefferson City and will feature exciting interactive displays staffed by some of the most dynamic faculty, staff and students from the four campuses, MU Extension and MU Health Care.

We will take this opportunity to not only show legislators what we are doing, but share how their investment in the UM System plays an essential role in our state’s economy and well-being. Legislators will learn about groundbreaking research and innovation, cutting-edge programs in community-based engagement, information about training the next generation of students who will contribute to Missouri’s economy, delivery of healthcare to rural counties, and partnerships with industries and other institutions.
We will share how our partnerships with other institutions are one of the most cost-effective ways to deliver programs to address critical workforce needs throughout the state.

Knowledgeable extension supporters, faculty, staff and students, alumni and donors, as well as our local city and county supporters, are crucial to the success of this approach. While we will not be taking vans and buses of people from across the state to Jefferson City on Feb. 28, we are asking for your help in promoting the showcase event to your legislators and encouraging their attendance by making calls and sending email or social media messages in the weeks prior to the event. We will have students, including our 4-H youth, hand-deliver tickets as a reminder for the evening event. We will be sharing more details in the weeks to come.

As this new concept was developed, concern was expressed about moving away from the long-standing practice of filling the Capitol with hundreds of supporters. While many supporters found the trip to the Capitol meaningful, many legislators noted this was not their preferred method of engagement.

After reflecting on this, it occurred to me that a legislative appreciation event, as a separate follow-up to Legislative Day, could create a stronger overall message. This would allow the university to formally engage legislators with numbers and data on Legislative Day in February. Then, in late March or early April, supporters would have the opportunity to express appreciation for legislator efforts.

An appreciation event would be casual and not driven by hard objectives. It would focus on developing relationships and understanding. I have recommended this to the president and chancellor. They are supportive and an appreciation event is being planned. More information will be available soon.

For supporters, partners and friends of the university who wish to visit their senator or representative and advocate in the Capitol at another time during the legislative session, we will make materials and talking points available.

Throughout the legislative session and afterward, I encourage you and all university supporters and stakeholders to have “back-home visits and conversations” with their elected representatives to reinforce the university’s appreciation for their support. Please contact me if you have questions about Legislative Day 2018, the UM System Showcase or an interest in the appreciation event.

Regards,

Marshall Stewart