LCC and KU to broadcast obesity program on Wednesday, Feb. 11

The University of Kansas and Labette Community College have partnered to broadcast Considering Obesity: KU Research on Brain, Body, Behavior Connections beginning at 4 p.m. in the Student Union Conference Room 1 on the Labette CC campus Wednesday, Feb. 11. The free-of-charge broadcast will feature nationally recognized experts on the brain, behavior, nutrition and weight management. A question and answer session with the panel will follow the presentation.

The program will be shown from KU’s Edwards Campus in Overland Park, Kan., which is also a free public event. Leading the presentation will be Professor Joseph D. Donnelly, director of the Center for Physical Activity, Nutrition and Weight Management at Children’s Mercy Hospital and Clinics in Kansas City, Mo., and director of the University of Kansas Center for Physical Activity and Weight Management at the KU Life Span Institute, one of the Institute’s 13 research centers.

Donnelly is a nationally recognized researcher in weight loss and maintenance who has received more than $10 million in National Institutes of Health (NIH) grants for his research since 2000. Several current projects involve more than 15,000 area children in strategies to combat obesity involving physical activity and environment, diet, pharmaceuticals and public policy.

More information about Donnelly, the Life Span Institute and the presentation can be found on the program Web site, and the LSI home page.

If you have questions about the presentation, contact Karen Henry at LSI at kahenry@ku.edu or call 785-864-0756, or contact Sara Harris, Associate Dean of General Education, Labette Community College, at sarah@labette.edu or (620) 820-1255.
BUDGET BILL PASSES IN SENATE TO BE DEBATED IN HOUSE

Kansas celebrated its 148th birthday this week, in addition to the bicentennial anniversary of President Abraham Lincoln’s birth.

I am growing increasingly alarmed by the slow start in the House. After three weeks, we have yet to consider any legislation on the House floor. So far this year most House committees are at a virtual standstill, with only one committee officially approving a bill. Most committees are having informational meetings.

The number one focus of the session must be responsibly balancing the budget. It is possible to enact good policy without spending money and there are a number of critical issues in which Kansas families expect progress in 2009.

Monday I celebrated my birthday and I had the honor of leading the Pledge of Allegiance for the Kansas House opening ceremonies. I enjoyed attending the Water Shed Banquet and the annual Kansas Farm Bureau Legislature Appreciation dinner. It was nice getting to visit with folks back home who were attending those events.

2009 Legislative Platform

The Democrat Caucus called a press conference this week to share their vision to empower each and every person as we strive to work together to make Kansas a better and stronger place. This is a time of deep concern for the citizens of Kansas. We are in a recession that has a serious impact on every individual, family, business and community in the state. The focus will be on “Empowering Kansans” and will focus on four different areas: Empowering Kansans to create opportunities, Empowering Kansans to build strong communities, Empowering Kansans to promote responsibility and Empowering Kansans to strengthen families.

KU and KSU Team Up on Cancer

Kansas University and Kansas State university signed an agreement this week to work together to try to get National Cancer Institute designation for the KU Cancer Center. The schools signed a memorandum of understanding that commits both schools to collaborate on cancer research. Obtaining NCI designation, which has been granted to 60 centers nationally, will ensure that Kansans can remain in Kansas to get the best care possible for cancer.

Unemployment Benefits

Just to let you know: There were 37,482 initial claims for unemployment benefits in December 2008, an increase from 18,212 claims at that time one year earlier.

Budget

On Thursday, the Senate considered the first version of the revised fiscal year 2009 budget bill, which must close the $186 million shortfall we face in the current fiscal year. The proposal received wide criticism from Republicans and Democrats alike and eventually failed to pass in its original form. It approached the budget with an “across the board” cutting philosophy, requiring a 3.4 percent budget cut in all state agencies. This would have been detrimental to Kansas schools, the corrections system, and necessary social services.

Governor Sebelius promised to veto the budget if it arrived on her desk with these effects.

By the end of the debate, the Senate eventually agreed on a compromise. They agreed on a lower, 1.5 percent cut against all areas except education funding, to avoid making any budget cuts to school districts so close to the end of the school year. The end budget cut totaled $334 million.

A bill cleared the House Appropriations Committee early Friday afternoon. The bill makes $323 million in adjustments to the budget for the remaining five months in the current fiscal year, which ends June 30. A little less than half of the adjustments are spending cuts and the remainder are accounting changes and the refinancing of state bonds. The committee endorsed the bill on a voice vote, setting up a debate in the House this coming week.

Education funding is a key issue. The House committee’s bill cuts aid to public schools by $48 million. With about 80 percent of school district budgets tied up in contractual obligations, districts will be hard pressed to implement the cuts as proposed. I know we have made a critical investment in Kansas school children in recent years and test scores have proven that our investment is paying off.

We have also made good efforts to protect our most vulnerable citizens. We need to continue to support the needs of our aging seniors, those with disabilities, protect social services and public safety.

This above mentioned bill only addresses the 2009 budget. We have yet to begin the process of crafting the fiscal year 2010 budget, which promises a deficit of over $1 billion. Maneuvering the budget is a complicated process that involves significant give and take. The debate is far from over. Stay tuned.

Editor’s note: Shirley Palmer is the Kansas House 4th District State Representative. Palmer can be reached at her office by mail at 4th District State Representative, Docking State Office Building, 7th Floor, Topeka, Kansas 66612, by e-mail at Shirley.Palmer@house.ks.gov, or by phone at (785) 296-7698 or call the legislative hotline at (800) 432-3924. Palmer can be reached at home by mail at 1862 Eagle Road, Fort Scott, Kansas 66701, by e-mail at rspalmer1862@sbcglobal.net, or by phone at (620) 223-4103.
Tidwell to present ‘Learning Tree’

THE FORT SCOTT TRIBUNE

Dr. John Edgar Tidwell, a professor of English at the University of Kansas and specialist of African American authors, will deliver "Gordon Parks' 'Learning Tree' Experience" at 4 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 19, in the Crimson and Gold Ballroom in Overman Student Center at Pittsburg State University. The talk will discuss Gordon Parks’ autobiographical novel “The Learning Tree,” as well as the film adaptation Parks shot on location in Fort Scott in 1968.

The presentation is free and open to the public. For more information, contact Jane Victor at (620) 235-4886.
Tidwell to speak on Parks

PITTSBURG — John Edgar Tidwell, a professor of English at the University of Kansas and specialist of African American authors, will deliver “Gordon Parks’ Learning Tree’ Experience” at 4 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 19, in the Crimson and Gold Ballroom in Overman Student Center at Pittsburg State University.

The talk will discuss Gordon Parks ’ autobiographical novel “The Learning Tree,” as well as the film adaptation Parks shot on location in Fort Scott in 1968. The lecture is in honor of African American History Month and is sponsored by the PSU Tilford Group, Friends of Axe Library, and the Kansas Humanities Council.

The presentation is free and open to the public. For more information, contact Jane Victor at (620) 235-4886.
A new Web site went online this week that allows consumers to find contact information for health care providers such as hospitals, county health departments, support groups, nursing homes and community clinics.

Go Local Kansas (www.golocalkansas.org) users can search by location, type of facility or a specific disease or condition. Information from all counties in Kansas will be available, including a comprehensive list of health services available in and around Labette County.

Services from alcohol treatment and acne treatment to women’s health and x-ray and diagnostic imaging are listed.

Gov. Kathleen Sebelius signed a proclamation declaring Jan. 29 Go Local Kansas Day and encouraged residents to visit the site “today and every day in 2009 to locate health resources in their community.”

Go Local Kansas is part of a statewide health information initiative encouraging Kansans to take charge of their health. Kansas Health Online (www.kansashealthonline.org) is a health information Web site that launched last year and is sponsored by the Kansas Health Policy Authority and developed by biomedical librarians at Dykes Library at the University of Kansas. It includes information on diseases and conditions, tools and tips to make healthy lifestyle decisions, and a guide to health policy in Kansas.
Weight seminar

The University of Kansas and Labette Community College have partnered to broadcast “Considering Obesity: KU Research on Brain, Body, Behavior Connections” beginning at 4 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 11, in the Student Union Conference Room 1 on the LCC campus. The free broadcast will feature nationally recognized experts on the brain, behavior, nutrition and weight management. A question and answer session with the panel will follow the presentation.

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Kinsley.

KU to honor local high school seniors

Students from 10 Kansas high schools will be honored Feb. 9 by the University of Kansas Alumni Association and KU Endowment at a dinner program in Belleville. The Kansas Honors Program began in 1971 and has honored more than 100,000 students. The honored scholars rank in the top 10 percent of their high school class.

During the ceremony, each student will receive an American Heritage Dictionary in hardcover and CD versions. David Johnston, director of marketing and internet services for the alumni association, will speak to the students and their parents and guests.

Students being honored include Kirsten Hermreck, Jewell High School; Kesley Anderson, Rebecca Bohling, Mollie Carlson and Breonna Lindberg, Pike Valley High School; Brian Broeckelman and Tanner Peroutek, Rock Hills High School; Shelby Broeckelman and Claire Thiessen, St. John's Catholic School.
Ban texting, not phoning on the road

In an attempt to reduce accidents on the road, the National Safety Council is pushing for a ban on cell phone use while driving. Closer to home, the University of Kansas Transportation Research Institute is attempting to determine how often cell phones and other electronic devices are involved in automobile accidents.

While we believe there is cause for concern about the destruction distracted drivers can cause, we remain unconvinced turning off cell phones will solve all the problems.

Such a ban does not do anything about drivers eating on the road while steering with their leg. Or attempting to change channels on the radio or remove and insert a CD. Or viewing the navigation system built right into the dashboard.

Could there be anything more distracting than two or more young kids bawling and screaming in the back seat? Yet there's no push to ban children from riding in automobiles. What about the driver who drops something on the floor and, in his attempt to retrieve it, temporarily disappears from view? Have you ever passed a car at night and wonder what movie they were watching in the front seat? Should we test people for day-dreaming potential and restrict driving privileges accordingly? Perhaps prohibit putting an arm around that special person in the passenger seat? Putting on makeup? Writing notes?

Looking at roadmaps? Not allow cars on the road with tires sporting less than a recommended amount of tread to avoid blowouts while moving? What about mandating driver education classes for every new driver in Kansas?

All of the preceding are common causes of accidents, some of which are fatal. The only method by which we could prevent all such distracted-driver accidents would be to ban driving. Entirely.

Yet the Safety Council and KU's researchers are focusing on cell phones.

"It's not just what you're doing with your hands -- it's that your head is in the conversation and so your eyes are not on the road," said NSC President and CEO Janet Froetscher. She likens phone use in the car to drinking while driving.

We think she's overstating the case a bit. We believe using a cell phone is no more or less distracting than any of the other possibilities listed above.

Text-messaging, on the other hand, should be prohibited by drivers. In our minds, that's no different than trying to read a book. And if legislators in Kansas or around the country choose to not let teen drivers use cell phones at all while driving, we wouldn't object.

But we believe educating drivers about all types of distractions would have much great effect than simply banning one possible diversion. Safety should be paramount -- particularly when vehicles are moving at 70 miles per hour. The National Safety Council should concentrate its efforts on an educational campaign.

--Patrick Lowry, Hays Daily News
Medical schools need our support

Wichita’s successful model of graduate medical education has helped stock the state with primary care physicians. And it’s at risk, in part because of the state budget crisis and changing accreditation standards but also because of a failure to communicate.

Wesley Medical Center and Via Christi Health System say they no longer can spend $3 million a year on the Wichita Center for Graduate Medical Education, on which they are partners with the University of Kansas School of Medicine-Wichita. In addition, the program must ramp up research and paid faculty if it’s to comply with new accreditation standards. Leaders at the nonprofit WCGME, which has a budget of $55 million largely funded by Medicare and Medicaid reimbursements, say it needs at least $9.6 million annually to sustain itself.

But Gov. Kathleen Sebelius’ proposed 2010 budget lacked the requested $2.5 million for WCGME. And unless elected officials and leaders of the medical community successfully explain and defend WCGME at the Statehouse in the coming weeks, it could be in trouble. Eventually, so could the clinics, hospitals and patients in 70 Kansas counties that have relied on the physicians the program trains. ...

Earlier this month, Sebelius expressed frustration to the Kansas Health Institute News Service at not being able to get an “objective number that I can take a look at” from both WCGME and KU of what kind of money the program needs.

The Kansas Bioscience Authority has committed $6 million to WCGME for research over three years. The Legislature’s Physician Workforce and Accreditation Task Force has also recommended that WCGME’s current-year state funding of $2.5 million be spared from cuts, and that $6.5 million in funding that otherwise would go to the bioscience authority instead be committed to WCGME next year in the name of economic development, as well as $1.4 million to offset current-year budget cuts for graduate medical education at the KU campus in Kansas City. ...

It’s important that hospital officials, physicians and community leaders in all the affected counties express support for the program at the Statehouse, so state lawmakers don’t dismiss WCGME as a local issue.

State and local leaders must ensure that it works out a new funding model so that WCGME can continue to recruit top-quality residents and faculty and plan for its future.

—The Wichita Eagle, via The Associated Press
Curley To Receive White Honor

LAWRENCE (AP) — Tom Curley, president and chief executive of The Associated Press and a leading industry voice on press freedom issues, has been named the 2009 recipient of the William Allen White Foundation's national citation.

Curley will receive the honor Feb. 6 at the University of Kansas.

Curley is considered one of the industry's fiercest defenders of press freedoms. In 2007 he was honored with the First Amendment Award by the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press for his work encouraging media organizations to fight for the public's right to know. The next year, he received the Radio and Television News Directors Foundation's First Amendment Leadership Award for his emphasis on open-records laws and First Amendment reporting.

Curley has also led the news cooperative's charge into digital delivery of news, including the creation of AP Exchange, the database that allows all Associated Press content to be searched by AP journalists and customers.

"Tom Curley represents big and appropriate repositioning at The Associated Press, which, like all of journalism, must redefine itself in this time of change," said Tom Eblen, chairman of the White Foundation.

White, whose name is on the university's School of Journalism and Mass communications, was the nationally known publisher of the Emporia Gazette until his death in 1944.

Previous honorees include Walter Cronkite, Helen Thomas, Bernard Shaw and Bob Woodward.