

Newspaper column
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Dr. John Jasinski, Northwest Missouri State University president

Our summer session is well underway and we have much in play as we think about budget and legislative issues, campus infrastructure and our intent to return to a vibrant and fully functional campus environment this fall.

As we think about the \$617.5 million in economic impact and added regional income that Northwest provides, we are quite pleased to be a destination for prospective students, families and other visitors to myriad activities on our campus this summer. In the last two weeks, for example, we've hosted more than 1,500 athletes for football camps and about 50 teams for women's basketball camps. Additionally, Tuesday was the first of 10 Summer Orientation Advisement and Registration (SOAR) sessions through July 24 for new students coming to Northwest this fall.

We are indeed focused on returning this fall to the traditional campus environment that helps our University and communities thrive. We recognize there are signs our nation and world are not yet finished with COVID-19, but we are encouraged by local trends that we may be reaching some closure. Thus, Northwest has updated its mitigation measures and now requires that only individuals who are not fully vaccinated wear a face covering on Northwest campuses. For fully vaccinated individuals, face coverings are optional.

At this time, Northwest is not requiring students and employees to have the COVID-19 vaccination, however, the University is strongly encouraging it to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. Having our community fully vaccinated limits the risk of transmission and enables our community to safely return to restaurants, athletics events, lectures, concerts and all the other activities we have to offer.

As we've done throughout the pandemic, Northwest continues to closely monitor conditions on our campuses and in surrounding communities while aligning with the guidance of the CDC, the American College Health Association, and state and local health agencies.

Our preparation for fall on the Northwest campus also includes various fences symbolizing our investment in deferred maintenance and infrastructure improvements. With the assistance of \$2.78 million in CARES Act monies, through the Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund, we are replacing roofs on Colden Hall, Garrett-Strong Science Building and Martindale Hall.

The state also has approved an increase of 3.7 percent to our core appropriations for fiscal year '22 and we expect to receive funding to assist with additional capital needs. House Bill 19 awards institutions monies for capital improvements and deferred maintenance, and Northwest is receiving about \$5 million that we are allocating to our central plant. Our central plant has served our campus well since 1905, but addressing that aging system is essential to keeping our main campus operating.

Unfortunately, with the age of our campus and through the course of our inspections, other issues creep up. So this summer, with the discovery of structural integrity issues on the roof

of the Lamkin Activity Center, we also are pursuing both temporary and long-term repairs on that facility. As a result, Bearcat Arena as well as the building's first floor lobby and second floor offices remain inaccessible until long-term repairs are complete.

Just as we've done throughout the pandemic, we are adapting. Our Department of Athletics staff has relocated across campus to the McKemy Center for Lifelong Learning, and our athletics training and strength and conditioning staffs relocated to the Carl and Cheryl Hughes Fieldhouse. This issue has residual effects across our organization and forces us to think in ways we may not have otherwise. We will figure out how to fund the necessary repairs and, using our "Bearcats together" mantra, turn this from lemons into lemonade.

As we approach the new academic year and anticipate receiving additional stimulus funding – we can't emphasize this enough – these are one-time funds with limited uses. None of this means Northwest is flush with cash for our education and general budget or our auxiliary budget. We still project a tight FY22 budget as we address changing enrollment projections, annual inflationary expenses and other needs. Any funding assists greatly, and we are very thankful to receive it.

As we conclude FY21 and take our FY22 budget to Northwest's Board of Regents next week, we remain focused on an affordable, high-quality education in both in-person and online formats, supporting our people, uplifting our infrastructure and being strategic and purposeful with a growth and change mindset.

Dr. John Jasinski is the 10th president of Northwest Missouri State University. For news and events at Northwest, visit www.nwmissouri.edu.