May 9, 2013

Springfield’s medical and business leaders applauded the news Thursday that Missouri legislators have approved $10 million in operating costs to help fund a medical school campus in Springfield.

The money, which still needs to be approved by Gov. Jay Nixon, would allow 32 students from each class at the University of Missouri to spend their final two years of medical school in Springfield observing doctors from CoxHealth and Mercy Hospital Springfield and helping to treat patients.

“It will allow us to begin the planning for the next step,” said Michele Schaefer, the senior vice president for regional operations at Mercy Springfield. “It will allow us to begin hiring for the Springfield campus.”

Steve Edwards, the president and CEO of CoxHealth, said funding still needs to be found for about $30 million for a new building at the Columbia campus to make the expansion possible. Edwards said much of that might be funded through state bonds.

“It’s a great, encouraging first step,” Edwards said.

A study that MU and local hospitals commissioned said that the economic impact of the campus statewide could be $390 million. That impact reaches its full effect after 27 years and is mostly from new doctors.

“It’s been a major priority for us for several years,” said Jim Anderson, the president of the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce. “We’ve been elated to see it get this far.”
More than 1,500 students, many of them from Missouri, apply to MU’s medical school each year. The school has the capacity to accept 96 new medical students a year. A Springfield campus would allow the school to accept 128 medical students annually.

Weldon Webb, the senior associate dean for rural health at the MU School of Medicine, said the first students in the expanded program could be admitted in August 2015 if the funding comes together.

“We don’t want to count our chickens yet,” Webb said.

Edwards said Lester E. Cox, for whom CoxHealth is named, foresaw that Columbia wouldn’t be large enough to support a larger medical school.

“It’s a nice piece of symmetry that even 60 years ago someone would foresee they needed to grow and that the place they would grow would be southwest Missouri,” Edwards said.
JEFFERSON CITY — The University of Missouri will receive millions in funding for a Springfield clinic for medical students, under the state budget passed Thursday by the General Assembly.

The budget provides $10 million to the University of Missouri to increase the medical student class size and create a Springfield clinic campus with Mercy Hospital and CoxHealth.

The additional funding was not added by the House but was added by the Senate. During a conference committee earlier this week, negotiators agreed to the Senate position after a letter signed by Rep. Eric Burlison, R-Springfield, and other legislators urged Rep. Rick Stream, the House Budget Chairman, to adopt the Senate position.

Plans for the expansion have already been in the works. In October, officials from MU, Mercy and Cox said they hoped an increase in cigarette taxes would fund the expansion, but the tax increase was rejected by voters in November.

Jon Swope, CEO of Mercy Springfield, and Steve Edwards, CEO of CoxHealth, have both said previously the expansion would allow the hospital systems to address the challenge of recruitment.

Both said that recruiting physicians to the Springfield area can be tough, but added that it helps when recruits see the city first-hand.
“If we don’t do anything different, by 2025, the primary care physician today who sees 1,500 patients would have to see 10,000 patients to accommodate all those who will need care,” Swope told the News-Leader in October.

The funding also includes $1.325 million to Missouri State University for an occupational therapy program.
Lawmakers debate details of budget bills

'Circuit breaker' remains issue.

By Rudi Keller

JEFFERSON CITY — The House budget debate began Thursday with a fight over how money from repeal of a tax credit for seniors and the disabled was being used.

Under the $24.8 billion spending plan that must be finished by tomorrow, lawmakers are using $56 million gained from repealing the so-called circuit breaker tax credit to pay for public schools and health care for the poor and blind. An attempt to send the budget back for negotiations because of how the money is being used was rejected.

Many lawmakers said they disliked the choices being offered them.

"I don't like it when it becomes this prisoner's dilemma — who do you hate more, seniors or kids? Or seniors and blind people?" said Rep. Jeff Roorda, D-Barnhart.

The House had completed final votes on three of the 16 bills making up next year's operating and capital improvements. On the third, which funds higher education, a new $10 million University of Missouri program to train new doctors at hospitals in Springfield was criticized as a late addition that went around normal budget procedures. "I expressed my displeasure in a number of ways with the university system on this," said House Budget Committee Chairman Rick Stream, R-Kirkwood.

Overall, the spending plan provides a $395 million base appropriation for the UM System and just less than half of a $25 million pool distributed through a performance funding program. The higher education budget also includes a $400,000 boost to the State Historical Society of Missouri, taking its appropriation to $1.7 million.

The circuit breaker tax credit provides as much as $750 to 105,000 senior citizens or the disabled who rent their homes and have an income less than $27,500. Gov. Jay Nixon supported repeal in January with his budget plan and set the money aside in a new "Senior Services Protection Fund" to support programs heavily used by seniors. Later, when it appeared that a comprehensive tax credit reform package was stalled, Nixon backed off from that support.
That left budget writers in the position of cutting $56 million or leaving the money in the budget. They chose the latter but changed where it was being spent, Stream said. "We had basically two choices — find $56 million to cut out of the budget or use the Senior Citizens Protection Fund to fund items we thought the governor would not veto," Stream said.

The choices they made have little to do with senior citizens. The funds from repealing the circuit breaker tax credit would be used in four areas of the budget:

P$10.1 million to be spent through the school Foundation Formula for early childhood special education.

P$20.2 million for the First Steps program.

P$3.3 million for community health centers known as Federally Qualified Health Centers.

P$21.5 million for the program providing health care for the blind.

"I think at this point in time, we are to the point where we can't back away from this without causing great disruption to the budget process," Stream said.

Before the budget came up today, the House voted overwhelmingly in favor of a $1.2 billion bond issue. The absence of Rep. Chris Kelly, D-Columbia, loomed large in the debate. Kelly, who has pushed for a bond issue each year since 2009, had a heart attack earlier this week and was resting after the insertion of a stent yesterday.

House Speaker Tim Jones, R-Eureka, said Kelly’s persistence won him over. "He has convinced me and so many others that it is time to be good stewards of our taxpayer dollars," Jones said.

The bond issued passed 136-23 and now moves to the Senate. It would allocate $600 million to colleges and universities, $200 million for mental health facilities, $100 million for the Capitol Building and $40 million for state parks. The remainder would go into a fund for state buildings and infrastructure and could be used for projects as varied as a water impoundment in northwest Missouri or a building for the State Historical Society of Missouri in Columbia.

Jones called Kelly a “conscience” for himself and the House. "Even though you are annoying, we all miss you," he said just before the vote.
Missouri lawmakers finished work on the bills that encompass the state's budget, sending the 2014 fiscal year plan to Gov. Jay Nixon a day before a mandated deadline.

But the bills passed by the legislature include several provisions that have raised the governor's ire, including partial funding of the Department of Revenue's Division of Motor Vehicles.

The proposed $24.8 billion budget includes $8.28 billion in general revenue, or funding that isn't directed toward specific purposes. That's an increase over the roughly $8.01 billion appropriated for fiscal 2013.

Some highlights, according to House Budget Chairman Rick Stream, R-Kirkwood, include:

- Roughly $66 million increase for the state's foundation formula funding public schools.
- $2.4 million increase for Bright Flight scholarships.
- An across-the-board pay increase for state employees.
- $4.2 million for the state's arts council.
- $1 million for tourism funding.
- $10 million to expand the University of Missouri-Columbia medical school in cooperation with CoxHealth in Springfield.

"We had a great process with the appropriations committees," Stream said. "They basically took my charge, which was to find lines that could be reduced or eliminated, work with the departments to see where we could provide more services to the people of the state. And they did good job of that. My discussions with the Senate chairman and his staff were excellent. We had some disagreements, no question about it. But I can't think of anything that was that difficult. It's a long, gut-wrenching process."
Added Senate President Pro Tem Tom Dempsey, R-St. Charles: "It's been a long slog dealing with the significant budget shortfalls over the past several years. Our prudent budgeting has allowed, in part, for these opportunities in new investments and our top priorities in education."

The budget process was slowed down considerably on Thursday in the Senate because of provisions that appeared to make the governor choose between a program to help low-income elderly renters, and early childhood and health-care programs.

The final budget, in effect, eliminates a tax credit for low-income elderly and disabled people who rent their homes, which is part of a "circuit breaker" tax credit. The credit to renters has cost the state about $55 million annually in lost revenue.

The budget reallocates the $55 million into a new "Missouri Senior Services Protection Fund," but then uses some money for the existing First Steps program for early childhood education for children with developmental disabilities, with the rest to be directed to clinics that treat poor people and to a program providing health care to the blind.

Earlier Thursday, before the House vote, Nixon issued a statement objecting to the plan, saying it was pitting the elderly against disabled children. The governor said such a move was unnecessary and noted that the House had just last week earmarked $38 million in the new budget to purchase a building near the Capitol and to use it as offices for legislative and state workers now working in the Capitol.

Nixon had supported changing the circuit breaker program earlier this year. But the governor announced in April that he wouldn't support changing the "circuit breaker" tax credit without broader changes to tax credit programs.

The way the budget was crafted was aimed at forcing the governor either to sign legislation to eliminate the circuit breaker for elderly renters, or risk not funding the early childhood and health-care programs.

That prompted some senators -- including state Sen. Ryan Silvey, R-Clay County, and several Democratic members of the chamber -- to filibuster the budget until that arrangement was changed.

The House ended up sending the bill changing the circuit breaker program, known as HB350, to Nixon by a vote of 91-69.

House Budget Chairman Rick Stream and Senate President Pro Tem Tom Dempsey talk about the circuit breaker conflict.

Dempsey told reporters that, if Nixon vetoes HB 350, the Senate has an alternative plan to set up the Senior Services Protection Fund as an amendment on a different bill, and then allocate money from the fund for First Steps.
"In my discussions with Sen. Silvey and the budget director, there's a couple of bills next week where, to allay anyone's concerns that we have any interest in cutting First Steps, we provide some statutory language to create a Senior Protection Fund and that there be a general revenue transfer into that fund," Dempsey said.

Asked about that Senate plan, Stream said he's "not aware of any deal or any type of arrangement like that whatsoever."

"We passed our budget the way we planned to pass it," Stream said, referring to the House. "Everything went as we planned it. We had a good, healthy debate on all of those issues, how we put the money into the Senior Services Protection fund. In the Senate, I know that they had some debate over there and a filibuster. But they passed all the budget bills, too."

House Majority Leader John Diehl, R-Town and Country, said the "House and the Senate have done their job to pass the funding sources that the governor used to build his budget."

"I'm perfectly comfortable with the way we've passed our budget," Diehl said. "It's the governor who created this problem."

But several Missouri groups who advocate for the elderly and the disabled are blasting the General Assembly for linking aid to the elderly and the disabled to assistance for disabled children, and then trying to force the governor to choose which group gets the aid.

In a joint statement, the Missouri chapter of AARP, Paraquad Inc. and the Missouri Budget Project contended, "The Missouri House's vote tonight to raise taxes on nearly 105,000 vulnerable Missouri seniors and people with disabilities by eliminating a modest tax credit that is critical to keeping them in their homes is not only unnecessary, but cruel."

The groups noted that the state government expects to end this fiscal year with a surplus. "It really adds insult to injury when there is money available to fund both" the circuit-breaker tax credit and First Steps, said Amy Blouin, executive director of the Missouri Budget Project.
Missouri spending plan creates choices between seniors, children

JEFFERSON CITY — Missouri lawmakers passed a nearly $25 billion budget Thursday that could force Gov. Jay Nixon to choose between funding for developmentally disabled children and low-income seniors.

The spending plan for the next fiscal year won final approval in a cloud of controversy after House and Senate budget negotiators made a last-moment switch in the funding source for several politically popular programs. Their acknowledged intent was to pressure Nixon into signing a separate bill that eliminates a tax-credit for low-income home renters — something the governor originally proposed but upon which he has since parsed his position.

Nixon did not take too kindly to the maneuvering. He issued a written statement Thursday calling the budget plan “a cynical attempt to pit children with developmental disabilities … against low-income seniors.”

The governor can wait until the budget's July 1 effective date to decide whether to sign or veto the dozen-plus budget bills. He also can veto any of specific expenditure lines contained in them.

The budget would increase Missouri’s total spending authority by more than 3 percent compared to the current year. It adds $66 million to the $3 billion core budget for public elementary and secondary schools, and it gives public colleges and universities a $25 million increase to be distributed based on whether they meet performance criteria such as student retention and graduation rates. State employees also would get a small raise.

House Majority Leader John Diehl, R-Town and Country, declared it a “responsible and accountable budget to the taxpayers.”

When Nixon outlined a budget plan in January, he assumed almost $57 million of savings from the recommended repeal of a tax break for more than 100,000 low-income seniors and disabled residents who live in rental housing. Nixon proposed to redirect that money to mental health care, nursing homes and home-based health and living services that could benefit the disabled and seniors.

But last month, Nixon said he would veto the tax break repeal for low-income renters if it wasn’t part of a “broad-based and balanced” overhaul of Missouri’s many tax credit programs that have put a financial strain on the budget.
The House gave final approval Thursday to a bill repealing the tax break for seniors and disabled renters, but separate legislation that would revamp Missouri's other tax credit programs still faces hurdles before the legislative session ends May 17.

Because of the uncertainty, legislative budget writers made a last-moment switch this week that would use money from the repealed tax break to help fund early childhood special education, the First Steps program that serves developmentally disabled preschoolers, health care for the blind and medical clinics that serve low-income residents. The intent was to pressure Nixon into signing the tax-break repeal for seniors and the disabled, even if the broader tax-credit overhaul fails.

"He's going to have to make a decision when we present the bills to him. Does he want to help the kids with special needs or not?" said House Budget Committee Chairman Rick Stream, R-Kirkwood. He added: "I do think we've got a lot of leverage."

But not all lawmakers were pleased with that leverage.

Several senators stalled a final vote on the budget for a few hours Thursday. Among other things, they raised a technical point that neither the House nor Senate had made the children's programs dependent upon the tax-break repeal when passing prior drafts of the budget, so a conference committee of House and Senate members should not have been able to make that switch when preparing a final version.

Opponents said the budget could jeopardize the First Steps program, which the state education department says serves more than 5,000 children.

"We are putting these kids on the line for something that everybody in the room knows is not likely to happen," said Sen. Ryan Silvey, R-Kansas City, a former House budget chairman.

Silvey dropped his opposition when Senate leaders pledged to craft a solution next week that would ensure the children's programs get funded. But Stream later told reporters that he was unaware of any deal for a post-passage budget patch.

Nixon called the contingent funding for children's services "especially problematic and irresponsible" given that lawmakers also passed a construction and maintenance budget Thursday that includes $38 million for a new office building in Jefferson City.

"Building new offices for bureaucrats at the expense of children with developmental disabilities and low-income seniors reflects the wrong priorities," Nixon said.

The governor also has criticized another budget maneuver, which attempts to provide just eight months of funding for the vehicle licensing division of the Department of Revenue. Republican budget leaders have said they will provide the rest of the money next January if the agency stops making electronic copies of license applicants' personal documents such as birth certificates. Nixon has said he would treat the budget literally, as a one-third reduction in the agency's annual allotment, and would lay off employees and cut services accordingly.
Jefferson City — The Missouri Senate has approved legislation raising the attendance requirements for students eligible for state-sponsored college scholarships.

Under the legislation, students would have to be continuously enrolled for a certain number of credit hours per semester to continue receiving state aid. It would affect recipients of Bright Flight, Access Missouri and A+ scholarships.

Sponsoring Republican Sen. David Pearce, of Warrensburg, said the requirements will provide an incentive for students to finish their degrees on time.

The bill passed the Senate 31-0 Thursday and heads now to the House. Lawmakers adjourn May 17.
To the naked eye, Laurence Bowers looked fine. The Missouri basketball team was sputtering, dropping two out of three conference games after Bowers suffered a sprained MCL in the team’s Jan. 8 contest against Alabama.

"The coaches wanted him back, like, yesterday," James Stannard, the surgeon who repaired Bowers’ torn ACL a year earlier, said.

Stannard observed Bowers complete a variety of physical tasks, and the Tigers’ forward looked alright. But when Bowers was tested in a room fitted with infrared censors, Stannard saw that Bowers wasn’t jumping right. His body wasn’t properly using muscles around his knee — something the human eye couldn’t see, Stannard said.

Dynamic Athletics Research Institute developed the system that halted Bowers’ premature return. Its developers call it DARI. The Missouri Orthopaedic Institute at University Hospital is the only facility in this hemisphere to use the technology. (An Australian rules football team, Carlton Football Club, based in Melbourne, also uses the DARI system.)

The Institute held an open house Thursday night to show off their new system, beginning with presentations from Stannard and Brett Hayes, director of therapy. Then Patrick Moodie, one of DARI’s founders, demonstrated the technology. Using 14 infrared cameras surrounding a reflective floor and three reflective walls, a man’s movements — he stood straight and extended both arms outward — were tracked and angular movements assessed.

"It’s XBOX Kinect on steroids," Moodie said.

Results are sent to the DARI headquarters in Overland Park, Kan., where they’re interpreted and sent back to the physical therapists at the Missouri Orthopaedic Institute. The data exchange, Moodie said, takes about 10 minutes.
Stannard said that the technology gave the Missouri Orthopaedic Institute the ability to better understand how to change therapy movements to make them safer and more efficient.

Roughly 19 percent of all track and field medalists in the 2012 Summer Olympics in London hailed from SEC schools, according to a news release from the conference.

"With that high level of play, we must bring a high level of care," Stannard said.

The long-term plans for the technology aren't concrete, although he said the Institute has ambitious goals. It wants to apply the system to MU athletes by storing a "normal," or baseline, for all athletes. In this scenario, the injured athletes couldn't return until they reached their baseline results. Then, Stannard wants to compare the data of injured athletes to be able to better assess "return-to-play" criteria.

MU football's Henry Josey was a prime example for how the technology could have been used to facilitate treatment, Stannard said.

"There's nothing in the books about that combination of injuries," he said, referring to Josey's devastating knee injury in 2011 that forced him to redshirt in 2012. "I wish we had a 'normal' for Josey. We maybe could have gone faster (in his rehab)."

Hayes said that the technology will be able to help therapists better assess injuries and develop a more comprehensive rehab plan. He said that all therapists at the Missouri Orthopaedic Institute are qualified to use the system, and that the technology extends to care for almost all patients — about 80 percent of all of the group's patients go through DARI testing.

Quality of care improves, Hayes said, because the system takes the human element of judgement out of rehabbing.

"To get true, objective information is very difficult with human observations," he said. "With this technology, we can get real, computer-driven data. The possibilities are endless."
Missouri Psychiatric Center completes renovations with youth area

Renovation adds beds, 'cheerful' environment.

By Jodie Jackson Jr.

Local mental health treatment options got a boost Thursday with the opening of a $1.9 million renovated youth unit at the Missouri Psychiatric Center.

The new unit represented the completion of a $13.8 million renovation plan that began shortly after the Mid-Missouri Mental Health Center was transferred by legislative action from the Department of Mental Health to University of Missouri Health Care on July 1, 2009. Missouri Psychiatric Center is on the University Hospital campus.

The nearly 7,800-square-foot inpatient unit on the psychiatric center's third floor will offer inpatient treatment for patients ages 5 to 18. Laine Young-Walker, director of the Division of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at the psychiatric center, described the renovated facility as a "cheerful, kid-friendly, healing environment" that features natural light, wider hallways and kid-specific amenities, including a Wii game system.

The new unit has 17 beds — three more than the old child and adolescent area on the first floor. The existing 14-bed unit had a count of 12 patients yesterday. Two adult units at the psychiatric center provide another 45 beds.

"At a time when mental health services are being cut nationwide, we're proud to be expanding care in Central Missouri," said John Laurielio, medical director of the psychiatric center and Chancellor's Chair of Excellence in Psychiatry at the MU School of Medicine.

Young-Walker said 1 in 10 American children has a serious mental health condition.

"Because this is the only inpatient psychiatric facility for children within a 90-mile radius of Columbia, every bed in this new unit is vitally important," she said.

Young-Walker said the center's assessment unit is seeing record numbers of youths and adults each month. It hasn't been uncommon for the youth beds to be full, causing staff to direct parents and caretakers to hospitals in Kansas City or St. Louis.
"We could probably build a 50-bed psychiatric unit and fill it," she said.

The average stay for child and adolescent patients is five to seven days. Young-Walker said the hospital is set up as an acute care facility that deals with crisis situations rather than long-term care.

The Missouri Youth Psychiatric Services unit has an adolescent section with 11 beds and a pre-adolescent section with six beds. Quiet rooms, a visitation room for parents, and larger treatment and medication rooms are other features of the new unit. The rooms and bathrooms also have ligature-proof fixtures.

Many of the design features were the result of input from staff, said Marla Smith, director of clinical operations. "Nursing had great input in that," said Smith, who was director of the former Mid-Mo Mental Health Center. She recalled when the facility had dormitory-style, four-bed rooms. Those rooms are now semi-private with two beds. The Mid-Mo facility had heavy screens over windows, making rooms darker.

MU Health renovated roughly 50,000 square feet of the 99,550-square-foot facility. State funds accounted for all but $800,000 of the $13.8 million project.
Food stamps, not crop subsidies, highest hurdle for farm bill

By Charles Abbott | Reuters – 14 hrs ago

By Charles Abbott

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Lawmakers are preparing for a second run at writing the new U.S. farm law that ended in a stalemate in 2012, and the biggest obstacle is not likely to be soil conservation or crop subsidies, but the billions spent mostly in cities and towns.

Analysts say food stamps for the poor, the biggest Agriculture Department program at an estimated $79 billion this year, is the make-or-break issue. Republicans are demanding far larger cuts than Democrats will entertain, and the debate is becoming increasingly partisan.

Enrollment in the program has doubled in a decade and costs have tripled. Critics say spending is out of control when only the neediest should get aid. Defenders say the weak economy is the culprit - enrollment is highest during economic turmoil - and that food stamps are targeted to avoid cuts in farm subsidies.

Food stamps "is the key to getting a final farm bill done. Not that there won't be plenty of other fights," said Pat Westhoff, director of the Food and Agricultural Policy Research Institute (FAPRI), a think tank at the University of Missouri.

"It seems like there is going to be some trimming and a battle between the House (of Representatives) and Senate over how much," said analyst Mark McMinimy of Guggenheim Securities. "I think a lot of heat is going to be around nutrition assistance."

The Senate Agriculture Committee is scheduled to start drafting its bill on Tuesday, with its House panel likely to follow on Wednesday. "On food stamps, they're going to be 10 miles apart," said a farm lobbyist.

Democrat Debbie Stabenow of Michigan, who chairs the Senate Agriculture Committee, is aiming for $4 billion in food stamp cuts over 10 years.
That is a far cry from the $20 billion in savings targeted by Oklahoma Republican Frank Lucas, the House Agriculture chairman, up $4 billion from the proposal in last year's bill, which House Republican leaders never put to a floor vote.

Republicans such as Senators Pat Roberts of Kansas and John Thune of South Dakota, and Representatives Marlin Stutzman of Indiana and Randy Neugebauer of Texas, would cut food stamps much more deeply, by some $36 billion over a decade.

While Stabenow says closing loopholes can generate substantial savings, the Republican faction would restrict eligibility broadly.

Between 2 million and 4 million people could be cut from the program under the Republicans' cuts, says an anti-hunger expert. That would be as much as 8 percent of the current enrollment.

Those receiving food stamps - formally known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP - was a record 47.8 million at the end of 2012, up from 46.5 million a year earlier.

Agriculture Committee leaders from both chambers commonly say farm policy is not a partisan issue.

Historically, disputes have split along regional lines that pit cotton and rice growers from the South against corn and soybean farmers of the Midwest. Republicans and Democrats cooperate based more on geography than party affiliation.

On food stamps, party identification increasingly appears paramount, however.

While Senate Agriculture Committee members Roberts and Thune, from the socially conservative Great Plains, want to cut food stamps, another committee member, Democrat Kirsten Gillibrand of New York, circulated a letter opposing any cuts in food stamps. It was signed by 32 Democratic senators.

In the House, Massachusetts Democrat Jim McGovern has sponsored a resolution opposing against food stamp cuts. As of Wednesday, it had 115 sponsors, all Democrats.

The farm bill died in the House at the end of 2012 in an election-year deadlock over food stamps. The Democratic-led Senate passed its version over the summer.

Small-farm activist Ferd Hoefner, policy director at the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, said the quarrel over SNAP could rupture a long-standing partnership of rural and urban lawmakers who supported farm programs on the one hand, and public nutrition programs on the other.

"Is this the end of the farm bill coalition?" Hoefner said.

(Reporting By Charles Abbott; editing by Ros Krasny and Gunna Dickson)
Is chivalry dead? It doesn’t have to be! That is, according to an adorable ten-year-old boy who knows how to be a gentleman -- and is spreading his message of kindness at the University of Missouri.

"I may be a kid, but I'm a gentleman in the making," says Cole, age ten, in a video titled "The Extra Mile," which has now gotten more than 250,000 views. "Now I'm not gonna sugarcoat it. I know how to treat a lady."

Who is Cole? And why is he giving flowers (and joy) to random women on Mizzou's campus?

Check out the video below and our interview with one of the Mizzou students behind it.

The "Extra Mile" is a class project of Clint Cannon, a sophomore, Dan Woodward, a junior and Nam Cu, a senior. The three are communications majors and made the video for a survey of communications class.
"The message of this video was just to bring back chivalry to the college dating scene," Cannon tells Daily RFT. "Once we had people’s attention, we thought, why not just be nice to everyone while you’re at it?"

That's why they had Cole -- who they contacted through a talent agency -- give out flowers to strangers on campus. The video was shot over the last month at Mizzou and posted last Friday.

"The prompt was to make a persuasive video," Cannon explains.

The three of them wrote the script together and then Cannon and Woodward shot and produced it, he says.

They were inspired by the "Kid President" viral videos, in which a cute kid makes videos pretending to be the president.

"We saw that using a little kid to send out a serious message... was effective," Cannon says, adding that they thought a young boy could explain chivalry quite well.

So they partnered up with Cole, who lives just outside of Columbia, and put together the video, featuring the boy on campus.

"That made my day!" one student shouts back at Cole in the video after he gives her a flower.

"We were hoping for it to go viral in the Mizzou community," says Cannon, noting that it’s now getting attention beyond campus as well. "We are just letting it go where it goes."

After all, it's ultimately a message of kindness.

"Don't just be a nice date," Cole says in the video. "Be a nice guy."