



# MEDIA RELEASE

OFFICE OF COUNTY MAYOR GLENN JACOBS

400 Main Street, Suite 615, Knoxville, TN 37902

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact: Rob Link Abbey Harris  
(865) 215-4750 office (865) 215-4579 office  
(865) 320-2108 cell (865) 705-1681 cell

## Mayor Jacobs Presents FY2019-2020 Budget Proposal

*KNOXVILLE, Tenn.*—Knox County Mayor Glenn Jacobs today presented his Fiscal Year 2019-2020 Knox County Budget proposal to the Knox County Commission, before beginning a series of public meetings throughout the county to print his plan directly to the taxpayers.

During his budget presentation, Mayor Jacobs made the following remarks:

Thank you all for being here.

A special thanks to Central High School and principal Michael Reynolds for graciously hosting us today, to Central High School's Navy Jr. ROTC for presenting colors, to the CHS Choir for that great rendition of our National Anthem, and to Central High School Student Government Association President Lauren Turrentine for that wonderful introduction.

I am thrilled to hear all the amazing things happening here that Ms. Turrentine just shared. The students and staff at Central, at all of our schools, work incredibly hard and it really shows.

As a reminder, Central students are still in class and continuing with their school day while we are here. To keep the disruption minimal, I ask that you please exit as quickly as you are able when the budget presentation is complete. I know school administration would greatly appreciate your cooperation.

Thanks also to Christ Covenant PCA Pastor and Chair of the Knox County Church Network Seth Hammond for his profound words this morning.

I'd like to first recognize Knox County Commission Chair Hugh Nystrom and Vice Chair Michele Carringer along with Commissioners Evelyn Gill, Randy Smith, John Schoonmaker, Brad Anders, Charles Busler, Richie Beeler, Carson Daley, Larsen Jay and Justin Biggs; and also any other elected officials here with us today.

That's a long list! If anyone I failed to recognize would please stand. Thank you all for your dedicated service to Knox County.

The most important group that we should recognize is you--the residents and taxpayers of Knox County.

We all know that Knox County is a great place to live, work and to raise a family. During my campaign, I identified seven key issues that will help us become even better:

- A commitment to keeping taxes low
- Continuing to attract new jobs to our area

- A renewed focus on the quality of education
- Infrastructure
- Working to create safer communities
- Full transparency, and
- A fresh outlook on limited government.

These issues are all important and interrelated, but the number one priority of my administration is economic development. Which is a fancy way of saying that we must maintain and enhance an environment which is attractive to the private sector and conducive to providing good jobs for the people of Knox County.

Today, I'm going to present a brief progress report on these seven issues and provide a forecast of how this year's budget will address them.

As I have said many times, I am committed to keeping taxes low. Governments do not "ask" their citizens to pay taxes. They demand their citizens pay taxes. And the people actually have very little say in how that money is spent. Unlike the private sector, government doesn't specialize in competition and consumer choice. So, I believe that we have a moral imperative to keep taxes as low as we can, to spend that money effectively and in a way that, hopefully, benefits as many people as possible.

At the same time, I realize that to provide the services expected of us, we must be realistic when looking at tax rates, revenue and spending. Fortunately, with a growing tax base and a vibrant economy, Knox County is in a good financial place. I am proud to propose a budget which is fiscally responsible, meets the needs of the County both now and in the future and DOES NOT include a tax increase.

Overall, this year's budget has grown by \$34,079,243, a 4.16% increase over last year. Most of that increase is due to pay raises, which I will outline a bit more later. We are in the process of implementing a voluntary workforce reduction program for eligible employees in hopes of lowering our overall personnel costs going forward.

We have been able to make some smart cuts that will not impact the essential services government provides. Specifically, I want to recognize our Parks & Recreation and Information Technology departments for the great work in streamlining their budgets.

Knox County has been fortunate to experience an expanding tax base and organic revenue growth, but if we want to keep taxes low, as I know all of us do, it is vital that we continue to be an attractive place to do business. Not only does this benefit the county's bottom line, but the single most important thing we can do for our citizens and our children is ensure economic opportunity.

With record low unemployment across the state, our challenge is not only retaining and attracting new jobs, but ensuring these jobs are high-quality, high-paying ones. The key to success is our region's unique assets, specifically in the high-tech and research and development sectors of the economy. I look forward to working with new leadership at the Knoxville Chamber, the University of Tennessee and TVA as well as with the proven leadership at the Farragut-West Knox Chamber of Commerce, the Oak Ridge National Laboratory and our regional governments and partners to promote Knox County and East Tennessee as a force in the global economy.

In addition, we must work to better align our education system and the private sector to promote the trades and Career and Technical Education pathways to make sure that our workforce has the tools to take advantage of the tremendous opportunities currently available in the skilled trades.

Our goal should be to make Knox County the workforce development center for East Tennessee.

You see, we can talk about jobs all day, but if we don't have the people to fill those jobs, nothing will materialize. An excellent workforce pipeline is key to any area's economic success and the key to an excellent workforce pipeline is excellent schools.

Knox County Schools are home to incredible faculty, staff and students. This year, we are proposing a \$22,122,000 increase to the General Purpose School fund. This increase includes enough funding to make a significant investment in our teachers. I am extremely pleased that our proposed budget provides enough funding for a 3.5% raise for certified teachers and classified employees at Knox County Schools.

With this proposal, Knox County taxpayers are providing our schools with the largest year-over-year increase in our county's history. Unfortunately, the State's antiquated funding formula the Basic Education Program, or BEP, is still an impediment to overall school funding. Under the BEP, Knox County subsidizes other counties around the state to the tune of tens of millions of dollars. That isn't right. Certainly, we want to be good neighbors, but my responsibility is to Knox County first and I will do everything in my power to make sure Knox County is treated fairly.

I am committed to working with Governor Lee and our delegation to overhaul the BEP and ensure Knox County Schools receive the state funding they are due.

In this budget, we are also addressing some school capital needs which have been deferred for too long. We are happy to be able to fund building expansions at Sterchi and Brickey-McCloud elementary schools and set aside funds to acquire property for a new elementary school in northwest Knox County. We are also proposing funding for a new building at Adrian Burnett and a new elementary school in the Lonsdale community. This budget calls for an \$800,000 contribution from the Knox County General Fund as an initial down payment for the Lonsdale school. I look forward to working with Superintendent Thomas and the Board of Education to provide additional funding for this project in the coming years.

The most important investment we can make when it comes to education is, of course, our students. Across the nation, we face a crisis in early childhood literacy. Reading on grade level in the third grade is a benchmark for success both in school and in life. In third grade, students are no longer just learning to read, they are reading to learn. Across Tennessee, only about a third of all third grade students read on grade level. In Knox County, we are doing something about it.

Superintendent Thomas and other Knox County Schools leaders recently approached my office with an exciting new literacy program. This budget provides \$750,000 for elements that include, among other things, providing focused literacy training to all first and second year Pre-K to fifth grade teachers through the Year-long Reading Course, best reading practices demonstration classrooms, stipends for librarians to provide additional access to school libraries, promoting Knox County Public Library cards and building a systematic way to communicate information about our Read City USA initiative.

I hope many of you are already aware of the Read City USA initiative my office recently launched. The goal of this initiative is to get Knox Countians excited about reading, and specifically to improve outcomes for children five years old and younger and in our most vulnerable populations. We want Knox County to become known as the best-read community in the country: to make Knox County Read City USA. You can do your part by going to [ReadCityUSA.com](http://ReadCityUSA.com) and taking one of the pledges to promote literacy. And, be on the lookout for some big news concerning Read City USA coming very soon.

Switching to infrastructure, this year, we are increasing our road paving budget by one million dollars, a 25% increase over last year. With the rising cost of asphalt, we must figure out ways to make our money go as far as it can. Jim Snowden, head of Engineering and Public Works, is in the process of obtaining a Pavement Management System that will evaluate all 2,200 miles of

Knox County roadways to objectively determine their condition on a continual basis. This will allow Engineering & Public Works to make better decisions about overall road maintenance and upkeep, thereby saving us money and extending the life of our roads.

One of the most important investments our community can make is in public safety. Of course, the Knox County Sheriff's Office is the front line for us in this area. They're fighting the substance misuse epidemic, human trafficking and a host of other issues. These people put their lives on the line every day to protect our community. I appreciate them, as I know does everyone else in this room. My office has worked with Sheriff Tom Spangler to provide his officers with an approximately 6% pay increase in fiscal year 2020. I believe this is long overdue.

Battling the substance misuse epidemic is a priority of my administration. Last fall, City Mayor Madeline Rogero and I hosted a Mayor's Summit to bring together government officials, non-profit organizations and members of the private sector to have a frank discussion about this issue, identify gaps in services and begin formulating a master plan as to how our community can and should respond.

We have made a lot of progress. The Knox County Health Department has created a substance misuse response coordinator position in support of All4Knox, a joint City and County effort to address the substance misuse epidemic. The Metro Drug Coalition continues its frontline work and the faith-based community has stepped up and is engaged. Could those pastors who have been working with us on this effort through the Knox County Church Network please stand so we can recognize you?

Folks, I have said again and again, this is an issue the government cannot solve alone. It will take all of us, the entire community. I am extremely thankful that so many good people are answering the call.

Governments are in the trust business. Without public confidence, a government cannot operate effectively to meet the public needs. So, I believe it is imperative to maintain open, honest communication between government and its citizens.

Since taking office, there are several ways I have worked to be accessible to the community and open about what my office is doing every day.

Every week, I host a community lunch at a local restaurant. We have dubbed these, "Eat 'n Greets." We aim to visit establishments in every corner of the county. To date, we have visited 23 locations and have had a lot of great meals, lots of double cheeseburgers and fries in my case. Anyone can stop by to say hello. A number of times, folks have brought important issues to my attention at these lunches.

Today, I'll be hosting an Eat and Greet at Pero's of Powell, close to I-75 and Emory Road. I'll be there at 11:30 a.m. Please join me if you are able!

I also host constituent meetings once a month, usually at a library or senior center. At these, I talk with folks one-on-one about whatever they want. It's a great way for my constituent services team, folks from the community, and me to problem solve real time and face-to-face.

Every Friday I deliver a "weekly update" to discuss what my office is working on, where we've been that week and what's planned for the upcoming week. We share that video on Facebook, Twitter and the Knox County government website.

I put a lot of emphasis on social media not just because it's the "in thing." Social media helps the community stay abreast of what's happening in local government and provides them another avenue to communicate with me about it.

Finally, I committed to a fresh outlook on limited government.

As we can clearly see with the substance misuse epidemic, government may not always have the answer, but we can certainly help facilitate the conversation. I think that is one of the most important roles of the mayor's office. Like any community, there are a lot of issues that we need to address, but government can't do it alone, nor should we try. It takes the entire community.

Yesterday, I stopped at a Weigel's down the road from here. As I was walking past their stockroom, I noticed a man sitting on the floor. Obviously, he didn't belong there. He was probably homeless. When I said to the cashier, "You do know there is a dude hanging out in your stockroom, right?" She said, "Oh, yeah, we just gave him breakfast and are letting him rest. He comes by about every day and we try to look after him." That's our community. The simple acts of kindness, compassion and brotherly love that we rarely hear about, but happen every day. We don't need government micromanaging our lives and telling us we should do this or that because politicians think it's the right thing. We already know what the right thing is, and, given the opportunity, we do it.

I am committed to working with the private sector, the faith-based community and our local non-profit organizations to collaborate on all the challenges that we currently face, and other challenges that will inevitably come up. Together, all of us can make this wonderful place we call home even better.

And we can make it even better.

This past Saturday, I was bestowed with a profound honor. Our local Veterans of Foreign Wars, Post 1733, is building a Veterans Memorial Wall at their location on 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue. They asked me to lay the first brick in honor of my dad, a 21-year military veteran himself. Like so many other vets, my dad isn't famous or written about in history books. He was a master sergeant, not a general. In the overall scheme of things, he just isn't that important. But, as I asked the crowd that day, "Where would we be without dad and so many people like him?"

Throughout our history, people like my father have believed that the ideals upon which this country rests are so important that they were willing to put themselves in harm's way to preserve them. Freedom, liberty, the American Dream, these are not just clichés. They have real world implications.

Like all of you, I am a product of the American Dream. All human beings have dreams and aspirations and inspirations, but America is one of the few places where anyone can make those dreams, aspirations and inspirations reality.

We ask children, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" A doctor, a teacher, a firefighter, an artist, a policeman, a scientist, a minister, a parent. In America, if you have the talent, you can do it. As for me, I always wanted to be a professional athlete ever since I was a little kid.

Growing up in rural northeast Missouri, I wanted to play baseball for the St. Louis Cardinals. There was just one problem: I was a terrible baseball player. I was much better at basketball. Then I found I was really good at football. Good enough that it looked like an NFL career was in the cards. A serious knee injury dashed those hopes. I signed with the Chicago Bears, but was released after one day because of my knee. It was devastating. The biggest disappointment of my life. But even though I had failed and failed and failed, I kept trying. I kept discovering opportunities. I created my own opportunities; and I finally found success in, of all things, professional wrestling.

As I look out here today, I see many folks whom I respect. Folks who have achieved tremendous things in their personal and professional lives. All your stories are unique, but they share a common theme. They all began with a dream, an aspiration, an inspiration.

So now I ask you, our community, Knox County, what is our dream, our aspiration, our inspiration? What do we want to be when we grow up? What do we want to be moving forward?

A while back, I asked a business leader from North Carolina what was his impression of Knox County. He told me that when folks in his city thought of us, they thought of two things: UT football and the World's Fair. The World's Fair was in 1982 and, although I think Coach Pruitt is going to turn it around, Vol football fans, myself included, we haven't had anything to brag about in almost two decades.

We are so much more than just those two things.

We have assets in our region that other areas would give anything to have. The world's foremost research laboratory is in our backyard. Our geographical location is about as good as it gets; almost half of the nation's population lives within a day's drive of Knox County. We are home to a major university, as well as the biggest community college in the state. We are the headquarters of the region's most important economic development organization. Major corporations, vibrant, innovative small businesses, lots of entertainment and recreation, great restaurants and food, a moderate climate. The list goes on and on. We have it all.

And everything is good here. We're doing good, but good is the enemy of great. We have the opportunity to be truly great. A place that the rest of the nation looks to with envy. One where we get calls from other places asking, "How did you do it?" Because that's what I've been doing. That's the question I ask leaders who oversaw the transformation of their communities from good to great. The answer is always the same: Knox County has so much potential. It's just a matter of seizing it.

I want to be on the other end of that phone call. I want people to ask me, to ask all of us, "How did you do it?" "The answer is simple," we'll say. "We made a decision that good wasn't good enough. We wanted to be great. And we found ways to make it happen. We had a dream, an aspiration, an inspiration, and we made it a reality."

President Reagan famously depicted America as the Shining City on the Hill, an example to the rest of the world of greatness. Why can't Knox County be that Shining City within America? Imagine, an economy that stresses innovation and is a player in the rapidly changing global economy; an education system that prepares students for success whether it's in liberal arts, STEAM, or the trades; and, most importantly, a community that comes together not only to confront challenges, but to make the possible real.

We can be that community, we will be that community...if we truly want to be that community.

To the elected officials who are here today, everything we do should take us one step closer to being the best community we can be. That is one of the goals of this budget.

To the private citizens here, I am ever cognizant that you have entrusted me with your money and the County should use that money as effectively as possible and use as little of it as possible. That is the other goal of this budget.

Thanks to the hard work of our tremendous employees across all departments, especially our finance department, I believe we have succeeded on both counts. I look forward to your approval.

Thank you.

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