

ELECTION 2018

Key dates

Primary elections will be held in August for governor, U.S. Senate, U.S. House of Representatives, state Senate and state House seats, as well as general elections for county offices.

July 3

Voter registration deadline

July 13-July 28

Early voting

Aug. 2

Election day

Next month

Opioid crisis and public safety.

The spread of opioid abuse claimed nearly 1,200 lives in Tennessee in 2016, and it is getting worse. Methamphetamine abuse, while not getting the headlines, has increased. Gun violence is increasing. What proposals do our candidates have to help Tennesseans address these public safety issues?

Issues and Answers

In the months leading up to the primary elections in August, the Times Free Press will run an “Election 2018: Issues and Answers” feature, produced by the Tennessee Press Association, as part of an effort to educate readers and voters about key issues facing Tennessee and what candidates for governor and U.S. Senate have to say about them. This installment of “Election 2018: Issues and Answers” focuses on infrastructure and how we invest our tax revenues in roads, transit, water quality and access to high speed internet. Future installments will cover the opioid crisis and public safety, rural development and distressed counties, health care and well-being, and education.

THE ISSUE:

INFRASTRUCTURE

What do statewide candidates say about infrastructure investment? Is investment in public infrastructure important? And should Tennessee have more dedicated revenue sources to pay for construction and maintenance of infrastructure across the state, or is the existing tax structure — primarily the state tax on fuel, and wheel taxes — sufficient to pay for what Tennessee needs to sustain and grow its economy? The major candidates for Tennessee governor and U.S. Senate were asked to tell our readers about their views on infrastructure investment.

GOVERNOR

REPUBLICANS

Diane Black

President Donald Trump’s Rebuilding Infrastructure in American Plan is tremendous news for Tennessee.

The principles of this plan are examples of what all policy should strive to do: Use funds as a hand up instead of a handout, give more flexibility to state and local governments and focus on the benefits of investments in private industry.

The plan would allocate \$200 billion to states to stimulate \$1.5 trillion in infrastructure investments nationwide. The funds will promote state, local and private investments in infrastructure and maximize the value of every taxpayer dollar.

The funds will be divided into multiple programs: \$100 billion to create an Incentives Program, \$20 billion for the Transformative Projects Program, \$20 billion to expand infrastructure financing programs, \$10 billion for a new Federal Capital Revolving Fund and, most importantly for Tennessee, \$50 billion for a new Rural Infrastructure Program.

The bulk of the funding from the Rural Infrastructure Program will be allocated to state governors, giving us the flexibility to prioritize the community’s needs.

For the 78 rural counties of Tennessee, this is a game-changer.

As governor, I will work hard to put these funds to good use in our communities. No one knows what Tennessee needs like Tennesseans. As I’ve traveled the state, two things I have heard is the need for good roads and broadband.

From the top to the bottom, greater access to good roads and broadband gives communities the necessities to recruit businesses, support local education and grow their economies.

The president’s plan will make it all the more possible for our state to improve our infrastructure, attract more businesses and spread the prosperity of Tennessee’s cities to even our most rural communities.

It’s time Tennessee dreams bigger for our rural communities, and the president’s plan is a huge step in the right direction.

Randy Boyd

Great roads and strong infrastructure are essential to economic development, and thankfully Tennessee has some of the best assets in the country.

One of our greatest assets is we are one of the few states with no road debt. As governor I will continue that pay-as-you-go conservative practice. As commissioner of Economic and Community

Development, I frequently promoted Tennessee’s outstanding infrastructure to new business prospects and it is a critical recruitment tool. Quality roads and safe infrastructure are about more than just transportation — they are about better jobs and properly growing our state. We must commit to a safe and reliable transportation system; no matter what new technology or changes come, I am focused on ensuring that Tennessee continues that tradition of safe roadways.

Furthermore, a critical part of our infrastructure is broadband access. Just as with roads, if there is no broadband, it will be hard for businesses, schools, and communities to thrive and grow. As ECD commissioner, I was happy to lead the effort to bring broadband to more rural areas, but there is still work to be done. As governor, I will continue working to make sure all communities are connected and have the tools to thrive.

Beth Harwell

My philosophy is that for those things government is charged with doing, it should do efficiently and

effectively. Infrastructure is the responsibility of government — and the state plays a large role — and it impacts every citizen in this state. Roads and utilities affect the quality of life of all Tennesseans. Infrastructure must be a priority, because jobs and economic prosperity depend on it.

A solid infrastructure is a critical part of recruiting businesses to relocate to Tennessee and creating an environment where Tennessee businesses can expand and thrive. While every citizen can feel the impact of poor infrastructure in the form of traffic, subpar utilities, and unsafe bridges, businesses rely on these things to deliver goods and services to all Tennesseans.

A few years ago, I convened a Rural Task Force that traveled the state to discuss what was needed to boost prosperity in our rural areas. Time and time again, infrastructure came up as a number one concern — roads, utilities and broadband.

We have taken action to address our state’s infrastructure over the last few years, but there is more that can be done, especially in the rural parts of our state. We are fortunate not to have any road debt in the state of Tennessee, and we need to ensure we have enough dedicated sources of funding to support these needs across the state. As governor, I will make that a priority.

Bill Lee

In my company, I have always told our managers, be careful about what you add in the good times, because you might have to take it away in the lean times, and that philosophy has kept us from having to make some very difficult decisions when times do inevitably get tough.

When approaching a budget, whether in my company, or as governor, I look at every line item and weigh the merits. You have to make hard decisions and differentiate from “needs” and “wants.”

Investing in infrastructure is clearly a need, and it needs to be addressed more quickly. I run a company with hundreds of vehicles, and our company is in the business of maintaining the infrastructure of buildings. Deferring maintenance is a costly, critical mistake. The same obviously applies to government. Neglecting infrastructure ensures more expensive and more painful solutions when we finally do get around to addressing them.

In Tennessee, we find ourselves with a growing infrastructure problem, not only because of deferred maintenance, but because of factors like TennCare, where we grew that program to unsustainable levels. As a result, fixed overhead became an anchor on the budget, which meant the state highway fund was raided to pay our bills.

We can’t do that again. Infrastructure needs to be part of a bigger conversation around our entire state budget. In the last eight years, inflation has risen 8 percent, and our population has grown by 5 percent. However, our state budget appropriations alone have risen by an astounding 32 percent.

If we don’t do something to slow the growth of government spending today — while revenues are currently strong — we’re destined to find ourselves in a hard situation when revenues drop. That will not only harm infrastructure, it’ll hurt education, law enforcement, and many of the services the state currently provides.

DEMOCRATS

Karl Dean

Karl knows that the right investments in infrastructure are key to economic growth. Access to roads, water lines, broadband service and other infrastructure are essential for businesses looking to grow and create jobs.

During his time as mayor of Nashville, Karl made improving the city’s infrastructure a priority, working with the Metro Council to invest \$2.3 billion in capital projects in all parts of Davidson County. He also worked with the Metro Council to create a funding stream for new water, sewer and storm water infrastructure projects. When Karl first took office, the city’s water department had essentially no bonding capacity. Now, Nashville has the water infrastructure it needs to support years of economic growth.

As governor, Karl will bring the same commitment to finding pragmatic solutions to our communities’ problems. He will work with the Tennessee General Assembly and our state’s leaders in Washington D.C. to ensure all available state and federal resources are put toward our state’s most pressing infrastructure needs.

Craig Fitzhugh

Infrastructure is — and has been — the backbone of Tennessee’s progress in the economic and social arenas. As Gov.

Ned Ray McWherter used to say, “Education plus roads equals jobs.” From the first rivers and the movement of goods and people, to the days of our roads being the class of the nation, Tennessee has led the way when it comes

to our infrastructure. Unfortunately, we began to lose that mantle in the past few years. I do believe that the IMPROVE Act that was passed in the legislature last year will begin to remedy some of the backlog of projects, and our state has made a real effort to improve our crumbling bridges. The unique makeup of our state in the urban-suburban-rural mix requires different solutions in each type of locale. Local governments must maintain their ability to make decisions in concert with their citizens for the best interests of their communities.

While infrastructure is usually thought of as roads and bridges, we must make sure that our water systems are also brought up to standard. No one really thinks of pipes beneath our roads and buildings until they burst. We must make those investments not only for their physical integrity but also for their health aspects, making sure that lead and other contaminants are not entering our schools, businesses and homes. New materials and technologies will allow for more durable and streamlined infrastructure, and we must not push off these projects. Doing nothing puts our communities and our citizens in danger — much like the danger our legislature put Tennessee in by not expanding Medicaid. The refusal of these funds has made Tennessee the per capita leader in hospital closures. Expanding Medicaid would give life to these hospitals, making our communities safer, healthier and more economically viable.

U.S. SENATE

REPUBLICAN

Marsha Blackburn

Tennessee’s economy is linked to our transportation and infrastructure system, and to maintain our economic competitiveness, we must think strategically about improving our connectivity.

While traditionally infrastructure refers to our highway system, broadband is an increasingly important component of connectivity. Internet access is critical to our 21st century economy. Lack of reliable internet access is not just an inconvenience; it holds Tennesseans back. Without access to reliable internet, children are unable to complete their homework assignments and our small businesses are unable to compete on a larger scale. As the chairwoman of the Communications and Technology Subcommittee, making broadband accessible is a top priority for me, and I am working with members of both parties to advance legislation to this end. One such piece of legislation would require new federal highway projects to lay broadband infrastructure at the same time, conserving tax dollars while constructing critical infrastructure.

Last month, President Trump unveiled his transportation and infrastructure initiative to improve our nation’s economy. I agree with the president that our current system of federal funding is inefficient, and I know simply throwing more money at the problem will not solve it. We must restructure the way federal highway projects are selected, maintained and regulated. With the president’s leadership, we will be more judicious in spending federal tax dollars, streamline the permitting process and encourage public-private partnerships. I will work with President Trump every step of the way to advocate for Tennessee’s roadways.

I am committed to growing our economy and making life easier for Tennessee families. In the U.S. Senate, I will work to increase Tennesseans’ access to broadband and work with the president to restructure the federal government’s infrastructure program.

DEMOCRAT

Philip Bredesen

Every doctor learns the rule — reflected in the Hippocratic Oath — to “first of all do no harm.” When you’re faced with a decision, it may be better to take the conservative path rather than risk causing more harm through your intervention.

This is too good a rule to just leave to physicians. There are plenty of other areas where it applies as well. One of these is the much-discussed area of public infrastructure, and we have a good example right here in Tennessee.

In his recent budget, President Trump proposed selling off a part of the Tennessee Valley Authority, TVA. His idea was to sell off the transmission assets — the power lines and the substations — that Washington would then use for other expenses. This is not entirely new with Trump; President Obama proposed something similar at one point.

But we Tennesseans have a lot of common sense, and know that there is no such thing as a free lunch. Tennessee electric ratepayers have been paying to build this electrical infrastructure for three-quarters of a century. We’ve paid for it, and it works well. When I worked as governor recruiting jobs, one of our competitive advantages was the availability of efficient, reliable power here in Tennessee, thanks to TVA.

If politicians sell parts of TVA to a private corporation, here’s what happens: Those politicians will take the proceeds and spend it somewhere quickly. But any private purchaser is going to have to get its investment back, plus interest and a profit. There’s only one place that is going to come from — TVA’s electrical customers. That is, you and me. We have to start back at the beginning, buying that infrastructure a second time, and will be doing so in our electric bills for decades to come. Politicians play, electrical customers pay.

So, Mr. President (and Mr. and Ms. Congress), let’s talk about our real infrastructure needs, but please remember: “first of all do no harm.”