

NEWS / COMMENTARY

# Mayor Tim Kelly Proposes Budget With Unprecedented Housing Investments, No Tax Increase

*Budget includes \$10 million for paving roads, 3 percent cost-of-living increase for city workers*

Chattanooga, Tenn. (Wednesday, May 11) — Chattanooga Mayor Tim Kelly on Tuesday presented his new budget to the City Council, keeping his promise to invest an unprecedented \$33 million into thousands of homes that Chattanoogaans can afford — with no tax increase.

The median price of a home has increased 80.7 percent since 2015, leaving 43 percent of renters defined as “housing burdened,” or spending more than 30 percent of their income on housing. And more than 20 percent of renters in Chattanooga are “housing insecure,” defined as spending more than half of their income on housing, and putting them at severe risk of eviction and potentially, homelessness.

The mayor’s \$33 million seed investment will catalyze the city’s \$100 million affordable housing initiative, which will include partners in the non-profit, philanthropic, financial and homebuilding sectors. The multi-pronged approach will include subsidies, gap financing, land acquisition, down-payment assistance and partnerships with community financial institutions to create homes for Chattanoogaans.

The budget also allocates more

than \$2 million toward homelessness prevention and rehousing efforts, including funding for a new temporary sanctioned encampment, and the rehabilitation of a former hotel into permanent supportive housing.

At its core, the new budget — which covers fiscal years 2022 and 2023 — incorporates the mayor’s One Chattanooga strategic plan, a broad, systems-focused vision that he unveiled at a State of the City presentation last week.

“This budget includes some bold investments, and we must continue to be bold and aggressive as we implement the One Chattanooga strategic plan,” Kelly said Tuesday. “We can’t afford not to.”

The proposed budget is available for the public to view at budget.Chattanooga.gov, and members of the public will be able to attend informational sessions and a public hearing prior to the first reading of the budget ordinance on June 7. Budget education sessions will take place at 3:30 p.m. in the City Council chamber on Tuesdays through May 31, and a public hearing will be held on May 31 at 6 p.m.

In his budget, Kelly also highlighted a robust \$10 million budget for repaving roads, part of a broader \$131 million investment into infrastructure, including sidewalks, bridges, traffic signal synchronization, sewer and stormwater

projects, and in fulfillment of his commitment to invest \$40 million into road repair over four years.

In Kelly’s first year, the city repaired more than 33 lane miles of asphalt and fixed more than 11,411 cracks, divots and most importantly, potholes. Kelly said he would not let up on efforts to revitalize the city’s aging infrastructure, which has been one of residents’ most-voiced concerns.

“Sometimes we have to make hard choices, but we are prioritizing the things that matter most for our community as a whole,” Kelly said.

The budget also includes a number of investments into a more effective and responsive government, including additional inspectors and specialists, additional truck drivers, and an innovation fund to help the city fuel new ideas to address resident concerns more effectively.

“This year’s budget is both bold and fiscally sound, responsibly taking on our city’s most persistent challenges, while also looking ahead to build long-term prosperity for every resident in every neighborhood,” said Brent Goldberg, the city’s chief financial officer. “As the city embraces a culture of continuous improvement, we’re working to streamline processes and prioritize innovative approaches to ensure that we are wise stewards of taxpayer resources.”

In recognition that providing essential services depends on the city’s corps of essential workers, the new budget also includes a 3 percent cost of living adjustment for city workers, including sworn employees, raising the city’s minimum wage to \$15.45/hour.

As a service-focused entity, about 62 percent of the city’s operational expenditures go toward employee pay and benefits. The largest portion of the general fund — 58 percent — goes toward first-responders and essential workers, with the Police Department, Fire Department, and Public Works making up the bulk.

The city is absorbing increases in health insurance costs this year to ensure that employees won’t see a premium increase. The city will also continue to supplement funds for federal Head Start workers to help strengthen the city’s Pre-K programs.

This year’s budget builds on the mayor’s \$30 million investment last year into employee pay, at a time when the city was hemorrhaging workers and in danger of browning out fire stations and cutting back on essential services. In bringing employees up to a market rate of pay, they received an average 15 percent salary increase, which allowed the city to restore and expand many of the services on which our residents depend.

# Know the Facts About Abortion & the Supreme Court Decision

*By Robin Smith*

Abortion is back in the headlines. What an interesting time for such a discussion. Most will be celebrating their own mothers and honoring the roles of so many women who shape the lives in such critical and countless ways during May and Mother’s Day as the headlines scream about abortion.

What brought the controversial topic back to the forefront? The historic leak of a draft document from the US Supreme Court as a major decision is coming within weeks determining whether states or the federal government determines the specifics around the access to the procedure that ends the pregnancy of a baby.

The issue at hand is whether the US government or state governments will make the rules relative to abortion. But you wouldn’t know that if you’ve listened to talk radio, watched cable TV news, read social media or gotten activist emails from certain interests.

Let’s set politics aside--no partisan talking points. Let’s look at the actual decision at hand, what it means and honestly understand what abortion is--not what it’s promoted to be.

And that’s where we’ll begin. What is abortion?

Abortion is the medical or surgical termination or end of a pregnancy which results in the end of life of the conceived child. Surgical abortions, according to the health literature, have fewer risks of being incomplete compared to medical abortions.

Surgical abortions are done through aspiration--the process to physically remove the contents of the womb through suction typically performed up to 16 weeks, or 4 months, into the pregnancy--or dilation and

evacuation (D&E) which is recommended after 13 weeks due to the size of the preborn baby. D&E abortions expand the womb through the placement of dilators (thin rods) allowing the practitioner to remove the developing baby with forceps, which are shaped like large spoons, and suction.

Medical abortions are for pregnancies 70 days or less after the mother’s last menstrual cycle, her period. Medical abortions involve taking two medications after the health care provider confirms the pregnancy and its location in the uterus. It is important for women to see healthcare providers to guarantee they don’t have a rare ectopic pregnancy or other conditions where excessive and fatal bleeding could occur.

Abortions were first recorded in ancient days, but made more available as women have become more sexually active outside of marriage and beyond the purpose of creating family. Increasingly embraced by societies across time, the reasons have been consistent: To prevent birth.

Abortion was used in centuries past for the reduction of population. Despite the increasing availability of effective contraception, abortion is argued to be necessary, even today, as needed for population control as cited in this piece published in the National Library of Medicine by Dr. Stephen D. Mumford of the Center for Research on Population and Security.

Mumford states, “No nation desirous of reducing its growth rate to 1% or less can expect to do so without the widespread use of abortion. This observational study, based on the experience of 116 of the world’s largest countries, supports the contention that abortion

is essential to any national population growth control effort.”

Even more plainly stated, the researcher declares, “Population control is an important but neglected social benefit of abortion.”

Don’t be misinformed. Abortion is not contraception. Contraception prevents the ovulation of an egg, that would be fertilized by the male’s sperm, that would conceive a child. The environment of the woman’s uterus is also changed to be less conducive for pregnancy. In contrast, abortion is to remove a fertilized egg that otherwise left in place would continue to develop and grow in the mother’s womb.

The fuss and drama about the pending decision by the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) revolves around the possible reversal of another decision made decades ago called Roe v Wade. The landmark decision determined that a woman’s choice to have an abortion would be protected without excessive government regulation.

This decision, however, has been treated to mean women have a constitutional right to have an abortion with no regard to the life of the preborn child, which science demonstrates through its chromosomes, its genetic material and its organ development, is a separate life naturally growing in the womb of the mother.

For example, medical research demonstrates that a preborn baby has a detectable heartbeat in the womb as early as five weeks of pregnancy with the heart rate increasing until week 9, then slowing again after week 13. During this first trimester, or initial three months of pregnancy, the heart’s anatomy and structure develops and pumps the baby’s blood. Just as the



presence of a pulse in a person represents a heartbeat, or life, so does the presence of the heartbeat in the womb.

Should the SCOTUS “overturn” Roe v Wade, abortions would not automatically be banned. Instead, each state would make laws and regulations that govern abortions. This would be similar to the fact that Tennessee law differs from many other states by not taxing the wages of workers or levy an income tax. Every bordering state of Tennessee--Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, North Carolina, Kentucky, Arkansas, Virginia and Missouri all have state laws that tax the wages of workers in addition to other taxes. States govern themselves differently. Abortion would become a state-governed procedure if Roe v Wade is overturned in several weeks.

Be informed about the headlines and the facts. It’s growing more clearly that all political interests rely upon anger, the belief of an existing crisis, or the twisting of information to move citizens to action.

# A New Dream Team of Federal Judges

*By Ben Jealous*

Something amazing just happened in the U.S. Capitol.

On one day, the Senate Judiciary Committee held a confirmation hearing for five extraordinary women of color who have been nominated to federal judgeships by President Joe Biden.

This judicial Dream Team will make our courts more representative of the American people. As judges, they will make our system more just. And they are building on an already exceptional record by the Biden White House and the Senate’s Democratic leadership to nominate and confirm what is by far the most diverse set of federal judges ever.

What a difference an election makes. Two-thirds of Trump’s judges were White men. In contrast, two-thirds of Biden’s judicial nominees, and more than three-quarters of his nominees to the important circuit courts of appeal—the level just below the Supreme Court—have been people of color. And that’s in addition to Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson, who will soon be sworn in as the first Black woman ever to serve as a U.S. Supreme Court justice.

The Far Right did everything they could to try to smear Judge Jackson and derail her confirmation. Her qualifications and character were unquestionable, so they resorted to utterly shame-



ful distortions about her record.

They failed to block Judge Jackson’s confirmation, but that hasn’t stopped them from running the same unprincipled playbook against civil rights lawyer Nancy Abudu, who has been nominated to serve on the 11th Circuit Court. The same groups that attacked Judge Jackson tried to smear Abudu. But I am convinced they will fail for the same reasons.

Here, very briefly, are the latest members of the judicial Dream Team made possible by voters who elected President Joe Biden and took control of the Senate away from obstructionist-in-chief Mitch McConnell:

Nancy Abudu is a civil rights advocate who spent years defending voting rights, freedom of speech, religious lib-

erty, equality under law, and other core constitutional principles. She helped defend a six-year-old Black student turned away from school on the first day of first grade because of his hairstyle. She will be the first Black woman to serve on the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals.

Judge Michelle Childs is a federal district judge nominated by President Barack Obama in 2010; President Biden has nominated her to the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals; he strongly considered her for the Supreme Court this year. In her years on the bench, Judge Childs has earned bipartisan respect for fairness while protecting voting rights and equal treatment in the courtroom.

Natasha Merle has been nominated as a federal judge in the Eastern District of New York. In her public-interest legal career she has served as a public defender in death penalty cases and as a civil rights attorney at the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, where she is deputy director of litigation, working to make real the promises of justice and equality.

Nusrat Jahan Choudhury has also been nominated as a federal judge in the Eastern District of New York. Her legal work at the American Civil Liberties Union has addressed racial disparities in law enforcement and unfair treatment of low-income people in the

legal system. She will be the first Muslim woman to serve as a lifetime federal judge.

Ana Isabel de Alba has been nominated as a federal judge in the Eastern District of California, where she will be the first Latina judge. As a lawyer, she fought against barriers to justice facing mistreated farmworkers like her mother and advocated for immigrants’ rights. Since 2018 she has been a California Superior Court Judge in Fresno County.

If you ever notice yourself feeling too cynical to vote, or so fed up with slow progress or broken promises that you’re tempted to stay away from the ballot box, think about these women and remember this: President Donald Trump and Senate Republicans filled our federal courts with young and often unqualified judges committed to the same ideology as the Supreme Court justices who are stomping on voting rights, civil rights, workers’ rights, and more.

We need more judges who will be a voice for justice. Having five such women appear before the Senate Judiciary Committee on the same day was a remarkable sign of the progress that can be made when we elect leaders who are committed to making progress and serving justice.