



**BILL HASLAM**  
GOVERNOR  
STATE OF TENNESSEE

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**HASLAM: COMMUNITY COLLEGE TUITION-FREE FOR ALL TENNESSEANS**

*Reconnect to offer last-dollar scholarship for adults without degrees to attend community college*

NASHVILLE – In his seventh State of the State address to the General Assembly, Gov. Bill Haslam introduced his proposal to make Tennessee the first state in the nation to offer all Tennessee adults without a degree access to community college tuition-free – and at no cost to taxpayers.

If the Tennessee Reconnect Act is approved, Tennessee would become the first state in the nation to offer all citizens – both high school students and adults – the chance to earn a post-secondary degree or certificate free of tuition and fees.

“Just as we did with Tennessee Promise, we’re making a clear statement to families: wherever you might fall on life’s path, education beyond high school is critical to the Tennessee we can be,” Haslam said. “At the end of the day, there is no higher potential for providing more opportunity for our citizens than increasing access to high quality education. And the point is, we’re doing it while maintaining discipline and responsibility to the taxpayer – keeping taxes and debt low and saving for when the economy ultimately slows.”

Launched in 2013, the Drive to 55 is the governor’s effort to increase the number of Tennesseans with a postsecondary degree or certificate to 55 percent by 2025. Currently, Tennessee needs 871,000 post-secondary degrees or certificates to reach 55 percent, but mathematically there’s no way to reach that goal by only serving high school students. There are 900,000 adults in Tennessee that have some college but no degree.

Tennessee adults without a certificate can already attend Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology (TCATs) tuition-free under the Reconnect program, and the governor’s Tennessee Reconnect Act would add community colleges into the program. [Click here for information on the Reconnect proposal.](#)

The governor also unveiled tonight the Tennessee STRONG (Support, Training, and Renewing Opportunity for National Guardsmen) Act, establishing a four-year pilot program for eligible members of the Tennessee National Guard to receive a last-dollar tuition reimbursement toward a first-time bachelor’s degree.

The Reconnect and STRONG acts are the final two pieces of NextTennessee, Haslam’s 2017 legislative agenda aimed at building and sustaining economic growth and the state’s competitiveness for the next generation of Tennesseans.



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The governor also released his Fiscal Year 2017-2018 budget proposal. The \$37 billion proposal makes significant investments in teachers, K-12 schools, higher education, state employees, the state's Rainy Day Fund and the tax cuts included in the governor's IMPROVE Act. For a second year in a row, and the second year in Tennessee recorded history, the state budget does not take on any new debt.

Notable investments include:

- \$200 million to fund the Basic Education Program (BEP), including
  - \$100 million for teacher salaries and
  - \$22 million for English Language Learners;
- \$77 million for state employee pay increases and market rate adjustments targeting high-turnover positions in state government;
- \$132 million to bring the state's Rainy Day Fund to an all-time high of \$800 million, well on the way to the statutory guideline of \$1 billion;
- \$655 million in state dollars for maintenance and new buildings across general government and higher education;
- \$135 million transferred from the General Fund to pay back the Highway Fund;
- \$78 million for higher education and the Complete College Act;
- \$15 million for career and technology education equipment;
- \$21 million to fund recommendations from the Rural Task Force;
- \$11.6 million to fund more than 700 additional slots in the Employment and Community First CHOICES program; and
- \$9.5 million combined to expand substance abuse and crisis intervention treatment services and supports.

Complete text of the governor's speech, an archived video of his speech and budget documents will be available at [www.tn.gov/stateofthestate](http://www.tn.gov/stateofthestate).

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