

# The Florida Times-Union

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\$2



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## Curry rolls out budget



Mayor Lenny Curry presents his 2017-2018 budget to the City Council on Monday morning that would include retrofitting community pools and hiring 100 new police officers. (Will Dickey/Florida Times-Union)

### Public safety, downtown, roads highlight Mayor Curry budget



100 MORE COPS

**\$4.4 million\***

• Mayor Lenny Curry wants to authorize Jacksonville Sheriff Mike Williams to hire **100** more police to combat violent crime.  
\* Only a limited number of recruits can move through police academy at a time. This represents only a portion of the cost.



DOWNTOWN IMPROVEMENTS

**\$9 million**

• The budget includes **\$8** million to demolish the former county courthouse and City Hall Annex on Bay Street to make them more attractive for private development. The mayor wants another **\$1** million for downtown landscaping and lighting improvements, as well as money for Friendship Fountain repairs and a Southbank Riverwalk extension.



ROAD RE-SURFACING

**\$12 million**

• Roads throughout the county will get resurfaced. There are also tens of millions more for sidewalk installations and repairs, road widening and Americans with Disabilities Act compliance work.

### Stimulus budget will feature \$131 million aimed at infrastructure

By Nate Monroe  
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Facing a city plagued with stubbornly high violent crime and buried in aging infrastructure, Mayor Lenny Curry rolled out a stimulus-style budget Monday that would put 100 more cops on the street and increase spending on roads and public facilities to its highest level in years.

Curry's \$1.2 billion budget for next year represents a windfall the city hasn't seen since the economy soured late in the last decade, and that city leaders could have only dreamed of during the nadir of City Hall's financial struggles.

Employees would get raises; millions would be poured into roads and other infrastructure across the

*"I'm very optimistic. It sounds like the mayor has included every part of Jacksonville in his budget."*

City Councilman Garrett Dennis

city, with millions more designated to make downtown ready for private development; Jacksonville Fire and Rescue would see an increase in personnel and equipment; and the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office would have a green light to hire a staggering 100 more officers, boosting the department to about 1,700 employees.

The spending increase is the result of a strong economy, growing prop-

erty values and far more flexibility stemming from a complex series of reforms to the city's employee-retirement system. Pension debt had grown to cost hundreds of millions of dollars each year — a trend those reforms, in the short term, reversed.

"Before pension reform, our future was built on a foundation of sand," Curry said in remarks Monday to the City Council. "Now we have a foundation of solid rock."

Curry's annual budget speech — the closest thing in Jacksonville to a "state of the city" address — featured some of his typical moxie: Without speaking his name, Curry lambasted the tenure of his predecessor, former Mayor Alvin Brown. Curry said his

BUDGET continues on A-3

## Attorney has law license restored

Mathis was accused of planning Allied Veterans scandal

By Andrew Pantazi  
andrew.pantazi@jacksonville.com

Kelly Mathis, the attorney who represented the Allied Veterans of the World internet cafes and once faced a criminal conviction that was later overturned, will have his law license restored.

Monday's order from the Florida Supreme Court marks the end of a four-year ordeal for Mathis, once the president of the local bar association.

"It has been a long, long road and that was the absolute last piece of the puzzle to complete recovery," Mathis said. "I've been vindicated. I've been re-instated. I think it's huge that the Florida Bar and Florida Supreme Court agreed I should be reinstated retroactively to four years ago, recognizing that this was just wrong from the beginning. I never should've been suspended. I never should've been arrested and I never should've been prosecuted."

In a rare move, the Supreme Court decided to back-date the re-instatement, so it's as if Mathis was never suspended in the first place.

In 2013, Attorney General Pam Bondi accused Mathis of being the "mastermind" behind a \$300 million racketeering and money laundering scheme that involved internet cafes where people were illegally gambling.

Mathis' attorneys argued that he was only giving legal advice to a client. Lawyers across the state took particular note of his case, worrying about what it might mean for the criminal liability of attorneys

ATTORNEY continues on A-3



Kelly Mathis (left) and his attorney Mitch Stone. During the four years Mathis did not have his license, he worked as a paralegal. (Eileen Kelley/Florida Times-Union)

## CSX ordered to pay \$3.9 million in death of trespassing film worker

By Russ Bynum  
Associated Press

SAVANNAH, GA. | Jacksonville-based CSX must pay \$3.9 million to the family of a movie worker killed on a Georgia railroad trestle in 2014, a jury decided Monday

in a civil verdict that found the company shared in the blame for the deadly freight train collision even though the film crew was trespassing.

The parents of Sarah Jones sued CSX Transportation in Chatham County

State Court, saying the railroad shared blame for their daughter's death.

The 27-year-old camera assistant died in the crash Feb. 20, 2014, during the first day of shooting "Midnight Rider," an ill-fated movie about Gregg Allman

of the Allman Brothers Band.

"This trial disclosed a number of exceptionally poor judgments and ignored opportunities by CSX Transportation to prevent this tragedy," Jones' parents, Richard and Eliza-

beth Jones of Columbia, South Carolina, said in a written statement.

CSX plans to appeal the jury's decision, said Rob Doolittle, a spokesman for the railroad.

"CSX is deeply sympathetic to the terrible loss

suffered by the family of Ms. Sarah Jones, but respectfully disagrees with the conclusions reached by the jury today," Doolittle said.

The film's director,

RAILROAD continues on A-3

Weather  
Not as stormy  
Forecast on A-2

90 Today's high

75 Wednesday morning's low

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# Republican defections kill health bill for now

By Alan Fram  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON | The latest GOP effort to repeal and replace “Obamacare” was fatally wounded in the Senate Monday night when two more Republican senators announced their opposition to legislation strongly backed by President Donald Trump.

The announcements from Sens. Mike Lee of Utah and Jerry Moran of Kansas left the Republican Party’s long-promised efforts to get rid of President Barack Obama’s health care legislation reeling. Next steps, if any, were not immediately clear.

Lee and Moran both said they could not support Majority Leader Mitch McConnell’s legislation in its current form. They joined GOP Sens. Susan Collins of Maine and Rand Paul of Kentucky, both of whom announced their opposition right after McConnell released the bill last Thursday.

McConnell is now at least two votes short in the closely divided Senate and may have to go back to the drawing board or even begin to negotiate with Democrats, a prospect he’s threatened but resisted so far.

McConnell’s bill “fails to repeal the Affordable Care Act or address healthcare’s rising costs. For the same reasons I could not support the previous version of this bill, I cannot support this one,” said Moran.



Officers prepare to arrest people protesting the Republican health care bill outside the office of Sen. Dean Heller, R-Nev. The Senate has been forced to delay the bill, giving Sen. Mitch McConnell a chance to garner more support. (Andrew Harnik/Associated Press)

It was the second straight failure for McConnell, who had to cancel a vote on an earlier version of the bill last month when defeat became inevitable.

Trump had kept his distance from the Senate process, but Monday night’s development was a major blow for him, too, as

the president failed to rally support for what has been the GOP’s trademark issue for seven years — ever since Obama and the Democrats passed the Affordable Care Act in the first place.

The Senate bill eliminated mandates and taxes under Obamacare, and unraveled a

Medicaid expansion. But for conservatives like Lee and Paul it didn’t go far enough in delivering on Republican Party promises to undo Obama’s law, while moderates like Collins viewed the bill as too extreme in yanking insurance coverage from millions.

## RAILROAD

Continued from A-1

Randall Miller, served a year in jail after pleading guilty to involuntary manslaughter and criminal trespassing charges. Jones’ parents said CSX also failed to take precautions that could have averted the crash on a trestle spanning the Altamaha River near Jesup in southeast Georgia.

Jones’ family had also sued Miller, his fellow production managers and several other defendants. All of them except for CSX settled or otherwise resolved their cases out of court. The jury Monday found \$11.2 million to be the total value of Jones’ life as well as her pain and suffering. Jurors decided CSX — the only defendant on trial — bore 35 percent of the responsibility for Jones’ death, making the railroad’s share \$3.9 million.

The jury in Savannah heard testimony during the civil trial that two CSX trains rolled through while the movie crew stood on both sides of the tracks within an hour before the crash, but the operators of those trains never called dispatchers to alert them. Jurors also were shown a CSX policy that train operators are expect-



Elizabeth and Richard Jones’s daughter Sarah was killed on the first day of filming “Midnight Rider.” (AP Photo/David Goldman)

ed to immediately report trespassers on its tracks and rights of way.

Jeffrey Harris, the Jones family’s attorney, also noted that the train’s brakes weren’t applied until after the locomotive struck a hospital bed the filmmakers had placed across the tracks. Actor William Hurt, hired to play Allman, had been lying in the bed before the train came upon the crew at 53 mph. Hurt escaped unharmed.

Six crew members were injured by flying shrapnel from the bed. Jones was run over.

Hurt appeared in Savannah and sat outside the courtroom during the trial’s first day last week. But the actor was never called to testify in the case.

CSX attorneys blamed the crash entirely on the filmmakers. CSX officials had twice sent production managers emails denying them permission to shoot on the bridge. Three of Jones’ co-workers testified that production managers never told the rest of the crew members, who went onto the railroad trestle unaware they were trespassing.



Sarah Jones was killed during a film shoot on a train trestle in Georgia in February 2014, and her death has prompted broad safety discussions within the film and television industry. (AP Photo/Colin Duran)

CSX lawyers argued that evidence of failures to follow company policies doesn’t prove the railroad was negligent. They said the engineer in the crash didn’t brake sooner because he was afraid the train would derail and possibly dump its payload of shipping containers onto people who were huddled on the bridge’s narrow walkway beside the tracks.

The crash ended production on “Midnight Rider,” which has remained in limbo. Allman went to court to prevent Miller from reviving it before he died in May at age 69.

## BUDGET

Continued from A-1

budget seeks to further turn the page on the lack of discipline and gridlock that Curry said was a feature of Brown’s time in office.

“To the critics and the cynics, we are not going to stop,” he said.

There is no change in the tax rate, which is 11.4499 mills. City leaders have the option of rolling back the rate to maintain the same level of tax collections, rather than keeping the excess revenue when property values rise.

Instead, City Hall will rake in the benefits of a growing economy: The city expects to collect about \$35 million more next year in property taxes because of anticipated rising values. State-shared revenue — the city’s cut from revenue collected by the state, like sales and gas taxes — is expected to increase by about \$5 million.

The City Council has final say over the budget, which takes effect Oct. 1.

Anna Lopez Brosche, the council president, said she hasn’t yet dived into the budget’s fine print but supports the issues Curry prioritized. “I’m happy to hear about parks and neighborhoods and downtown,” she said. “I think what the mayor presented today was in line with the priorities that we’ve heard from him for two plus years.”

### INFRASTRUCTURE BOOST

Curry’s spending plan would increase the amount of money stashed away in reserves, though it also calls for borrowing more

money than city leaders have been comfortable with in the recent past. The capital improvement budget includes about \$100 million in borrowed money.

Curry said his request is reasonable given the flexibility in city finances stemming from pension reform. He also said his budget pays down more debt than it borrows.

The extra capital spending — \$131 million in all — is spread throughout the city, a far larger and more ambitious spate of improvements than City Hall has proposed in at least seven years.

Curry wants \$8 million to demolish the former county courthouse and City Hall Annex on Bay Street, steps he hopes will make them more attractive sites for private development. He wants another \$1 million for downtown landscaping and lighting improvements, \$1.2 million for repairs to Friendship Fountain and \$1 million for improvements and an extension to the Southbank Riverwalk.

There is \$12 million for road re-surfacing throughout the county, and, through a program he’s dubbed “Safe Neighborhoods,” Curry has proposed \$50 million in improvements that include \$8 million to help build dormitories and a community field at Edward Waters College, as well as money for 42 more Jacksonville Fire and Rescue employees and \$12 million for a back-up communications center.

“We owe our public safety workers better,” Curry said.

The capital budget touches on tens of millions of dollars in smaller-scale projects like sidewalk installations, road widening and park improvements — the kind of spending that district council members, who get the final say, tend to favor.

Curry’s budget keeps in mind other special concerns. He also wants, for example, \$1 million to retrofit five community pools — part of a drowning-prevention effort favored by City Councilman Garrett Dennis, who is chairman of the council’s finance committee.

The finance committee plays an influential role in the budget process, reviewing every piece of the spending plan and having the ability to add or remove money. The group begins its budget review next month.

### ‘HISTORIC’ INCREASE IN COPS

When the 100 new police officers Curry wants would actually hit the street is unclear

The training academy can only take on a limited number of candidates at a time, meaning some of those 100 new positions would not materialize into boots on the ground until the following year. The budget includes money for 80 new positions next year, though Curry wants to give JSO permission to hire up to 100. He said that would streamline the process of gaining the additional 20 when enough recruits have moved through the academy.

The proposed cost of salaries for JSO would in-

crease next year by about \$12 million, which is the result of the 80 new positions Curry is funding in addition to the cost of raises.

Curry had promised as a candidate to hire 147 new officers to get the crime problem under control. He settled on the 147 figure because that’s what former Sheriff John Rutherford said had been lost during Brown’s administration. A chunk of the alleged reduction, about 71 positions, had nothing to do with Brown. Forty-one of those positions stemmed from the Duval County School Board and Jacksonville Port Authority deciding to stop contracting with the Sheriff’s Office to provide security officers at their locations.

Still, restoring the 147 figure became an oft-repeated Curry talking point.

Curry has financed the hiring of 80 new cops through this year, in addition to 80 new community service officers, who handle minor call-outs such as traffic accidents so police officers can concentrate on more serious crime. His proposal for 100 new officers would bring the total to 180 during his term as mayor.

That would boost the JSO headcount to about 1,700, just shy of its peak around 1,800.

“This is historic as far as adding police officers to Jacksonville,” Sheriff Mike Williams said. He said it takes about 11 months for recruits to go through the police academy and be ready to hit the streets. He said the sheriff’s office would strive to train as many recruits as possible

this year, probably in the range of 60 to 80, and then continue moving toward the full 100 new authorized positions.

“So this clearly sets us up for a couple of years, and really sets us up for the long term,” Williams said.

He said additional police hired over the past couple of years have started to turn the tide on violent crime.

“We’re not waving the flag on crime being down because it’s not down enough,” Williams said.

Dennis, the council finance chairman, said it’s “too early to say” on authorizing 100 more police officers. “I want to see the details and I want to see the dollars and make sure that other priorities are met, too,” he said.

The budget also includes \$1 million to build a “crime gun intelligence center” in the Ed Austin State Attorney Building on Monroe Street. The center will house prosecutors and investigators who work with gun-crime technologies like Shotspotter — a surveillance network that uses high-tech microphones to detect gun fire and alert police. A pilot program for Shotspotter is set to launch this month.

Curry is also looking to shake up the Jacksonville Journey and the Children’s Commission, which have somewhat overlapping missions and have frustrated the mayor, who has taken a keen interest in youth programs.

His budget does not address how he plans to reform the Journey and commission — that will come in separate legislation he

## ATTORNEY

Continued from A-1

who advise clients.

Police arrested 57 people, but Mathis was the only one to go to trial. An appellate court threw out his conviction, finding the trial judge had been wrong to stop Mathis’ attorneys from arguing that what Allied had done was legal and not gambling.

Mathis had wanted to argue that Allied was offering sweepstakes, much in the same way McDonald’s does. Florida law says sweepstakes are not gambling if they are used to bring someone into a business that sells a legitimate product, like McDonald’s Monopoly stickers that come with meals. Allied Veterans was selling internet time as a legitimate product, Mathis had said.

During the trial, prosecutors presented people who had purchased hundreds of hours of internet time they had never used because they really came to gamble, but Mathis was not allowed to rebut claims that the practice was illegal.

Bondi’s office decided not to pursue a second trial against Mathis.

In March, Fourth Judicial Circuit Chief Judge Mark Mahon authored a report that urged the Florida Supreme Court to “immediately re-instate” Mathis.

The Florida Bar “completely agreed with the report,” Bar spokeswoman Francine Walker said. She has never seen the court back-date an attorney’s re-instatement like this.

During his four years without a license, Mathis worked as a paralegal.

Authorities had said Allied Veterans, though it was a nonprofit claiming to help veterans, had only given about two percent of its profits to charitable causes. Prosecutors said Mathis’ law firm had billed the nonprofit about \$6 million for his legal services, though his attorneys said the amount was likely less than that and he only billed for actual work his firm had performed.

Though prosecutors charged 57 people, Mathis was the only one who faced prison time after he refused to accept a plea deal. The former presidents of the nonprofit, for example, pleaded no contest. Former Fraternal Order of Police president Nelson Cuba and union vice president Robbie Freitas pleaded guilty, and also faced no prison time.

Mathis, on the other hand, was sentenced to six years in prison after being convicted on about 100 different charges.

Mathis attorney Brian Tannebaum said Mathis’ case was unique in many ways. For one, even after the criminal conviction, the Florida Bar agreed to suspend Mathis, but wait before taking any further action until after Mathis had a chance to appeal. This meant the Bar never had to send Mathis through its disciplinary process.

Tad Delegal, the current Jacksonville Bar Association president, said the case had stunned lawyers.

“It seemed to most attorneys pretty outlandish that he could be criminally prosecuted,” Delegal said. “That was very troubling to me. It was troubling because you are alleging that there was this vast conspiracy to do very illegal things. And yet there were no consequences for the people who allegedly engaged the illegality, or no substantial consequences.”

“I am absolutely excited for Kelly being re-instated.”

said would be filed in a few weeks — but there is at least one hint of what’s to come.

The Journey began as a cocktail of crime-prevention programs ranging from ex-offender re-entry to summer camps. Curry’s budget next year moves programs that don’t deal with at-risk youth out of the Journey and into different departments. Ex-offender re-entry programs, for example, wouldn’t be in the Journey budget. Curry said that helps keep the effort focused on kids.

“I remain committed to those kids so they don’t slip through the cracks,” he said.

### EVERY CORNER OF JACKSONVILLE

Curry’s proposed budget would boost the city’s emergency reserve account to almost \$66 million, an increase of \$10 million. He said that would prepare the city for a future “that is built on a rock.”

City Councilman Reggie Brown, who serves on the council’s Finance Committee, said boosting reserves is a worthwhile goal, but if the city has a “more pressing situation that requires the attention of dollars,” those might need to be taken care of first.

He said it appears that Curry’s budget “touched every corner of Jacksonville,” an assessment shared by Dennis.

“I’m very optimistic,” Dennis said. “It sounds like the mayor has included every part of Jacksonville in his budget.”

Times-Union reporters Christopher Hong and David Bauerlein contributed to this report.