Governor funds $41M STEM building for University of Memphis

By Sam Stockard
Updated: February 03, 2020 9:56 PM CT | Published: February 03, 2020 6:35 PM CT

A student at the University of Memphis, walks to class in front of the Gather on Southern building in January of last year. (Houston Cofield/Daily Memphian)

Bolstering the outlook for engineers and science majors in West Tennessee, Gov. Bill Lee put $41 million in his $40.9 billion budget for a STEM building at the University of Memphis to replace an outdated building.

The second-year Republican governor announced Monday, Jan. 3, he set aside nearly $160 million for capital improvement projects and $70 million for capital
State Rep. Kevin Vaughan, who penned an op-ed on the need for the STEM building at his alma mater, said he was “really excited” to see the university get the opportunity “to advance a program that’s vital to the Memphis area as well as West Tennessee.”

The university’s old engineering building is 32,000 square feet short of what is necessary to move the STEM program forward.

The new building will provide laboratory space, a Carnegie 1 Research Institution and space for students to work on projects “in a collaborative environment,” said Vaughan, a Collierville Republican.

State Rep. Jim Coley, a Bartlett Republican, also worked with Vaughan to lobby the governor for the funding.

In an op-ed published in The Daily Memphian, Vaughan said during a recent trip to the Herff College of Engineering he felt as if he were in a “time warp,” going through a building that had barely changed since he graduated in 1984.

The college’s goal is to double bachelor’s degree and master’s degrees to 235 and 80 per year, respectively, but with a 30% increase in enrollment, it has less space to operate, Vaughan wrote in his op-ed.

In addition, the university could receive $59 million for separate capital improvements projects, including $5 million for athletic facilities, $4 million for athletic media, $5 million for a middle school renovation, $500,000 for Millington
Utility Service connection, $30 million for a mixed-use facility park on campus, $650,000 for Mynders Hall renovation, $12 million for parking garage on west campus and $2 million for residence hall repairs.

The National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis also is slated to receive $300,000 in the governor’s budget.

---

**TOPICS**

**GOV. BILL LEE**  **"UNIVERSITY OF MEMPHIS"**

---

**Sam Stockard**

Sam Stockard is a Nashville-based reporter with more than 30 years of journalism experience as a writer, editor and columnist covering the state Legislature and Tennessee politics for The Daily Memphian.