By a unanimous vote Friday afternoon, the UT Board of Trustees selected Randy Boyd to serve as UT's 26th president for the next five years.

“As I’ve said, naming the president of the University of Tennessee System is one of our most important decisions that we undertake as trustees,” Board Chair John Compton said. “We wanted to make sure we were comprehensive and considerate to all key stakeholders in reaching our decision. Randy Boyd is absolutely the right person to lead the university at this time.”

Trustees approved Boyd serving in the position up to June 30, 2025. He will continue to serve without a salary. He will receive $10,000 per year to cover state health insurance costs.

“I am thankful to all who have shown confidence and support for me to continue as the 26th president of the University of Tennessee,” Boyd said. “It is an honor and a privilege to serve my alma mater and our great state with this great team. Together, we will make this the greatest decade in the history of the University of Tennessee.”

In other business, trustees heard an update on what the university is doing regarding COVID-19, and trustees approved revisions to the university’s tenure policy to extend the probationary period.

Boyd, a UT Knoxville alumnus and Knoxville businessman, has served as interim president of the UT System since Joe DiPietro retired in November 2018. As president, Boyd serves as chief executive officer of the statewide system, which includes the flagship campus in Knoxville, campuses in Chattanooga and Martin, the Health Science Center in Memphis, the Space Institute in Tullahoma, and statewide Institute of Agriculture and Institute for Public Service.

After a positive performance review, Compton recommended foregoing a national search to fill the president position. The other trustees agreed.

“The recommendation was informed by a number of considerations, including the positive momentum of the university, the strategic initiatives that are underway, and, most notably, the favorable feedback received from key stakeholders,” Compton said about moving forward without a national search.

During his time as interim, Boyd established the UT Promise scholarship and mentoring program providing free tuition for Tennessee residents whose family household income is less than $50,000 a year and academically qualify to attend UT. He also led the initiative that created the Oak Ridge Institute at UT, which seeks to create a robust talent pipeline in areas of growing national needs. He also reunited UT Knoxville and UT Institute of Agriculture to elevate the impact and reputation of both.

During the November 2019 Board of Trustees meeting, discussions began to remove the interim title. In December 2019, Compton conducted a formal review of Boyd’s performance, which included requesting feedback from leadership of faculty, staff and students as well as alumni, legislators and others.

After extensive discussion of Boyd’s review and leadership during the February 2020 board meeting, Compton requested Boyd participate in a series of town hall meetings across the state to share his vision for leading the university. Town hall meetings were held in Knoxville, Chattanooga, Nashville, Martin and Memphis between March 4-11.

Boyd is the founder and chairman of Radio Systems Corp., a Knoxville-based business. He also serves as chairman of Boyd Sports and is the owner of the Tennessee Smokies, Johnson City Cardinals, Greeneville Reds and Elizabethton Twins.

Boyd served as chair of the Tennessee Higher Education Commission and as commissioner of the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development. He is founder and co-chair of the Governor’s Rural Taskforce, which exists to help state government and industry leaders find solutions to the biggest challenges facing rural Tennessee.

Boyd also served as Gov. Bill Haslam’s adviser for higher education and was the architect for Tennessee Promise, Drive to 55 and Tennessee Achieves initiatives aimed at increasing the number Tennesseans with post-secondary degrees to 55 percent by 2025 and decreasing financial hardship for those Tennesseans pursuing degrees.

Boyd is the first in his family to graduate from college. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree in business with an emphasis on industrial management from UT Knoxville. He also earned a master’s degree in liberal studies with a focus on foreign policy from the University of Oklahoma.
Dr. Renee LaFleur, associate professor of history, and her daughter, Eleanor, are using the call to stay home during the COVID-19 pandemic as a way to give back to communities in need. The mother-daughter team is making medical face masks out of quilting material for medical professionals in New York. Renee is using the time off campus to not only teach her classes but also teach her daughter important life skills: how to sew and care for others when you can.

“(Her father and I) consistently try to teach her that when you have, you need to share, and we have time and resources to make these masks so it is our responsibility to share and help others,” said Renee.

With material left over from her quilting days, Renee is creating reusable face masks that will benefit medical professionals who are running out of personal protective equipment (PPE). While Eleanor is too young to make the masks by herself, Renee says she loves helping cut out fabric and sewing the straight-edges. The pair has already donated one batch of masks to a supply drive created by Martin gastroenterologist Dr. Nikhil Patel who is sending the PPE to health-care workers in New York, where his son works, and will continue to make more until they run out of supplies.

UT Martin community aids in COVID-19 relief effort

UT Martin, along with multiple Tennessee higher education institutions, has partnered with THEC and TEMA to create personal protective equipment for Tennessee COVID-19 relief aid. UT Martin has centralized all of the 3D-capable printers on campus into the Rogers Media Center and is currently printing headbands for medical face shields.

“We are pleased to engage with the Tennessee Higher Education Commission and other educational partners across the state to provide safety materials to Tennessee’s health-care workers. Our faculty and staff are working to create filament bands for safety masks on our campus 3D printers,” said UT Martin Chancellor Keith Carver. “We want to be a resource for the region and state’s efforts to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic situation.”

The media center, located in the Paul Meek Library,

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continues to add more printers to the operation each day increasing maximum production and support. Currently, the center is running eight printers around the clock to produce as many headbands as possible. THEC (Tennessee Higher Education Commission) has also purchased two additional 3D printers to aid UT Martin’s capacity.

The printers are being operated by faculty, staff and students who all agree that while the work is time-consuming, it is rewarding knowing that they are making a difference for Tennessee medical professionals fighting COVID-19.

“It’s an eye-opening experience because we’ve been doing 3D printing, but not on this scale before. It’s amazing what we are able to do, and it is a humbling experience that we are able to help as many people as we can in this situation that we are in,” said student worker Jordan Bell, of Dresden.

The center is also responsible for cutting out sheets of acetate, as well as elastic to complete the shields that will be assembled after being transported to TEMA (Tennessee Emergency Management Agency.)

“We are grateful that our staff and our students are really passionate about helping people. Without all of us, we couldn’t get this done,” Olivia Fernandez, UT Martin Information Technology Services manager, said.

UT Martin has a quota of 1,000 masks but will continue printing as many headbands as needed until the crisis has ended, according to Fernandez.

The relief project originally began at Austin Peay State University after Gov. Bill Lee called universities to action in the fight against the novel coronavirus. After creating the prototype for the medical mask, universities across Tennessee, including UT Martin and UT Knoxville, joined the effort and have produced hundreds of 3D printed shields so far.

Scott Sloan, chief of Staff and Emergency Services coordinator for THEC, says the contributions from campuses like UT Martin are making a difference in the state.

“There is impact here. My interactions and communications with TEMA have reinforced that this effort is genuinely making a difference,” said Sloan. “Every band that these schools can produce right now is furthering an assessment and virus testing for a Tennessean somewhere in the state.”

From the mass production of face shields for TEMA to a mother-daughter team sewing masks together for doctors across the country, the UT Martin community is working together during a time of crisis to ease the effects of COVID-19.
‘Keeping the Beat hosted by TNMEA’ music series to premiere March 30

The UT Martin Department of Music is partnering with the Tennessee Music Education Association and the CMA Foundation to broadcast “Keeping the Beat hosted by TNMEA,” an interactive, educational livestream series created to engage students and artists during the COVID-19 crisis. “Keeping the Beat hosted by TNMEA” will premiere at 8 p.m. CDT, Monday, March 30, and will air Mondays-Thursdays on the UTM Music Facebook page as well as the “Keeping the Beat hosted by TNMEA” Facebook page and YouTube channel.

“Keeping the Beat” is an expansion of the current Department of Music program “Corona Connection,” but will be hosted by Tennessee Music Education Association with the support of UTM Music. Nightly guest artists will lead interactive discussions about topics in music ranging from education and performance to administration and advocacy.

“I hope this is a way to connect music professionals whose gigs have been canceled and are at home with so much to give, with students and educators whose schools have shut down and are home and hungry for quality educational resources and real-time engagement and inspiration with artists,” said Dr. Julie Hill, chair of the music department. “The world has never been so small and big all at the same time, and the opportunities to connect these two groups together have no borders nor boundaries.”

The focus of this series is to teach K-12 and university music students and educators, not to host live-streamed performances by individual artists.

“The overall purpose is to teach, inspire and challenge viewers with a task or project, as right now, many at home have unexpected extra time on their hands when their regular schedules would not allow space and time to create such things,” said Hill.

The first week’s lineup is as follows:

• March 30: Michael Holland; “From the Trenches: The Practice of Teaching Music”
• March 31: Raffaele Ponti; “Professional Surfing as a Music Director”
• April 1: Joshua Simonds; “Pursuing a Career in Arts Management”
• April 2: Daniel Vargason; “Tax Implications for Musicians”

The series will be funded by the Country Music Association Foundation and Shelby County schools, while the Tennessee Music Education Association and the UT Martin Department of Music are contributing additional staff time.

To tune into “Keeping the Beat,” visit the UTM Music Facebook page. For more information, contact Hill at jhill@utm.edu or 731-881-7418.

You Tell Me

• Question – How is UT Martin helping student workers who are not allowed to work on campus during the COVID-19 crisis?

• Answer – Many UT Martin students have been temporarily displaced from their jobs on campus and in the community due to recent closures from COVID-19. The Displaced Student Worker fundraiser was created to help minimize financial insecurity for students during this time. So far, the Displaced Student Worker Fund has raised more than $15,000. More than 150 alumni, employees and community members have donated to the fund. For more information, visit give.utm.edu.

Submit your questions anonymously to the Suggestion Box link at www.utm.edu/suggestionbox.