

09/15/2016

Greetings, Fabulous Folks of the Fortieth!

First and foremost, I want to express my gratefulness to you, for you have entrusted me to represent you concerning the affairs of this great state of Tennessee.

“Gratitude is born in hearts that take time to count up past mercies.” --Charles E. Jefferson

Staring at a blank screen in my study on Seabowisha Lane, I glance above my computer to my framed “Oath of Office” on the wall that reads:

I, Terri Lynn Weaver do solemnly swear that, as a member of this, One Hundred Ninth General Assembly of The State of Tennessee, I will faithfully support the Constitution of this state and of the United States, and I do solemnly affirm that as a member of this General Assembly I will, in all appointments, vote without favor, affection, partiality, or prejudice; and that I will not propose or assent to any people, or consent to any act or thing, whatever, that shall have a tendency to lessen or abridge their rights and privileges, as declared by the Constitution of this State.

I have been called to three Extraordinary Sessions since elected to serve District 40—education; healthcare; and the latest, correcting a Tennessee code to prevent forfeiting \$60 million of our Federal Highway Funding, and a resolution to expel a member of the General Assembly. I would like to address this recently-adjourned session.

First, I believe we passed a bill that made our roads safer by punishing eighteen- to twenty-year-old DUI offenders under adult standards. Drinking and driving is wrong, it’s a violation of law, and it will be enforced. Alcohol-related traffic collisions kill more young people 16-24 years of age than any other single cause. By stiffening the penalty and raising the blood alcohol content to .08% or greater, we became non-compliant with the feds by leaving out .02% for those 16 but under 21 years of age. Not even our Tennessee “zero tolerance” law that reads, “21 and under can not purchase, possess, transport or consume alcoholic beverages,” meets the federal standards! I would submit that we wean from the federal trough when the 110th General Assembly convenes in January 2017. The federal government continues to usurp powers not delegated to it by the Constitution by holding states hostage or demanding something. Going forward, we need a majority of principled state legislators, who will say enough is enough, and fight to regain state sovereignty. How about we send a tithe of 10% of state revenues to Washington and they live within those means; gas dollars stay here, and we fix and build our own infrastructure needs with our money instead of sending it to the feds and the only way we get it back is by their rules. Something has got to change, or we will continue to be ruled by D.C. and take the bribe. But that argument is better saved for another day.

Yesterday, before entering the House chamber, my heart and spirit weighed heavy. Knowing a resolution would be presented to expel Representative Jeremy Durham, I entered the chamber prepared and knew how I would vote. Believing in due process of law such as a filed complaint, innocent until proven guilty, a fair hearing without prejudice, facing your accuser under oath-- procedures that define a due process--in my humble opinion, the procedures were compromised. Let me be clear: my vote did not defend the accused, but it defined what I believed to be “injurious” to any future member who could be expelled based on rumor or hearsay, placing justice on a very slippery slope. Having already consented to a motion to protect the names of the females involved, it was my duty to vote, and my only options were a red button or a green button. I do not apologize for the vote I made, nor do I admonish members who voted differently or not at all; for each member must reason and discern their own decisions, and uphold the oath we swore to protect. It was unfortunate we even had to participate in such an episode.

I close with a passage from 2 Timothy:

For God did not give us a spirit of fear; but of power, love and a sound mind.

Sincerely,  
Terri Lynn Weaver