

April 15, 2011 - The "Loop"

Voter Photo ID Passes House

Late in the week, we passed a major reform to our electoral system that calls for Tennesseans to present a valid photo ID in order to vote. Various public opinion polls from Tennessee show citizens overwhelmingly support the common sense measure.

The bill, HB 7, passed the House by a wide 57-35 margin. Numerous comments were made in support of the legislation. One of the bill's Republican backers stated, "For years, our system has operated under the premise of 'one person, one vote.' This bill respects that premise and removes any doubt that is the principle guiding our electoral system."

By requiring a simple photo ID, the legislation institutes a common sense reform that ensures every legitimate vote in Tennessee counts. "With the technology we have in today's world," noted another conservative legislator, "there is no excuse to allow someone's legitimate vote to be cancelled out by a person who shouldn't be voting in the first place." The bill now moves to the Tennessee Senate for consideration.

Tenure Reform Becomes Law in Tennessee

During the mid-week, the Governor officially made the education tenure reform bill law by signing HB 2012. The legislation moves tenure for educators from three to five years and links the tenure privilege to revised performance evaluations. The law is part of an ambitious education agenda advanced by the Republican-controlled General Assembly to remake the face of education in Tennessee.

The core principles of these reform initiatives are promoting student achievement and encouraging teacher excellence throughout Tennessee. In the long-term, Republican leaders of the House believe these initiatives will lead to a better trained workforce for the State. "If Tennessee is going to become the No. 1 location in the Southeast for high quality jobs, then it is critical that we improve education because businesses are looking to compete with employees educated for the 21st century workplace," said the Governor. The House Speaker added, "Our goal is to make sure our teachers are equipped with the best tools possible to educate Tennessee students. We want an effective teacher in front of every classroom, and we want those who are excelling to be rewarded. This proposal is absolutely key to education reform."

"Study after study shows when our students have the highest quality teachers leading them they will reach their full potential," said the House Majority Leader. "I'm proud to support the Governor's efforts to identify and protect the best educators in our schools. Ultimately, this law ensures our next generation will be better equipped to enter the workforce and make Tennessee a better place to live and raise a family."

Economic Giant Officially Breaks Ground in Tennessee

Last week, Tennessee received additional good news as it seeks to brand itself as the number one destination for high quality jobs in the South. Wacker Chemical, a worldwide manufacturer of numerous products, hosted a groundbreaking at the location of its soon-to-open operations facility in Bradley County. The company announced it would invest \$1.45 billion into the plant—the largest single private investment in the Chattanooga-area.

The company joins other corporate giants who have recently joined the growing number of top-tier companies to call the Volunteer State home like Volkswagen, Hemlock Semiconductor, Amazon, and others.

One GOP Representative from the area stated, “Bradley County and East Tennessee are leading the way back in our state from the depths of the Great Recession because of great projects like this new Wacker Chemie facility.” The Governor also stated his hope that bringing in a company like Wacker would promote further growth. Another conservative Representative for the area noted, “Wacker increased its investment in Bradley County, adding nearly a half-billion additional dollars and 150 more jobs to the originally planned 500 positions.”

Charter Schools Cap Lifted by House Committee

Legislation at the center of the General Assembly’s education reform package to remove the cap on charter schools passed the House Education Committee on Tuesday. The bill moved by a wide 12-5 margin and now heads to the House Finance Committee for consideration. Under current law, the number of charter schools is capped at 90 statewide. This bill would do away with the cap, while also allowing any student in a charter school's area to attend the school.

Proponents note that increasing the number of charter schools increases the access of Tennessee students to a high quality education. These education reforms moving through the Legislature prioritize student achievement – the standard by which all reforms should be judged. Conservative leaders say that, ultimately, this reform and others are really about job growth in Tennessee.

The Majority Caucus Chair stated, “A wider array of educational opportunities only strengthen our State’s ability to attract a more diverse collection of high-paying jobs for our citizens. We campaigned on high quality jobs last fall—higher standards in education will lead to just that. Check this off as yet another promise kept by our Republican Majority.”

Bills to Combat Illegal Immigration Moving Through House

After several hours of discussion in both subcommittee and full committee, Republicans moved three immigration bills out of State and Local Government Committee this week. The bills enact simple reforms that will address concerns over illegal immigration. The first bill will require all employers—both public and private—to submit the names and Social Security numbers of employees hired. The second piece of legislation asks for a verification to be made of a person’s lawful status and any person found to be an unlawful alien is prohibited from receiving taxpayer benefits, potentially saving the State millions of dollars. The final bill says in the course of a lawful stop, State and local law enforcement must determine the legal status of the individual in question.

Republicans contend that the inaction of the federal government has forced states to implement stringent illegal immigration measures. The bill’s sponsor said, “By taking a comprehensive approach that targets three distinct areas of the law, we can bring the reform demanded by so many of our citizens. I believe this plan will place Tennessee at the forefront of State efforts to combat illegal immigration and provide a blueprint for other States to follow.”

Having passed State and Local Government Committee, the bills now advance to several committees for further consideration.

New Requirements to Fight Meth Advancing

Strong legislation to stop the scourge of meth in Tennessee advanced in the House Health & Human Resources Committee this week. The bill, HB 1051, requires all pharmacies to log the sale of products made from pseudoephedrine into an electronic tracking system. Pseudoephedrine is the main component used by drug users to produce meth, a highly-addictive and destructive drug.

The electronic database is known as the National Precursor Log Exchange. Additionally, the legislation strengthens penalties for drug charges. An individual arrested for meth production in the presence of a child under 8 years old will be classified as a Class A felony while “smurfing” will now be classified a Class A misdemeanor should the bill pass. Smurfing is when several buyers are sent to multiple locations to buy pseudoephedrine products.

The electronic database will not be funded by taxpayer dollars and, instead, will be paid for by the cold medicine manufacturers—an example of a strong relationship that can be forged when government works with the private sector.

In closing...

It is such a blessing and an honor to serve each and every one of you. Please do not hesitate to call on me anytime if I can ever be of assistance to you.

Blessings,
Terri Lynn