

April 1, 2011 - The "Loop"

Tennessee Celebrates One Year Anniversary of Key Education Victory

On Tuesday, Tennessee marked a key anniversary in the State's efforts to comprehensively reform education. One year ago, leaders in the General Assembly and throughout the government learned Tennessee would be awarded the coveted funds associated with "Race to the Top" -- a federal program designed to increase competitiveness and ingenuity in education.

Tennessee was one of only two States to be awarded the funds. Lawmakers convened for an extraordinary session to craft "First to the Top," legislation to ensure Tennessee has the foundation and framework in place to secure these funds. By placing first, Tennessee is given millions of dollars to increase student achievement and encourage teacher excellence.

The reforms in education are part of a larger focus by the General Assembly to make Tennessee the number one State in the South for high quality jobs. Education reforms that raise standards and ensure each student is taught by an excellent teacher are a long-term solution to building a better-equipped and diverse workforce in Tennessee.

In a meeting that marked the anniversary, the Governor discussed the improvements Tennessee has made in the last year. Key stakeholders in winning and executing Tennessee's First to the Top plan participated in the discussion by taking stock of the great progress Tennessee has made and recognizing the work yet to be done for the children of Tennessee.

"Race to the Top has made Tennessee the focal point of education reform in the nation, and I am thankful to those who worked so hard for this incredible opportunity," the Governor said. "After a year we are in a position to bring real reform to our schools, and I am very encouraged about where we are and where we are going."

Currently, we are working through several education reform initiatives. The Legislature passed tenure reform last week and soon plans to take up measures for charter school reform and equal access legislation for all educators. The bills will all prioritize student achievement as the top focus in the State's education system.

House Begins Work on Common Sense Voter Photo ID Plan

On Thursday, the House took a major first step towards enacting a common sense reform that was a cornerstone pledge to voters last fall. HB 7 passed the State & Local Subcommittee and is expected win approval from the full Committee next week.

The legislation simply requires a voter to present qualified photo identification before voting. Voters without proper identification shall be allowed to cast provisional ballots. Most Members of the General Assembly highlighted this legislation as a top priority and believe the bill instills integrity in our electoral process.

The sponsor of the legislation remarked, "Last year, we told Tennesseans we will take steps to ensure validity and integrity are part of our voting system. This legislation provides a simple check and balance at the ballot box to make sure every Tennessean's vote will count. This is a common sense reform citizens have asked for time and time again. I am proud our Majority is working hard to live up

to the pledges we make to voters.”

Legislature Makes Major Move to Fix Legal Loophole with Common Sense Reform

In the mid-week, the House Judiciary Committee passed the “Exclusionary Rule Reform Act” which will close off a technicality from being abused by some of Tennessee’s most violent criminals.

The Chairman of the Committee sponsored the legislation after advocating for the legal fix over the last few years. News reports have highlighted an alarming trend of criminals using the exclusionary rule to get evidence gathered against them thrown out of court. This legislation merely codifies a good faith exception to the rule which provides judges an avenue to keep the evidence when a minor, technical mistake was made in the course of the investigation.

The Chairman stated, “I have worked hard over the last few years to clarify this particular area of the law so court cases will be able to proceed. There is no excuse for a harmless and minor glitch, which has no bearing on a criminal investigation and case, to be the reason a violent criminal escapes prosecution. This common sense fix will ensure the integrity of our judicial system and let victims of crime know their attackers will be brought to justice.”

The legislation will soon go to the full House of Representatives for a vote on final passage.

Representative Terri Lynn Weaver Releases Statement on HB 1085

(NASHVILLE, March 31, 2010) – The House State and Local Subcommittee yesterday passed a major initiative sponsored by Representative Terri Lynn Weaver (R—Lancaster) that will help the State track student enrollment and chart the cost of illegal immigration for taxpayers.

HB 1085 simply requires persons enrolling children for the first time in public schools to submit the student's social security number, a visa as issued by the United States, or certain birth certificates. Additionally, it requires schools to submit certain enrollment information to the Department of Education for inclusion in the department's annual report.

Rep. Weaver released the following statement about the bill’s movement:

“I’m encouraged by the action taken by the subcommittee. I believe this is a strong first step towards ensuring our valuable resources are only being used for Tennessee citizens.

“Our General Assembly is committed to strong oversight of the use of taxpayer dollars, especially when it comes to education. We pledged to safeguard our State’s fiscal resources and this bill is consistent with that philosophy. As we work towards overall education reform, we must be confident that every dollar is being spent wisely.”

In Brief...

In the House Finance Subcommittee, legislation known as the “Empowering Educators with Equal Access” reform was passed through to the full Committee. The House Speaker ensured passage of the much-needed reform by casting the decisive vote in the Subcommittee. Late on Wednesday, legislation to stem the tide of illegal immigration in the State was passed in the House State & Local Subcommittee. The three pieces of legislation make up a comprehensive plan for

greater enforcement and stronger guidelines on illegal immigration. The sponsor stated, “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.”

The First Lady of Tennessee sat down with parents and guardians at Algood Elementary School in Putnam County on Monday. She invited parents of school-age children to participate in the roundtable discussion as part of her effort to learn how the state can encourage parental and community engagement. During the visit, the First Lady learned about the Algood school’s unique plan to improve parent and family participation, having adopted the Putnam County Schools Family Engagement Plan. “Education is a shared responsibility by the schools, parents, and communities, and I’m very impressed with the school system’s family engagement plan,” said the First Lady. “It recognizes that parents and guardians are a vital part of a child’s learning, and creates a comfortable environment for parents and teachers to work together.”

The House will soon vote on a measure to protect teachers from being disciplined for pointing out weaknesses in scientific research. The legislation encourages critical-thinking skills in the classroom and merely requires public schools to “create an environment” in which teachers “respond appropriately and respectfully to differences of opinion about controversial issues.

In closing...

Thank you Macon, Smith and DeKalb for participating in this weeks 4-H, Right to Life Chapter Directors, Tennessee Health Care Association, Smith County Junior Leadership and to Bobby Cheely who did a fabulous job paging on the house floor. I love it when fine folks young and older come to Nashville to see government in action. Also a big thanks for the homemade peanut brittle from Ms. Bray and the mason jar of Smith county honey from Ronnie Bussell.

As always, it’s an honor to serve you.

Blessings,
Terri Lynn