

April 8, 2011 - The "Loop"

Tort Reforms Move Along in Judiciary Committee

After much discussion, the House Judiciary Subcommittee moved forward with legislation to cap damages stemming from lawsuits in Tennessee. The tort reforms will provide stability in the legal system and ensure lawsuit abuse does not become a reality in Tennessee.

The bill has been a major cornerstone of the Republican Majority's jobs package, with the Administration stressing the need for the proposal in order to create a jobs-friendly environment in Tennessee. The reforms set in stone much-needed stability so businesses in Tennessee will be able to adequately budget. We have fought for several years to pass various tort reform measures, and are extremely pleased to see the bill moving forward. The bill will now be heard in the full Judiciary Committee.

Governor, Lt. Gov., and Speaker Unveil Career Coach Vehicles for Tennessee

The Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and Speaker today unveiled three vehicles designed to improve outcomes for those looking for work. Three "Career Coaches" were customized with 10 computer workstations with Internet access, printers, fax machines, and flat screen TV's with SMART Board overlays to facilitate classroom instruction. The intent of these roving offices is to bring job matching and training to rural communities that have limited access to a Tennessee Career Center.

The vehicles will be based in Huntingdon, Nashville and Knoxville in order to cover all areas of the state. Each mobile unit will be staffed with three Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development employees who are trained in career counseling and unemployment benefits.

"These mobile career centers will provide Tennesseans across this state with the information, assistance, and equipment they need to find jobs and career opportunities," the Speaker said. "Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development employees will provide them with the tools they need to succeed in today's economy, and I applaud Governor Haslam and Commissioner Davis for making this a priority."

Major Initiatives for Election Reform

On Thursday we passed major legislative initiatives meant to reform how elections are conducted and administered in the Volunteer State.

Taken together, the bills clarify the Tennessee Code to make it consistent with legal precedence that has governed election commissions. The bills also define the responsibilities of administrators of elections and provide greater local oversight over how elections are conducted. These bills ensure there is a concrete route for dealing with concerns raised by election observers.

A central tenet of the Republican platform is local control. These bills are all representative of that philosophy as they ensure greater access by county officials who can best ensure a free and fair election for the citizens of Tennessee. As the prime sponsor of HB709, this bill simply removes early voting if there is not any opposition in a municipal election (city council) and it does not coincide with the August or November election. This legislation will be a savings to our counties statewide. My focus is how to do government better by ultimately reducing the costs and size of government.

We Welcome New Tennessee Commissioner of Education

On Tuesday, the Governor swore in his pick to guide Tennessee's Department of Education. The new Commissioner of Education is tasked with guiding and implementing the much-needed reforms that are at the heart of the education initiatives moving through the General Assembly. Following the swearing in ceremony, key leaders of the House of Representatives released statements applauding the Commissioner's appointment.

The Speaker stated, "I am looking forward to working with Commissioner Huffman to ensure Tennessee students have every opportunity at their fingertips and every classroom has a great teacher at the helm. His background of strong reform will build on the momentum we currently have here to make our schools even better. Strong schools lead to job growth and prepare the next generation for our global economy. The Republican Education Committee Chairman said, "I look forward to working with Commissioner Huffman over the coming years to enact an agenda that is both visionary and attainable. Raising the standards for student achievement and teacher excellence is a laudable goal and I am confident we will reach it."

Commissioner Huffman is the former executive vice president of Teach for America, a nationwide organization that recruits educators. Mr. Huffman is an attorney who taught in the classroom and has a decade of experience as an administrator under his belt.

We Pass Tough Sex Offender Registry Legislation

Early in the week, House Republicans overwhelmingly passed a reform to the criminal code that closes a loophole that allows sexual offenders to find refuge. The bill requires all sexual offenders who are incarcerated, but who have not yet registered as a sexual offender or violent sexual offender, to be registered in the institution in which they are incarcerated by no later than August 1, 2011.

Effectively, the bill increases public safety as it will catalogue and publicize the sexual offenders around the State. It ensures those who have been convicted of a sexual offense have to sign a TBI registration form. The TBI then takes the person's information and places it into the sexual offender database.

The Republican sponsor of the legislation stated, "This is an important move for our General Assembly. It reinforces our commitment to increase safety for Tennessee families. I have seen the destruction and detrimental effects sexual abuse can have on victims. The fact our law currently allows some criminals to legally continue harassing their victims is unacceptable. Our Majority is committed to preventing further victimization of Tennesseans by the worst kind of criminals."

Tennessee Says Goodbye to a Tennessee Original, Former Governor Ned McWherter

Members of the General Assembly were saddened to hear the news of the passing of former Governor of Tennessee, Ned McWherter. Many veteran Members of the Chamber served with McWherter, including many Republicans.

Gov. McWherter was first elected to the House of Representatives in 1968. After a few terms, he was elected to be Speaker of the House. He would go on to serve Tennessee as Governor for two terms in 1986.

After learning of his passing, Speaker Harwell stated, "Tennessee lost a true statesman with the passing of Governor McWherter. He understood the role of the legislative body, and he carried it out to the fullest. He will be missed, and my heart goes out to his family during this difficult time."

Two memorial services will be held for Governor McWherter, one on Saturday at 2 p.m. in Nashville at the War Memorial Auditorium. The other service will be held at 1:30 p.m. on the front lawn of McWherter's home in Dresden. Both memorials are open to the public.

Unclaimed Property Website for Tennesseans

I urge citizens throughout Tennessee to visit an updated State website that features hundreds of listings for unclaimed property.

In terms of property, Tennessee does not hold to a law of escheat, meaning that unclaimed property after a certain time period “returns to the crown”. The State—through the Treasury Department—holds unclaimed property until it is reclaimed by the rightful owner, or by the owner’s heirs (if the owner is deceased). Anyone can search for unclaimed properties by name at this website:

<http://treasury.tn.gov/unclaim/FindUnclaimed.html>. “I would hope every Tennessean visits this site to check for any property that may rightfully be theirs. Far too many citizens are unaware of this fact and I hope this site helps correct that. Typically the property that is held by the Treasurer’s office is intangible property. A few common examples might be uncashed payroll checks, utility deposits, customer refunds, dormant checking and savings accounts, mutual funds, and stock. This is a prime example of how our government can help our residents and I encourage everyone to spread the word about this resource.”

Tennessee's State Treasurer remarked, “The Unclaimed Property Division within the Treasury Department returned over \$23.6 million and 250,000 shares of securities to approximately 20,000 claimants last fiscal year. This is an outstanding program that benefits citizens of this State.”

Visitors from the 40th!

It was such a joy to showcase the many talented and gifted artists from Macon, Smith and DeKalb Counties during Arts Day on the Hill this week. Arts Advocacy Day on the Hill is an annual event that promotes the importance of the Arts and the effect it has on our culture. As one who is a strong advocate of the Arts, I certainly enjoyed hosting this event and having a reception in honor of those who participated. Hats off to those of you who attended!

I also want to thank Sheriff Steve Hopper and his Chief Deputy Eugene Roberts for visiting my office this week. It is always so great to have my local officials stop by.

It was also Ladies Day on the Hill with a record number of Republican women from all over the state emerge on the State Capitol. Governor Bill Haslam addressed the annual event. I too, was asked to speak, as well as, sing the National Anthem. It was a huge honor for me.

In closing, please feel free to call on me at any time if I can ever be of assistance to you at (615) 741-2192. It is such an honor to serve you all.

Blessings,
Terri Lynn Weaver