

December 2, 2011

Greetings! Though some say the national economy is slowly improving, still on the horizon for this year's agenda there will be another round of budget cuts even though we have seen a slight increase in state revenues by 5 per cent, more than we had anticipated. That is some good news. However that being said we have some big budget busters to deal with like the rising cost in Health care, education and public pensions which are a huge strain and will eat up most of the states new cash flow. Wisdom would dictate to still prepare for the worst. The Governor commented that revenues are better but we also have more obligations. Talking with those whom I represent in the 40th district the general consensus is to remain vigilant continue the department cuts and live in the new norm, doing more with less.

Good news for the state as being scored above the national average and praised as a national leader for its availability and use of data to improve public education, according to the Data Quality Campaign. This national nonprofit existing solely to encourage policymakers to improve their use of data in order to get the best results for student achievement scored Tennessee a 7 out of 10 with the national average score being 4.6. That, my friend, proves just how well our school administrators, principals, and teachers are rolling up their sleeves and getting the job done. Collecting data is of no use if not implemented. By including "value-added" scores in teacher evaluations shows true leadership. Teachers receive a value added score to show our students year to year improvements on state tests. I applaud the hard work ethics being performed by those involved with educating our most precious asset, our children.

The Tennessee Department of Safety and Homeland Security announced that the state has issued about 6,600 photo ID's for voting purposes. A new state law will require a federal or state issued photo ID free of charge, in order to vote in 2012. Folks I believe we must do all we can to protect the ballot box. This is a means to that end. At least we still live in a country where your life is not in danger when going to vote as in some other places in this world. So if you have not taking care of this, please do what is required and get your photo ID. The state has opened 19 driver service centers to help facilitate the voter. Do the right thing and be prepared for 2012!

I want to thank the Macon County Ministerial Association who sponsored the kick off Christmas Tour of my newest CD "On Christmas Night" What a blessing to have my son Justin performing with me and my mother to join us for a song as well. Christmas time is coming and I look forward to seeing those of you whom I represent in the parades and events to follow.

Blessings!