

June 24, 2011 - The "Loop"

In our final legislative days, the House moved legislation that will amend the State's Constitution. Senate Joint Resolution (SJR) 127 is a constitutional amendment that would bring the Constitution of the State of Tennessee back to a position of neutrality regarding abortion. Once again, SJR 127 enjoyed bi-partisan support.

This amendment restores protections for citizens through common sense measures regarding a very personal matter in the lives of many women. SJR127 simply restores the authority of the people acting through their elected officials, to legislate abortion. Our State has a strong record of protecting life and this amendment will forever enshrine that principle in our Constitution.

Many of us fought for the passage of the constitutional amendment for several years, but our efforts were blocked in subcommittees. The process for amending the State's Constitution is a long one. Joint resolutions must pass one General Assembly by a majority, which we accomplished last year. In the subsequent General Assembly, it must be passed by two-thirds, before finally being put to the voters in the next gubernatorial election. Having accomplished those requirements, the amendment now goes before voters in 2014! Yesterday on the Hill I had the honor to stand with fellow members along with the Governor holding that piece of legislation that means much to me, saving the lives of those who do not have a voice, the unborn.

In addition to this Amendment, we also took another strong stand to respect life of the unborn. House Bill 498 passed unanimously because of strong leadership. The new law treats the murder of a pregnant woman as two separate deaths. We also passed legislation that closes a loophole allowing sexual offenders to find refuge. 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. Reinforcing 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 simply wrong. I am committed to preventing further victimization of Tennesseans by the worst kind of criminals.

Recently, there have been a number of accounts of violent situations at work. In fact, a study by the U.S. Department of Labor found that 50% of firms that employ over 1,000 workers reported instances of workplace violence. Annually, over 1.7 million individuals are victims of violence at the office.

The 107th General Assembly brought legislation to full passage that protects Tennessee workers while at their places of employment. The bill, HB 1586, addresses violence in the workplace by criminalizing extortion, coercion, and violence at work.

I remain committed to make Tennessee the best right-to-work State in the nation. Employers are also protected by the legislation and the exemption for labor unions is removed from the Tennessee Code.

In closing, under the current system, criminals have avoided responsibility for their actions. In the passage of HB694, defendants can still make a case in front of a judge to obtain probationary status but must take responsibility. It brings fairness to the courtroom and sends a message that accountability and victims' rights will be respected in our judicial process. This bill consolidates the methods for deferral of criminal proceedings and removes an avenue that criminals could use to delay their sentence and brings closure to the victim.

These weekly "Loops" are intended to keep you informed of the actions being accomplished on the Hill in Nashville. I pray they have been helpful. Have a safe and celebrating 4th of July. Fly our flag for it is truly a blessing to live in this great nation.

Blessings, Terri Lynn