

March 25, 2011 - The "Loop"

## Common Sense Education Reforms Moving Through General Assembly

Since taking office in January, the Governor has made clear his vision for wholesale reform of Tennessee's education system. He has said student achievement should be the cornerstone of any educational initiative. Legislators agree and have stated on numerous occasions that promoting teacher excellence is one way to ensure that vision becomes a reality for Tennessee students.

The Speaker and Lieutenant Governor have confirmed their respective Chambers will aide the Governor's quest to raise standards in our classrooms. This week, major legislation was advanced to that end in the House.

On Thursday, in a landslide vote of 64-32, the teacher tenure reform legislation easily won approval in the House. The bill's sponsor said, "We said last fall that we would do what it takes to make Tennessee the number one destination for high-quality jobs in the South. That included top-to-bottom reforms in business regulation and education. This is yet another promise kept to Tennesseans that we are committed to bringing accountability to the classroom to ensure every student is led by a great teacher." The House Majority Leader added, "The Governor laid out a clear vision for raising standards and bringing more accountability to our educational system. We've done just that with passage of this legislation. With high-performing teachers, our students will receive the training and skills they need to be successful in the workforce. That means more and better jobs for Tennesseans."

On Wednesday, the charter school initiative started its legislative trek. The House Education Subcommittee held debate on the legislation and is expected to vote on the measure next week. The legislation will do away with the current restriction on the number of charter schools allowed in Tennessee and provide greater access to a quality education to Tennessee students. These measures, along with other initiatives moving through the House, will ultimately lead to a more diverse and skilled workforce in Tennessee, bringing in more businesses and jobs to the Volunteer State.

## U.S. Senator Corker Visits the General Assembly, Offers Strong Conservative Message

On Tuesday, U.S. Senator Bob Corker (R-TN) paid a visit to the General Assembly where he spoke with Members and gave an encouraging message about the work being done in Nashville.

The Senator spoke to the Members about international affairs and education matters but spent the majority of time talking about the fiscal crisis facing our nation. He remarked, "...I was here to encourage them to help us motivate lawmakers throughout our state at the federal level and to talk with their citizens that they represent, their constituents, about how important it is to take action." He pointed out he was proud of the efforts to rein in spending at the State level and hopes to lead the federal government to follow suit.

The Senator was welcomed by the Speaker and introduced by the Lieutenant Governor and afterwards took questions from the Members about issues facing Tennessee.

## Work of the Governor and General Assembly Lead to Job Growth in West Tennessee

The State received encouraging news during the week as a federal grant had been approved for construction to begin on a new deepwater port in Northwest Tennessee on the Mississippi River.

However, the grant would have been removed had it not been for the hard work of the Governor and some Members of the House.

For several weeks now, the Governor and legislators from West Tennessee have highlighted the fact Tennessee needed to find resources to continue moving forward with construction plans for the forthcoming Port at Cates Landing. When it is finished, the port will lead to approximately 1,700 jobs and bring in a much-needed economic boost of \$354 million to the local economy. The facility will be the deepest port on the Mississippi River between Baton Rouge, LA and Saint Louis, MO. The positive commerce and shipping effects of the project will be felt throughout Tennessee.

### Empowering Educators with Equal Access Bill Moving Through the House

The House moved legislation touted as a “new way forward” on education reform this week by passing HB 130 out of the House Education Committee. The pro-teacher legislation gives a voice to all teachers who have not had a voice in education negotiations over matters in the classroom. The bill, like many other common sense measures working their way through the Legislature, promotes student achievement and allows teachers to be rewarded for excellence in the classroom through items like merit pay.

The bill calls for a collaborative effort at the education negotiating table between all interested stakeholders and allows for “equal access” to all professional teaching associations. The Governor recently stated his support for the measure because it, “(G)ives superintendents greater flexibility in making personnel decisions and supports my central focus of doing what's best for children in Tennessee classrooms.” The bill now moves on to the Budget Committee for consideration.

### General Assembly Begins Work on Health Care Compact

Tennessee is poised to take the lead in reasserting the role of States with recent legislative maneuvers—a priority for many voters in last fall’s elections who believed the federal government has stepped into areas not meant for Washington.

After passing the Health Care Freedom Act two weeks ago and the Governor signing it into law, the Legislature started working on the Health Care Compact. The Compact is a multi-State effort to rein in the federal government and allow States to determine their own individual plans for health care coverage for their citizens. The States utilize federal resources for the programs and get to determine the amount of government interference over health care decisions.

The Act envisions a partnership among the States and Congress to bring more transparency, accountability, and individual responsibility to health care at the local level, instead of allowing the bureaucracies of Washington to run the system. The measure currently is being debated in the House Health Committee.