

May 27, 2011 - The "Loop"

As in the great lyrics of the old Bing Crosby song would say, "You've got to accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative, latch on to the affirmative and don't mess with Mister In-between". The 107th General Assembly's first chapter, now behind us, was a very productive and efficient session indeed. Passing significant legislation in education, giving teachers a choice and a voice, tort reform which will curb frivolous lawsuits, SJR127 that will return our State Constitution to a position of neutrality on abortion, and putting into place part one of a three part immigration reform by enacting E-Verify a tracking system that informs who is here legally or not. All of this and more plus reducing the state budget by over a billion bucks, I truly believe we are making Tennessee a better place to live, work and raise a family. Oh I forgot to say we gave a tax break to our seniors through a deduction in the Hall Tax. Not to mention investing in key priorities like restoring the rainy day fund by 70 million and setting aside 71 million for disaster funds that will assist fellow Tennesseans due to the devastating tornadoes and high flooding in west Tennessee.

After late into the night Saturday the House and Senate adjourned the earliest it has concluded in 13 years saving the taxpayers even more in legislative expenses as a result. Yes it matters who governs. This Republican Majority stayed focused on honoring our pledge to lower government spending in Tennessee, and move passage on some strong conservative principles regarding our economy, education and immigration.

We accomplished much however we have much yet to do. Already I am working on legislation that will reduce if not remove that "tax that never dies" called the inheritance or death tax.

In closing, the 26th President of this United States Theodore Roosevelt once said, "The greatest prize that life has to offer is the chance to work hard at work worth doing." I thank you, the good folks of the fortieth district for giving me the honor to work hard for you. With the first half of the 107th General Assembly complete until January 2012 when we pick up where we left off, I look forward to seeing you where you live, work and play in the greatest district of all.

The Professional Educators Collaborative Conferencing Act of 2011

I want to take a moment to talk to you about one of the great reforms put into place by our conservative Majority in the State Legislature.

While we have spent much time reining in government spending, limiting regulations, and protecting the freedoms Tennesseans cherish, we have placed most of our emphasis on bringing common sense solutions to the problems our education system faces.

In this session alone, we have instituted changes to our teacher tenure system, so our best and brightest teachers will be retained by schools. We have lifted the cap on charter schools so every child in Tennessee will have access to a quality education. We also passed legislation that protects our hard-working teachers' salaries from being reduced. Finally, at the end of the session, we presented comprehensive legislation to the Governor that empowers every Tennessee teacher like never before.

The Professional Educators Collaborative Conferencing Act of 2011, does away with the antiquated model of adversarial mandatory negotiating by the education union and instead will provide a route for every individual teacher to have a voice at the education negotiating table. It opens up direct lines of communication between all education stakeholders so that education policy will reflect the will of teachers, parents, and administrators.

The bill, created with the input of teachers and school boards, authorizes a number of historic reforms in education including:

- Retains the provisions regarding the rights of professional employees;
- Collective bargaining is replaced by collaborative conferencing;
- Ensures that teachers may engage in collaborative conferencing with boards of education individually, with other teachers, or through representation by a professional employee organization; and,
- Requires training in collaborative problem-solving to be developed for the school board by the Tennessee Organization of School Superintendents.

Educators will now have the ability to represent themselves in education discussions or enlist the help of the Professional Educators of Tennessee (PET), the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), Tennessee Education Association (TEA), or

other qualified education associations.

Under current law, far too many teachers are forced into silence because they are not represented by a select union. That has led to the exclusion of some of our hardest working and most experienced voices in education. Current law also has forced our best and brightest teachers to have their achievements ignored, resulting in average pay and average recognition. In effect, collective bargaining required all teachers to be paid the same, regardless of their caliber of instruction. This certainly is no way to treat the valuable individuals responsible for guiding and training our next generation of leaders in Tennessee.

In the collaborative environment envisioned by this historic legislation, all teachers and their invaluable perspectives will be accounted for in curriculum and education policy. Teachers will have direct input about items such as salary and benefits. Under this system, teachers will be viewed on the basis of their achievements in the classroom, not their seniority. Additionally, lines for free flowing communication are established between the directors of school and the professional employees who work for the local board of education—a reform that recognizes the free speech rights of all teachers.

Beyond these reforms, let me take a moment to address what this bill does not do. While critics will try and obscure this fact, this legislation does not outlaw any union or association. It does not limit the voice of any teacher. It does not take away any insurance opportunity for our teachers.

In reality, this legislation opens up greater opportunities for teachers. It puts us all on the same team so that the focus will be on student achievement and encourage the teaching excellence our State needs to equip our children with the skills they need for the 21st century job market.

Our teachers represent one of our State's most valuable resources. For far too long, we have heard about the individual who works long into the night and spends countless hours patiently and effectively guiding our children thinking no one notices this hard work. I believe they deserve to be heard and rewarded. Thanks to this legislation, they will.

Should you have any questions about this legislation or any other matter, feel free to contact me at (615)741-2192. It is an honor to represent you. I will always do my best to fight for less government, lower taxes, and more freedom for every Tennessean.

Blessings,
Terri Lynn Weaver