



The Weekly Update

Tennessee General Assembly

House of Representatives

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The 106th session of the Tennessee General Assembly officially ended this week.

Listed below are a few of the bills I carried during this legislative session which I feel will have a direct, positive impact on many individuals in my district.

- HB 93 Requires criminal background checks to be conducted for nursing home direct care employees prior to employment.
- HB 839 Expands eligibility for Helping Heroes educational grants
- HB 2503 Regarding automatic dialing devices (robo calls): Prohibits those utilizing automatic dialing devices with an area code in Tennessee from displaying “unknown number”, or conceal or misrepresent the telephone number being utilized. I could only apply this to Tennessee numbers due to Federal Communications Commission laws.
- HB 2504 Provides a pilot program that allows county clerks to issue certified copies of birth certificates. Previously these were issued only by the Health Department.
- HB 3389 Requires state supervisory personnel to be physically present in Tennessee while supervising employees working in this state.
- HB 3391 Authorizes circuit court judges in Davidson County having domestic or probate jurisdiction to appoint one or more persons to act as “master”. This person would be required to have a law degree and would hear domestic cases, then the judge would review and approve (or disapprove) the master’s findings. This came at the request of local Davidson County judges who have a tremendous backlog of cases to be heard. Any party to such a lawsuit could request and receive a full hearing by the judge rather than the master.
- HJR 1305 This resolution urges the Department of Health to provide free replacement copies of vital records to flood victims who lost these records in the flood.

Budget:

We passed a balanced budget plan that leaves over \$600 million in Tennessee's rainy day fund.

This year has been one of the toughest in our legislature's history. For three years, Tennessee has been fighting an uphill battle to regain positive economic growth. For many states, the financial crisis has meant massive cuts of employees and epic reductions in services to try and create balanced budgets. However, Tennessee has been able to weather the recent financial crisis with responsible spending cuts and help from Tennessee's Rainy Day Fund. We passed legislation to help create jobs, improve our schools, and protect our citizens with no new taxes.

Small Business Development and Job Creation Opportunities: In 2009, the Tennessee General Assembly welcomed Hemlock Semiconductor and Wacker Chemie AG to the Volunteer State. These two companies, along with Volkswagen in Chattanooga, have brought the promise of thousands of new jobs to Tennessee.

This year, recognizing that small businesses are the backbone of Tennessee's economy, the state House of Representatives proposed the creation of a program to help small businesses expand and create new job opportunities. Known as the Small Business Opportunity Fund, the program would work in combination with private investment to offer small businesses financial assistance to expand and create new jobs within the company.

Better Teachers, Better Schools, Better Futures: In January, Governor Bredesen called a special session of the Tennessee General Assembly on the issue of education. The purpose of the special session was for the House and Senate to adopt new legislation that would put Tennessee in a position to receive new federal dollars to improve K-12 schools across the state.

The "Race to the Top" program required states to implement education-reform measures that promote the development of "great teachers and leaders." These reforms included the adoption of teacher evaluations that use multiple measures that take into account student growth and learning data in assessing a teacher's success.

The Legislature passed the necessary reforms and, in March, Tennessee and Delaware became the first two states approved under the "Race to the Top" guidelines. This allowed Tennessee to receive nearly \$500 million in new education funding, with half of the funds split proportionally between individual school districts in all 95 counties.

Protecting Families and Tennessee's Most Vulnerable: Last year we worked to restore the funding for the Department of Children Services and Tennessee Mental Health programs, two programs constantly under assault for its necessary costs.

In 2010, recognizing that such funding attacks could potentially happen again, some House members began talks early in the year with leaders on both sides of the aisle in order to protect important programs that help children and adults suffering in difficult and abusive environments. Thanks in large part to these talks, funding in these areas was preserved.

In addition, this year significant steps were taken to get tough on child predators. State Representative Henry Fincher sponsored legislation adding the offense of aggravated rape of a child to the list of sexual offenses for which an offender must be sentenced to community supervision for life. Also State Representative Ty Cobb passed a law making it a crime to harbor a known runaway child or help a child escape from the custody of the child's parents or law enforcement.

Improving Safety & Reducing Crime:

In 2009, State Representatives John DeBerry took on criminals with guns by passing legislation that creates the added charge of "attempting to commit first degree murder" to any criminal committing a dangerous felony with a firearm.

State Representative Gary Odom worked to extend the time violent criminals stayed in jail for first offenses from an average of 25 percent of their sentence to a minimum of 70 percent. Under the legislation, criminals that commit aggravated robbery would now be locked up for a minimum of nearly 6 years, rather than the current average of just over 2 years.

The Legislature got tougher on drunk drivers thanks to two different pieces of legislation by House Judiciary Chairman Kent Coleman. Under one bill, the list of substances that can be cited as potential causes for driving under the influence was expanded to include any "controlled substance, drug, substance affecting the central nervous system" that "impairs to any extent the driver's ability to safely operate a motor vehicle."

In addition, Chairman Coleman sponsored legislation allowing general sessions courts that normally try cases of DUI to also make a determination at the same time whether a driver violated the implied consent law if they refused a blood or breathalyzer test. By allowing one court to conduct both hearings, drivers found guilty would immediately lose use of their license and be off the streets faster.

Promoting Equality In Business:

A recent study in Tennessee found that nearly 98 percent of state contracts are awarded to male or Caucasian-owned businesses. While African-Americans make up nearly 20 percent of Tennessee's population and women of every race make up over half the population of the United States, companies owned by women and minorities work on less than 2 percent of the business required of the state.

This year we began taking steps to ensure that a fair opportunity for success is being made available to all companies, regardless of race or gender. With the help of language provided in a bill sponsored by State Representative Larry Miller, the House and Senate adopted an omnibus bill that will require the state to regularly review its bidding process and ensure that the system used does not benefit any one group.

The steps are expected to be reviewed in the near future to assess if the changes are working and to determine if more work is needed.

Flood victims: The House and Senate voted to waive sales tax on the items flood victims need most such as major appliances, furniture, building supplies and tools. The Department of Revenue is finalizing the process to apply for the waiver, and will soon have the application process posted on their website's front page at <http://www.state.tn.us/revenue/>. Some important facts to remember:

- 1) The waiver will be for qualified purchases made by September 30, 2010.
- 2) You may only file one claim, so all items that qualify for the waiver should be put on one single claim form.
- 3) Claim must be filed by November 30, 2010.

Flood Info from TEMA for Renters

Renters in Tennessee who lost their homes or personal property as a result of Tennessee's severe storms, straight-line winds, tornadoes and flooding between April 30 and May 18, 2010, may be eligible for assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) but must register by **Tuesday, July 6**.

Regardless of whether someone rented an apartment, mobile home or house before the storm, renters whose homes were made uninhabitable due to severe storm damage may qualify for assistance from FEMA's Individual and Households Program (IHP). This program offers two kinds of housing assistance that target eligible renters:

- Funds to rent alternative housing for a limited period of time while repairs are made to their dwelling.
- Free assistance in finding new rental property.

Renters may also be eligible for Other Needs Assistance (ONA), designed to help survivors with uninsured, but necessary, expenses and serious needs caused by the disaster.

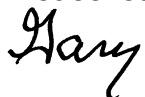
ONA money may be used for:

- Disaster-related medical and dental expenses.
- Disaster-related funeral and burial expenses.
- Replacement or repair of necessary personal property lost or damaged in the disaster including clothing; household items such as room furnishings or appliances; and tools and equipment required by the self-employed for their work.
- Primary vehicles and approved second vehicles damaged by the disaster.

Tennesseans, in the counties designated for individual assistance, may apply online anytime at www.DisasterAssistance.gov or call the FEMA helpline at **800-621-3362 (FEMA)** or **(TTY) 800-462-7585** for those with speech and hearing disabilities. The helpline operates from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. and assistance is available in all languages.

Since we are out of session, I will now begin sending monthly reports rather than weekly.

Please let me know if I may assist you in any way.



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Weekly Update Is For Informational Purposes Only