

# Capitol Hill Update

71st District State Representative David "Coach" Byrd

**House Focuses on Assisting Veterans in Tennessee**  
 Republicans in the House have spent a great deal of time this legislative session focusing on bills to assist veterans and currently serving military personnel in Tennessee. Building on legislation passed over the last several General Assemblies, the House hopes to continue finding ways to make life easier for military members and their families in the state.

One bill from this year, House Bill 8, will ensure high school students that train between their junior and senior year in the National Guard or go to advanced training after their senior year will still remain eligible for the state's Tennessee Promise program. The Tennessee Promise Program, set to begin this fall with the class of 2015, provides high school graduates the opportunity to attend a community or technical college free of tuition and fees. It is both a scholarship and mentoring program that provides last-dollar scholarships that cover costs not met from the Pell, HOPE, or TSAA scholarship programs. While removing the financial burden is key, a critical component of the Tennessee Promise is the individual guidance each participant will receive from a volunteer mentor who provides guidance and assistance as the student enters higher education. In addition, under the program, students are required to complete eight hours of community service per enrolled term, as well as maintain at least a 2.0 GPA.

Also on the education front, the House recently gave final approval to legislation updating the state's laws pursuant to the Veterans Access, Choice, & Accountability Act of 2014. House Bill 715 adds spouses and dependent children as parties eligible for in-state tuition rates. Since a veteran can assign their benefits to a spouse or children, they would also qualify for these tuition and fee rates. The legislation also shifts the period of eligibility after discharge for in-state tuition rates from two years to three years. In addition, it requires the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) to convene the University of Tennessee and Tennessee Board of Regents systems to review processes related to awarding academic credit to veterans. This is known as "PLA" or "prior learning assessment" and ensures that veteran students receive as much academic credit as possible for training or skills obtained during their service.

Other veteran-related bills this year include House Bill 803, which gives non-resident veterans the same authorization as veterans who are Tennessee residents to use their experience as a military truck driver to receive a commercial driver's license (CDL) in the state. As passed, the legislation allows experienced military drivers to waive the state's CDL skills test requirement upon providing proof of a military license for the class of vehicle for which they are seeking licensure. This new change applies as long as the veteran's driving record shows no accidents or citations over the past two years.

Approval was also given this week to legislation allowing 501 (c) (19) veterans organizations to raise funds for charitable purposes. House Bill 172 is the final step in ensuring that Amendment 4 to the State Constitution, which won approval by voters in November of last year, is enacted. The amendment gives veterans groups the same opportunity as 501 (c) (3) organizations to conduct annual fundraising events like cake walks, raffles, and other games of chance. Amendment 4 received 69.6 percent of the vote, outpacing all other constitutional amendments on the ballot. Any funds raised by the games under the amendment must go to purposes that benefit the community, veterans, or retired veterans.

Finally, House members unanimously moved forward this week with legislation designed to better support

the healthcare needs of military men and women across Tennessee. As amended, House Bill 425 authorizes healthcare providers who are in the National Guard to provide volunteer clinic services in a Tennessee military armory for those in need. Currently, no authorization is in place that allows these military members to provide such care. Once passed by both chambers and signed into law by Governor Haslam, the new program will be referred to as the Mission Tennessee for Veterans Program. While supporters agree the bill is not the final solution in solving veteran's healthcare issues, they do agree the legislation is a great stride in ensuring veterans in Tennessee, using resources already in place, receive the healthcare they deserve.

As the first half of the 109<sup>th</sup> General Assembly moves forward, House Republicans will no doubt continue their efforts of working to make Tennessee the best possible state for veterans and their families to work and call home.

**Right to Try Bill Passes with Unanimous Support**  
 Legislation referred to as the "Tennessee Right to Try Act" passed the full House of Representatives this week with unanimous support from state lawmakers.

As passed, House Bill 143 nullifies certain federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) rules that prevent terminally ill patients from accessing experimental treatments. Currently, patients with life-threatening diseases may access experimental drugs, but only after receiving FDA approval. House Bill 143 allows eligible patients to bypass this FDA approval process and receive their experimental drugs directly from the manufacturer.

The legislation does not mandate participation by pharmaceutical companies and includes protection for healthcare providers, with a prohibition against revoking a license or issuing sanctions based on the issuance of investigational or experimental treatments.

Currently, 13 other states have already passed "Right to Try" laws similar to House bill 143, and more than 20 states are considering such measures in 2015.

Now that the bill has successfully passed through the state House, it will next be heard in the Senate before moving to the desk of Governor Bill Haslam to be signed into law.

**Legislation to Unlock State Asphalt Grant Dollars Receives House Support**

Legislation that will aid in unlocking nearly \$23 million dollars statewide to taxpayers in the form of asphalt infrastructure improvements was approved by the House this week in Nashville.

The bill, which changes the way the state currently manages its State Aid Asphalt Grant Program, will allow funding set aside by the state to now be used in the form of direct expenditures to upgrade, repair, and rehabilitate roads that have fallen in disrepair over the years.

Currently, in order to receive funding through the Asphalt Grant Program, a 25% local match must be made. However, because many local governments cannot afford the match, a large percentage of the asphalt funding set aside by the state has gone unused. House Bill 1105 reduces the local match percentage to only 2%, ensuring that local governments can now afford the grant funding and are not burdened by excessive infrastructure expenses. The main goal of the legislation is to take existing funds and convert them to asphalt infrastructure repairs. The funds are already allocated each year and House Bill 1105 creates a pathway to increase access for much-needed road improvements across the state.

As always, I am truly humbled and honored to be your voice on Capitol Hill. If there is ever any issue I can assist with, please reach out to my office by calling 615-741-2190 or emailing me at rep.david.byrd@capitol.tn.gov. I look forward to hearing your thoughts, ideas, concerns, and suggestions during the 109<sup>th</sup> General Assembly.

## The racoon, the salamander, the nut, the fish, and the Bible

Guest editorial  
 By Emily Weathers Kennedy

Once when I was in charge of administrative personnel in an architectural firm, I had to make a tough decision. A receptionist I hired told an architect, when he asked her to transcribe a site inspection, that that particular task was not in her original job description. I had never had anyone fired before, but this was the last straw for a young lady who just didn't want to assume any task, no matter how easy or helpful, aside from answering the phones. I reasoned, even the senior partner in the firm made coffee! After she left, I found her stash of romance novels and nail polish.

Energetic people with ambition for their jobs adapt and progress, appreciating their responsibility to their employers - unless they work for the public as a state elected official. Then, it seems that wasting time is perfectly okay, especially when their "employers" can't seem to fire them.

A recent example of dawdling on the job started with Tennessee House Representative Jerry Sexton (R) and his jockeying to get the Bible on the record as Tennessee's state book. When I first read this, I thought it was a joke. After the Washington Post, ABC News, USA Today, and most late night comedians had something to say, I realized it was no joke, but once again, Tennessee and the South were the butt of one.

All that time on our dime to push for something that shouldn't (and most likely won't) make it past committee much less Constitutional muster, especially when there are so many important issues facing our state!

And, just for the record, which version would be listed? The King James? The Catholic? How about the Old Testament, which might appease some of our Jewish citizens? Either way, these state senators are going against what our Founding Fathers fought for and wrote clearly about. According to James Madison, in the original draft to the Bill of Rights 1789, "The civil rights of none shall be abridged on account of religious belief or worship, nor shall any national religion be established, nor shall the full and equal rights of conscience be in any manner, or on any pretext, infringed."

Religious leaders have spoken out against this bill saying the Bible is too dignified to be made into a state

symbol alongside Rocky Top, the passion flower, and channel catfish. Other senators also disagree. Senate Majority Leader Mark Norris (R) argued, "We're being asked to make the Bible, any Bible, any version of it, an object, like the state reptile. Like the raccoon, the salamander, the nut, the fish."

Both Louisiana and Mississippi legislators have attempted the same thing and failed. The sponsor of the Louisiana bill pulled it, saying that it had become a distraction.

I would like to ask our Tennessee legislators to learn from other misguided attempts to pass such distracting legislation and listen to what the public wants for a change. Prime example: Governor Haslam's Insure Tennessee bill would have given hundreds of thousands of working Tennesseans the chance to purchase health insurance. Of those Haslam polled who associated themselves with the Tea Party, 60% supported the bill. Even of those who considered themselves "very conservative," 56% supported Insure Tennessee and yet our fine General Assembly chose not to vote it in.

Healthcare, transportation, education—all are in dire need of new ideas and focused effort. Tennesseans deserve more than dawdling.

Contact  
 the  
 Advocate  
 by mail,  
 P.O. Box 308  
 L'burg, TN  
 38464,  
 by telephone,  
 931-762-1726,  
 or email,  
 advocateeditor@  
 bellsouth.net

## Hensley . . . Continued from A-4

formance, student growth and other indicators of student performance such as ACT scores and high school graduation rates. It further directs the State Board to study what other states have done in this regard.

**Tennessee Drivers Licenses** -- The Senate Finance, Ways and Means Committee voted this week to increase the time period a driver's license is valid from five to eight years. The proposal would cut the wait time at the state's driver's license centers, as well as provide greater convenience to license holders. The move means the state would issue approximately 900,000 licenses per year, instead of the current level of 1.5 million.

**Uninsured Motorists** -- A bill to implement an online verification program for uninsured motorists is one step closer to passage, as it received approval by the Senate Finance, Ways and Means Committee. Senate Bill 648 would establish an online verification program to help ensure compliance with the Tennessee Financial Responsibility Law. The goal of this program is to reduce the state's uninsured motorist rate, which is currently at 23-24 percent, and offer a real-time system of auto liability policy verification. The bill requires that notice procedure be provided to any driver found to be uninsured, allowing them 15 days to provide proof of insurance or exemption. Failure to comply will result in a \$25 coverage failure fee. The bill also increases the fine for failure to provide proof of insurance from \$100 to \$300, and if a driver fails to provide proof of insurance to an officer, the officer may tow the vehicle as long as the officer's agency has adopted a policy for such procedure.

**Med Spas** -- The Senate Health and Welfare Committee approved a measure I sponsored this week which establishes a medical spa registry to be maintained by the Board of Medical in consultation with the Board of Osteopathic Examination. A medical spa is any business that offers or performs cosmetic medical services.

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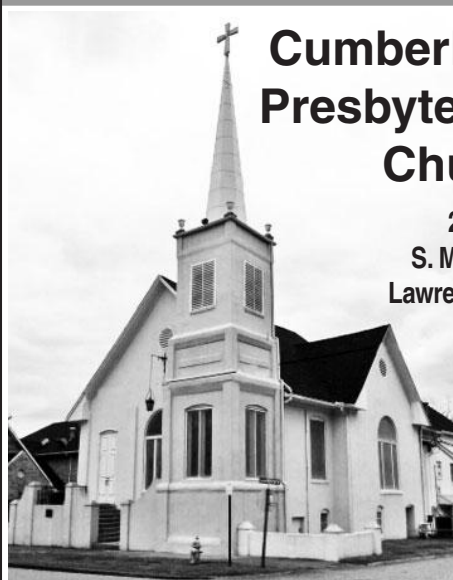
makers of veterinary anti-nausea medicines. Because all those water-skiing squirrel videos will soon feature hapless squirrels riding tumbling tumbleweeds.

It will take a lot to get people to take this issue seriously. For one thing, folks have faith in American ingenuity. They assume technology will take care of the problem. You know, like a super-hero exoskeleton capable of KICKING THE CAN FURTHER DOWN THE ROAD!

If we don't get a handle on this situation now, we will live in a frightening new world. People will sit around the campfire singing, "Michael, Drag The Boat Ashore." Youngsters in swimming trunks will replace "Cannonball!" with cries of "Tentative toe dip!!!" Right-wing talk-show hosts will rant about "redistribution of perspiration." Philosophers will ask, "Is the glass half-empty or...half-way to the next county after armed robbers hijacked it???"

Research the issue. Start out with some relatively painless ways to conserve. Really, in a hundred years, who is going to care if you had the lushest lawn on the whole &^%\$# block?

Well, okay, maybe Betty White. But she'll be too busy procuring bootleg water for a wet T-shirt contest to say anything.



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OR, to have items picked up, call 762-1115.

Monetary donations may be mailed to P.O. Box 769, Lawrenceburg, TN 38464.

