

Sine Die – 10 June 2010:
Closure of the 106th Tennessee General Assembly

Here are some highlights from this session of the 106th Tennessee General Assembly, which officially closed their session at 1:13 am on June 10, 2010.

First, let us go over something that is near and dear to all our hearts...the status of the Tennessee State Employee Bonus program and how it is much different now than it was before.

Originally, as most of you know, the Governor proposed a 3 percent one-time bonus for state employees. This would have cost the state \$164.7 million and lawmakers felt that was excessive in a year when layoffs were occurring. The proposal in the final budget provides for a one-time bonus of \$50 per year for every year of service. Employees will have to have been on the job a minimum of three years to be eligible, so the minimum bonus will be \$150 with a maximum bonus of \$1,250. Now, here is the tricky part...the bonus is contingent upon the state “collecting over projected revenues.” What exactly does that mean? Well, no one seems to know exactly, but in an election year, you can be sure they will do their best to try to pass these bonus’s out. Now, if the green light is given to pass them out, they are saying the most likely time they would be distributed would be in the fall sometime...again, right around election time. We can expect both parties to take the credit if these are passed out and both parties to lay blame if they aren’t. So this issue is **TO BE CONTINUED.**

Another financial program that was put up on the chopping block this year was the Career Ladder program. But, I am happy to say that based on the fact that this expense continues to go down every year due to teacher attrition, it was left alone. Those of you who receive Career Ladder pay are happy to hear that I am sure.

Also, the Alvin C. York Agriculture Institute's funding was placed back into the budget after being originally removed in the Governor's budget proposal. While not rock solid beyond a couple of years, you can count on a great many legislators continuing to fight to fund this institution if and when it is attempted to be removed from the budget again.

Now lets take a look at a couple of the bills that were passed this year.

The first one was sponsored by Senator Gresham. It was Senate Bill 2416 and the House Bill was HB3130, which was sponsored in the house by Representative Beth Harwell, another strong supporter of PET who has spoken at our Annual Meetings in the past.

In a nut shell, what this bill did was to take the ownership of the "Code of Ethics" that all teachers in the state were required by law to abide by, away from its current owner, TEA, and put it in the state's hands. The current Tennessee Code Annotated stated that a teacher could be charged with "Conduct unbecoming based on ... disregarding the code of ethics of the Tennessee Education Association in such a

manner as to make one obnoxious as a member of the profession”. With the passage of this new state law, number Public Chapter 916 dated 5/28/2010, commonly referred to as the “Teacher Code of Ethics Bill or Law”, that section will now read, “Disregard of the teacher code of ethics in title 49, chapter 5, part 10, in such a manner as to make one obnoxious as a member of the profession; or.” With the passage of this bill into law, the state of Tennessee now has it’s own code of ethics that will be placed into the next publication of the Tennessee Education Law Annotated, more commonly called the Tennessee Code Annotated or TCA, for all teachers in the state to abide by.

Another important bill was SB3067 by Senator Jamie Woodson (HB2772 – Rep. Montgomery). This bill, made into law in Public Chapter 798 dated 4/27/2010, changes the date by which teachers must be notified in writing of their dismissal or failure of reelection for the next school year from April 15 to May 15. From now on, teachers won’t receive “letters of non-renewal” until the 15th of May or just before.

There were over 4,000 bills submitted, so if you have any questions about a specific bill, please contact PET and we will see what information on that bill we can find out.

The 106th General Assembly has been quite interesting. We look forward to seeing what the 107th will bring.

*by Tim Brinegar
15 June 2010*