



NEWS AFFECTING STATE EMPLOYEES

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TN prisons to pay officers \$1,000 'retention bonus'

Dave Boucher, The Tennessean

TSEA President Bryan Merritt lauded the bonuses, but said they likely won't be enough to stop officers from walking out the door.

"It is no secret the department of correction continues to face challenges with officer recruitment and retention, and we applaud their decision to self-fund this bonus for correctional officers; however, while bonuses are valued, until policies and practices which directly impact staffing levels are corrected, we believe the department will continue to face these issues," Merritt said in a prepared statement.

Staffing vacancies have plagued the prison system for months. In early August, department officials told state lawmakers there were 302 vacancies among the 2,644 total officer positions. Nearly half of those vacancies were concentrated at West Tennessee State Penitentiary in Henning, with another 75 reported at Northwest Correctional Facility in Tiptonville.

Department spokeswoman Neysa Taylor confirmed 3,300 officers are eligible for the bonuses. That number represents all eligible staff from all 10 of the state's public prisons, as well as central office staff, the correctional academy and the Office of Investigations and Compliance.

None of the numbers for the amount of officers per facility provided by Taylor on Tuesday match with the number of officers per facility provided in an August presentation to state lawmakers.

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State banks another \$90.7M of tax 'overcollection' in October

News Release, Department of Finance & Administration

Growth in sales tax collections and a large one-time corporate payment contributed to growth in Tennessee revenue collections for October. Finance and Administration Commissioner Larry Martin reported today that collections for October were \$970.8 million, which is 11.06% more than October 2014, and \$90.7 million in excess of the budgeted estimate.

"The sales tax, which is our best economic indicator, reflected relatively strong growth for the month and recorded the strongest first quarter growth since 2004, which is extremely encouraging," Martin said. "Franchise and excise taxes were also strong, pushed by a substantial non-recurring tax payment from a large corporation. That's not an unusual occurrence, but it's important for us to

recognize that we can't expect that every month.

"Calendar year tax filers also make October unusual because that's when they are allowed to request a refund or pay an underpayment of taxes."

On an accrual basis, October is the third month in the 2015-2016 fiscal year.

General fund collections for October were \$91.0 million more than the budgeted estimate, and the four other funds that share in state tax collections were \$0.3 million less than the estimate.

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State comptroller raises concerns and questions about Haslam's outsourcing project

Richard Locker, Knoxville News Sentinel

State government's chief financial watchdog, Comptroller Justin Wilson, is raising serious concerns and questions about the size of and processes involved in Gov. Bill Haslam's controversial initiative to contract out the management and operation of virtually all state-owned property, including state parks and college campuses.

In a letter to the Haslam administration last month, Wilson called the project "a fundamental change in how the State manages its real properties" and said the new private-sector-oriented procurement process being used "is largely untested" in government and should be tested first on a smaller scale than the governor's massive initiative.

The comptroller noted that the procurement approach itself - "vested outsourcing," in which potential contractors are involved in the development of the contract early in the process, before it is awarded - was developed for use within the private sector. "Though I understand it is being tailored to fit within state procurement laws, we all must step back and ensure the fundamental tenants of government procurement are addressed," Wilson wrote.

"Is the process fair? Is the process transparent? Was there a level playing field? The answers to these questions should be clear, but I still have some questions ... questions that can only be answered by having seen the process work. The concept of Vested Outsourcing is largely untested in the state government environment," he wrote.

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Governor not sure yet if outsourcing plan should go to Legislature

Richard Locker, Knoxville News Sentinel

State Senate Speaker Ron Ramsey said two weeks ago he believes the outsourcing project should come before the Legislature whether it's legally required to or not.

"I would think that all of it would need to come to the General Assembly. I don't know whether it has to or not. Personally if I was the governor, I would want to get buy-in for this from the Legislature if we decide to do something like this," the Blountville Republican said.

But the governor said it's too early to say what needs to go to the General Assembly because whether to proceed with the larger outsourcing project, and what it will include, is still under consideration.

"We don't know yet what that will be. It depends on what that will look like. We do things in the

everyday course of business at the state right now where there are things that are contracted out and things that were contracted out that we bring back in," Haslam told reporters after a ceremony honoring state employees who are military veterans, in advance of Veterans Day Wednesday.

...Asked whether lawmakers should have the ability to vote the project up or down, he said: "Again, it depends on what it is. I think the executive branch has a function for running day-to-day government. If this is part of the day-to-day course of events then I would say no. If it's something different from that, then they may well. But we don't know what the proposal is yet so it's too early to say."

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Haslam Highlights Transportation Projects Across State

News Release, Office of Governor Haslam

Joined by Department of Transportation (TDOT) Commissioner John Schroer, Haslam also released two transportation projects lists: a list of 181 backlogged projects that will not be completed or at least under contract until 2034; and a list of 765 new project needs that cannot be considered until 2022 at the earliest, if ever.

A 2015 Tennessee Comptroller's report on transportation funding states that revenues are not expected to be sufficient to maintain current infrastructure. Cars and trucks are more fuel-efficient, construction and labor costs have risen, and Congress has not passed a long-term transportation funding bill in 10 years. Tennessee's population is expected to grow by 2 million by 2040, which puts a greater demand on the state's infrastructure.

"Today is about starting a thoughtful discussion on what Tennesseans want from their transportation system today and for their children and grandchildren. Transportation affects every Tennessean. From the business moving product to the parents trying to make it home before their kids go to bed, everyone has a stake in this discussion," Haslam said. "The last time Tennessee passed a roads plan was 1986, so if history is any indication, it could be another 30 years before the state has another plan.

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Contact

TSEA
627 Woodland Street,
Nashville, TN 37206

615.256.4533
800-251-TSEA (8732)

info@tseonline.org

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- Brad Henry

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