



NEWS AFFECTING STATE EMPLOYEES

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Vanderbilt Poll: Trump, Clinton leading their parties in Tennessee

Richard Locker, Memphis Commercial Appeal

Other findings of the Vanderbilt Poll included:

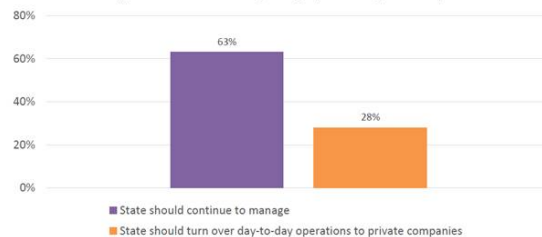
- Regarding Gov. Bill Haslam's proposal to **outsource the management of most state-owned facilities**, including prisons, hospitals, parks and college campuses, 63 percent said they believe the state should continue to manage its facilities; 28 percent said they favor such privatization.

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Views on Privatization of State Services

Among TN Registered Voters

Elected officials in Tennessee are currently exploring the possibility of hiring private companies to manage the day-to-day operations of state institutions like prisons, hospitals, parks, and universities. Supporters believe this would increase efficiency, save money, and improve services. Opponents argue that this would not save money and would decrease the quality of services offered by these state organizations. What about you? Do you think the state should continue to manage these organizations or turn over day-to-day operations to private companies?



Source: Vanderbilt University Poll
November 2015
N=377; MoE: +/- 3.5%



Budget surplus brings stampede of money requests

Andy Sher, Chattanooga Times-Free Press

Everyone in state government is hungrily eyeing that half-billion-dollar-plus surplus and offering ideas about how some - or in one case nearly every dime - of it could best be put to use.

Ideas include using \$260 million to repay the state's transportation fund for money snatched from it by an earlier administration and diverted into the general fund... Secretary of State Tre Hargett, meanwhile, is advocating for \$90 million to construct a new Library and Archives Building.

State department heads shared their ideas with Haslam last week during his annual public budget hearings.

The Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation is asking for \$125 million to repair long-neglected facilities at state parks.

Some \$55 million would go toward state park inns, golf courses, marinas and the like as the state seeks to outsource some operations to for-profit companies at 11 parks, including Harrison Bay State Park in Hamilton County.

Other agencies had their own notions. Most startling was a proposal from General Services Commissioner Robert Oglesby during his budget presentation.

In a state where existing building maintenance and improvements have traditionally been funded in year-to-year, haphazard fashion - if at all - Oglesby and his team boldly proposed putting everything on an annual funded basis.

That would cost \$1.8 billion. But Oglesby is modest. He's only asking for a partial down payment. Price tag - \$528.98 million.

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Tennessee prison chief: I'm not resigning

Dave Boucher, The Tennessean

"I'll say this, I have no intention of resigning. I think our agency is in good shape," Derrick Schofield told the Tennessee State Employee Association during an extensive interview in November.

"We continue to operate sound facilities. We have documentation to prove it. We continue to maintain our accreditation and that speaks volumes about what we are doing and the folks that are out there doing it. That is what I say to that."

...The department is also exploring changing the number and lengths of shifts at prisons, on a per-facility basis. That potential change is supposed to rely on the findings of an employee survey. The survey went out to correctional officers last week - delivery was delayed for at least two weeks in order to give the department time to get every officer an email address.

Although Schofield told Haslam the survey would be completed by Tuesday, the survey will actually remain open through Sunday. At that point, the TSEA will provide the department with the final results.

After asking officers where they work and how long they've worked for the department, the survey includes six questions about scheduling. The questions ask whether officers believe changes such as rotating days off and not being paid overtime until they've worked 171 hours in a month had a positive or negative impact on their lives.

"We are thankful to the Senate for encouraging Commissioner Schofield to work with TSEA on the survey; however, we wish the survey could have been a bit more extensive," TSEA President Bryan Merritt told The Tennessean in a prepared statement.

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ETSU prez appointed to higher ed transition task force

Nathan Baker, Johnson City Press

The task force, which Haslam's office said in a press release will guide the proposed Focus On College and University Success Act through the legislative process and implementation, will have two component boards: a steering committee and a working group. The steering committee will be tasked with identifying operational areas needing adjustment if the governor's plan is implemented, while the working group will research implementation issues and recommend areas to increase efficiency.

Haslam named Noland as a member of both boards.

"I'm honored to have the opportunity to serve in this capacity, which has an exciting potential for historic change to the state's higher education system," Noland said Tuesday. "This is a wonderful opportunity to bring together the higher education landscape and to make things happen on our campuses."

Haslam's proposal would remove six of the state's four-year universities from the control of the Tennessee Board of Regents and create local governing boards to manage their budgets, tuition and operations. The Tennessee Higher Education Commission would still hold a supervisory role above the schools.

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Expert: Haslam's college plan might not change much

Adam Tamburin, The Tennessean

The plan would split off the six universities governed by the Board of Regents and create new local boards for each. If it is approved, schools such as Middle Tennessee State University and Austin Peay State University would have local governing boards that would be free to set tuition, hire or fire a president and approve a budget.

When it comes to student success, Doyle said, evidence doesn't show that there is much of a difference between a central college system and individual boards. Doyle said that in Florida, where public colleges have veered between a central system and independent boards, graduation rates and student retention have stayed about the same.

The changes "have impacts on campuses," he said. "But when you take a big picture and see how the state is doing, you don't tend to see those big differences."

Doyle said that the individual boards might affect the way administrators go about making policy changes, but they don't typically have an impact on the student experience on campus.

What can change when universities go from a large system to individual boards is tuition. Doyle said centralized systems, such as the Board of Regents in its current form, tend to have lower tuition rates.

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State Agency Helps Register Seniors for Tennessee Promise

Associated Press, Memphis Daily News

The Tennessee Department of Human Services has partnered with Families First parents to register more than 700 high school seniors for Gov. Bill Haslam's free-tuition program.

Tennessee Promise offers eligible high school seniors free tuition to a two-year community or technical college.

DHS said in a news release that the department reached out to Families First parents with students in the 12th grade to encourage them to enroll in the program.

Families First, a state program for needy families, focuses on gaining self-sufficiency through employment.

DHS said its effort is part of the department's commitment to a two-generation approach to creating

successful pathways toward self-sufficiency.

The department says it will continue to partner with the parents and youth to assist them in completing the requirements of the program.

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Greene Valley Development Center may stay open past its set closure date in June

Allie Hinds, WJHL

Greene Valley's closure date was set for June of next year, but now millions of dollars are requested to keep it open for another six months.

Greene County State Representative David Hawk has said from the beginning there's no way the state can get all the residents out and close Greene Valley by June 2016.

The Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities said that is still the plan, but is asking for funding to stay open until December 2016, just in case the new homes for the residents aren't ready in time.

"My thought is, 'I told you so,'" Hawk said. He said he thinks this is what the state intended to do all along. "The concern I have is that an artificial date has been set just for the sake of a lawsuit and it's forcing families and conservators to find placements that they may not be comfortable with long term," Hawk said.

After a judge decided in January to close Greene Valley in June 2016, families scrambled to find new homes for their loved ones, and hundreds of employees searched for new jobs.

But now there could be more time.

"I'm trying to live in the reality of the situation," Hawk said. "Trying to give them a better idea of where were actually going to be in the next six months, 12 months."

"We are still on schedule to meet a June 30th, 2016 deadline, however at a budget hearing earlier this year, out of an abundance of caution we asked for 6.5 million dollars in nonrecurring state funds to potentially continue to operate Greene Valley Developmental Center," DIDD Communications Director Cara Kumari said.

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Hundreds searched, dozens arrested in Operation Clean Up

Lenny Cohen, WCYB

More than 300 vehicles were searched and two dozen people arrested when the Tennessee Department of Correction conducted "Operation: Clean Up" outside its District 10 Johnson City Field Office, Tuesday.

The department reported it held the regional sweep in the field office's parking lot to ensure offenders on community supervision, including parole and probation, are held accountable.

In Johnson City Tuesday, they made 24 arrests on charges including drug possession and felony probation/parole violation.

Also, they issued more than 35 citations on charges including suspended/revoked license and drug paraphernalia.

"Operation: Clean Up" led to more than 900 vehicles being searched, including 341 Tuesday in Johnson City.

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democracy."

- Brad Henry

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