



NEWS AFFECTING STATE EMPLOYEES

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Economists forecast substantial TN tax revenue growth

Associated Press, Knoxville News Sentinel

In presentations made to the State Funding Board on Friday, Robert Currey of the Legislature's Fiscal Review Committee had the most optimistic surplus projection of \$422 million for the budget year ending June 30.

...The State Funding Board is made up of the state comptroller, treasurer, secretary of state and a representative of the governor's office. The panel is scheduled to announce its own projections Thursday.

Comptroller Justin Wilson said he was encouraged by the projections, but added that he's "not as optimistic as some of the presenters were. "Our goal is to try to hit the number," he said. "It's just as bad to overestimate as it is to underestimate it."

Secretary of State Tre Hargett said he wants to take a cautious approach. "We'd rather be pleasantly surprised this time next year or during the legislative session than having the shock value of having overestimated revenues," he said.

Lawmakers have voiced several ideas about how to spend the expected surplus and new revenue, including proposals to use it for road projects or phasing out the state's tax on income from stocks and bonds. Republican Gov. Bill Haslam has warned that increasing costs in education and health care will eat up most of that money.

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Poll finds Haslam with 64 percent approval rating

Tom Humphrey, Knoxville News Sentinel

Gov. Bill Haslam's job approval rating stands at 64 percent among Tennessee voters, above average for governors nationwide, according to a months-long survey by Morning Consult. Just 24 percent gave him a negative rating.

The online political research group does polling on multiple issues nationwide. It asked about a governor's popularity in surveys from May into November and reported results when all states had a statistically appropriate sample - 1,442 in the case of Tennessee, said to provide a 2.6 percent margin of error.

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DSCC staff voices concerns on outsourcing maintenance

Staff, State Gazette

[Sen. Ed Jackson] related his experience with outsourcing: "I have seen what outsourcing has done to some industries who have tried it for a year or two, and some did OK and some did not. I'm not a huge fan, personally, for outsourcing, because I think the people who actually work for the facility take more pride in what they do. I think that's definitely the case for people here at Dyersburg State, and Jackson State, in the same way."

Jackson said that despite rising costs in higher education tuitions, highway construction, and TennCare, at present there is still a projected budget surplus of a half-billion dollars.

Bowyer explained that the state's cost of education per student has not increased, but rather the cost to the student has. Jackson agreed and said: "I'm the ears and the mouth for you in the state Senate, and I promise to take your side and will be a strong voice for you."

DSCC vice president Teri Maddox said, "One of the things we don't think about when it comes to cutting costs, and the people sitting here, is all that they do that is not considered part of their job." She explained how welcome the custodial staff made her feel on her first visit to the college for an interview. Indeed, it was one of the reasons she decided to come to DSCC. She also talked of student interactions with the entire maintenance staff and how supportive they are. "When we talk about losing people like that, we're not just talking about dollars and cents, but an attitude on this campus that they have. They are welcoming and supportive of the entire campus. What we can't afford is to lose them!"

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Editorial: Concerns about outsourcing plan need discussion

Editorial Staff, Knoxville News Sentinel

Though the process so far has been kept under wraps, vested outsourcing seems to be the direction the administration is taking. Haslam tapped one of the developers of vested outsourcing, Mike Ledyard, to be the state's director of facilities management outsourcing.

Vested outsourcing was developed through research conducted by the University of Tennessee College of Business Administration and funded by the U.S. Air Force. The approach centers on developing close relationships between buyers and vendors focusing on outcomes rather than transactions and using incentives for both parties. Vendors typically are intensely involved in developing the contracts before the final agreement is made.

Such cozy relationships might work in the private sector, but public contracts require fairness and transparency. Wilson indicated the administration is adapting the vested outsourcing concept to comply with state procurement laws, but questions remain. "Is the process fair? Is the process transparent? Was there a level playing field?" Wilson wrote.

The architects of the outsourcing plan need to be able to answer those questions in the affirmative to secure public support for the effort. State employees already are mounting vigorous resistance, especially at Tennessee's colleges and universities.

An assessment of Haslam's plan should wait until it is actually released, but the administration would be wise to look at the options through Wilson's lens. One promising sign is that Wilson and

his staff have held a series of meetings with the governor's outsourcing team in recent weeks. Ensuring accountability and transparency is vital for conducting the public's business.

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Lawmaker wants answers after \$12M in state inventory reported missing

Alanna Autler, WSMV

[Sen. Kerry Roberts], a former CPA, sits on the Government Operations Committee.

"I know \$12 million may not seem like a drop in the bucket, but to you and me and the taxpayer, that's a whole lot of money," Roberts said.

But many agencies claimed their missing inventory isn't exactly missing. Several departments pointed to record-keeping issues as to why so much property was unaccounted for. Roberts said that nuance means nothing.

"That's a paper trail that's supposed to be followed 100 percent of the time," Roberts said. "It's not that complicated."

Some have asked who is in charge of finding the property. The Comptroller's Office performs audits, but each department is responsible for its own inventory.

There is also a process when it comes to getting rid of items, but Roberts questioned if everyone is following it.

"If there is not accountability, if people can't give an adequate answer, then there are people who need to lose their jobs," he said.

The \$12 million worth of items lost represents roughly .03 percent of the state's budget, but critics said that should not matter.

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32 Tennessee prison officers assaulted over 28 days

Dave Boucher, The Tennessean

Between Oct. 12 and Nov. 8, there were 32 assaults on correctional officers in Tennessee, according to the Tennessee Department of Correction. None of the officers died, but three of the attacks required hospitalizations.

If there were a similar number of assaults during other months of this calendar year, the state's prison system would be on pace to surpass the number of assaults on correctional officers recorded last year. The news comes amid the ongoing debate over prison safety concerns, and while Gov. Bill Haslam and prison officials continue to say there is no increase in violence in the state's facilities.

In a statement, Tennessee State Employee Association President Bryan Merritt called on the department to find a way to cut down on assaults while making changes suggested in the ACA review.

"We understand the everyday work environment for correctional officers is hazardous, but 32 assaults on officers within a month's time is unacceptable. We urge the department to act immediately to find and address the issues causing this recent spike in assaults on officers, and to then work diligently to implement the assault definition changes which were recommended by the

September ACA audit," Merritt said.

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Sunday column: Legislators rule the roost, in session or out

Tom Humphrey, Knoxville News Sentinel

A lot of public policy matters come up with the Legislature in exile from April through December, Hawk says, and it makes sense to have lawmakers come in to deal with them rather than leaving everything to the governor.

"From January through April we are an equal third branch of government ... but my fear is that the other eight months out of the year we lose that equality as a branch of government. And we are to be the voice of the people," he said.

Passage of Hawk's forthcoming bill is unlikely, given that Senate Speaker Ron Ramsey gave a quick thumbs-down response to the idea. Other members of the Republican supermajority are equally loath to do anything that could be portrayed by a critic as a spending more government money - as in the \$198 per day each lawmaker gets while in session as a supplement to the modest \$20,884 annual salary.

On the other hand, Ramsey is generally a big fan of asserting legislative authority. He recently declared, for example, that any major effort by Gov. Bill Haslam to expand outsourcing of state government should get legislative approval. The governor said he doesn't know about that since he doesn't know what he's going to propose on privatization.

But as a general proposition, perhaps Haslam has learned a lesson from previous attempts to get along with a GOP legislative gang that is more conservative than he is himself and would like to avoid the Legislature as much as possible.

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