



NEWS AFFECTING STATE EMPLOYEES

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Details on Pay for Performance Raises

Staff, TSEA

[Tuesday], the Department of Human Resources announced pay for performance salary percentage increases for employees rated Valued (2.5 percent), Advanced (3 percent), or Outstanding (4 percent). These increases are set to become effective January 2016. The department said employees can expect the increase in pay starting with their last paycheck in January.

"TSEA is pleased to see state employees being rewarded for the great work they do every day for Tennessee," said TSEA President Bryan Merritt. "It has been nearly three-and-a-half years since state employees received a raise equivalent to 2.5 percent, and we are grateful for the recognition by this administration of the value of Tennessee's workers."

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TDOC Survey Produces Mixed Results

Staff, TSEA

The survey is an effort to gather employee input as the department considers making changes to employees work schedules based on the recommendations of a September audit by the American Correctional Association. TSEA initiated the idea of a staff survey to help give TDOC employees a voice over their future. TDOC agreed with the idea of a survey and, after additional encouragement from the Senate, partnered with TSEA to distribute the survey to 3060 correctional series employees.

"The results of this survey show that the Department of Correction has much work to do with regard to employee overtime pay and work schedules," said TSEA President Bryan Merritt. "And, while the results for work schedule preference are mixed, we believe there would have been overwhelming support for a return to a 40-hour work week if that option was included in the survey. 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 will likely conduct an independent survey in the near future."

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Ron Ramsey loses faith in embattled Tennessee corrections chief

Andy Sher, Chattanooga Times-Free Press

After months of controversies over safety and working conditions for prison guards under embattled Correction Commissioner Derrick Schofield's policies, Lt. Gov. Ron Ramsey is suggesting it's time for "new leadership" at the agency.

...Ramsey's comments came during a question-and-answer session Friday with reporters. Schofield is under fire in areas ranging from changes to prison guard work schedules and high guard vacancy rates to his controversial redefinition of violent inmate-on-guard assaults.

A former top Georgia prisons official, Schofield has repeatedly defended his policies. But he recently offered to let correctional officers at the various facilities decide the length of their work schedule, and he is asking Haslam to raise their pay.

Now Schofield is retooling definitions of inmate-on-guard and inmate-on-inmate attacks in response to recommendations made by experts from the American Correctional Association who toured several Tennessee prisons last fall.

Haslam and Schofield insist the commissioner's policies have made Tennessee prisons safer and point to departmental statistics showing fewer violent incidents. But lawmakers, correctional officers, the Tennessee State Employees Association and former department officials charge that's attributable to the reclassification of assaults.

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TN tax take in November adds \$50M to surplus

News Release, Tennessee Department of Finance & Administration

Tennessee revenue collections for November continued to reflect economic growth. Finance and Administration Commissioner Larry Martin reported today that November collections were \$902.6 million, which is 9.58% more than November 2014.

"We believe the current fiscal year will show moderate growth, somewhat better than most recent post-recession years," Martin said. "Sales tax revenues are improved from last year, but economists aren't certain we will sustain this growth pattern. We won't know how after-Thanksgiving retail sales performed until this time next month.

November collections were \$50.9 million more than the budgeted estimate. The general fund was over collected by \$42.6 million, and the four other funds that share in state tax collections were over collected by \$8.3 million.

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No bids received for TN state parks outsourcing

Eric Schelzig, Associated Press

Haslam has long said park services like restaurants, golf courses, inns and marinas are prime examples of areas where private vendors could do a better and cheaper job than state government.

The Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation earlier this month requested \$55 million to upgrade facilities at parks before operations could be handed over to private vendors. But at least one of the three companies that had expressed interest in a bid dropped out over uncertainty about whether lawmakers would approve the money.

...Bryan Merritt, president of the Tennessee State Employees Association, welcomed the news that no bids had been submitted.

"We completely agree with the \$55 million needed in upgrades, and support TDEC in the use of these tax dollars," he said in a statement. "But we also feel strongly it should remain out of private hands, as to not give the appearance of corporate welfare being handed out."

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Tennessee to spend millions on new DUI campaign after controversy

Natalie Neysa Alund, The Tennessean

The state last week hired Austin-based Tuerff-Davis Enviromedia Inc., which won the \$11.5 million contract to oversee the Governor's Highway Safety Office media campaign. The state will pay \$2.5 million with the remainder of the costs covered by the federal government. Earlier this year, state officials emphasized all of the funding for the controversial anti-DUI campaign came from the federal government.

The new campaign will focus not only on programs aimed at stopping impaired driving but other highway safety issues including motorcycle safety and seat belt use, according to contract documents.

...State officials did not immediately respond to inquiries about the new marketing firm, including exactly where the state money will come from or why it is now being used to help pay for the contract.

Contract related documents list the rate of pay per hour for several employees as high as \$175 per hour (for creative director) and as low as \$40 per hour (for intern). The public relations employee would make \$140 per hour, or if salaried full time, \$291,000 annually. By comparison, Tennessee's transportation commissioner makes \$158,556 each year.

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West Tennessee prison escape attempt under investigation

Natalie Neysa Alund, The Tennessean

A West Tennessee prison was on lockdown Tuesday morning following an attempted inmate escape, state officials said

Few details have been released about the attempted escape at West Tennessee State Penitentiary in Lauderdale County, but Tennessee Department of Corrections spokeswoman Neysa Taylor said quick work by correction officers prevented the inmate, identified as Arturo Perez, from escaping the facility.

"No fences were breached during this attempt and the inmate never left the secure area of the prison," Taylor said.

Although Perez was contained within the facility, the warden followed protocol in alerting local law enforcement.

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Program to stop providing meals to Tennessee

prisons

Staff, WBBJ 7 Eyewitness News

Tennessee Rehabilitative Initiative in Correction CEO Patricia Weiland has announced that the organization will be eliminating the multimillion-dollar program in order to improve TRICOR's business model and bolster its reputation.

Lawmakers blasted TRICOR after a September audit by the Tennessee Comptroller concluded that the organization lost \$4 million because it doesn't have a written contract with the Department of Correction for meals.

The audit also raised concerns about the quality and size of meals provided.

Weiland says TRICOR and the Department of Correction are working to extend their current contract to run through June 2016 to allow the department time to find a new food provider through a bidding process.

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