



NEWS AFFECTING STATE EMPLOYEES

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State workers' group frets about impact on state services in Haslam buyout of 700

Andy Sher, Chattanooga Times-Free Press

The Tennessee State Employees Association, which advocates for state workers, is "concerned about our state's ability to continue providing quality services to our citizens over the long term," president Bryan Merritt said in an email.

He cited figures showing that since fiscal 2010-11, the year Haslam took office, the state has eliminated 3,311 positions - not including the buyout. Meanwhile, state population has increased by 200,000, Merritt said.

With an estimated 17,000 - 40 percent - of state workers eligible for retirement in five years, Merritt warns of a "potential staffing crisis in the coming years."

Moreover, Merritt said, the administration "this year made state jobs less attractive by cutting longevity and retiree insurance benefits for all incoming state workers. Now the state has sent another 700 workers home. We are very concerned about the impact this will have on services in Tennessee."

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Fireside Chatter: Tennessee is not a corporation

Sawyer Smith, Patrick McKenzie and Hayley Brundige, UT Daily Beacon

Cost-cutting shouldn't begin with the state's lowest-paid and least acknowledged employees - especially when these decisions are being made unilaterally by the nation's only billionaire politician.

What's more, there is not much evidence to suggest that this plan will be worth the drastic overhaul it entails. Based on past privatization efforts, this proposal will likely result in minimal fiscal benefit. A 2015 case study at Tennessee Technical University suggests that savings would be insignificant. After privatizing custodial services, TTU only saved around \$100,000. The university fired its local custodial staff and cut pay for future workers, diverting a majority of the "saved" money to an out-of-state contracting firm.

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Haslam: no timeline on privatization; colleges can opt out

Megan Boehnke, Knoxville News Sentinel

"At the end of the day, if they want to opt out, they can," Haslam said. "Our concern is those same schools are coming to us all the time, saying 'We need more funding, we need more funding.'"

Haslam, who was at the Knoxville Chamber on Thursday morning for a transportation round table, also cautioned that he is a long way from making a decision about whether to move forward with plan to outsource the management of state-owned buildings. The plan has prompted UT employees to protest outside the law school on campus and in front of the Pilot gas station on Cumberland Avenue last week.

Anxiety heightened when a confidential timeline that was first obtained by WTVF, Channel 5, showed an Oct. 19 deadline for the state to issue a "request for quotes" from interested companies. Haslam said Thursday "that's not my timeline."

Haslam said that timeline was not his, and the process would likely take much longer.

"It's interesting, people are worried about this going so fast, but in comparison, we started this process in looking at our state parks," Haslam said. The inquiry into whether to subcontract the state's golf courses and marinas to private companies to run began two years ago, he said, and a decision still hasn't been made.

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Tennessee Gov. Bill Haslam makes Politico's list of 50 thinkers, doers and visionaries

Andy Sher, Chattanooga Times-Free Press

According to Politico, the nonpartisan news organization that covers all things political, Haslam earned a spot for setting a "a higher bar for higher ed.

That was a reference to the governor's "Tennessee Promise" program which drew national attention for its last-dollar scholarships basically guaranteeing free tuition and mentors to state high school graduates attending state community and technical colleges.

Haslam is using interest earned from a set-aside portion of Tennessee Education Lottery proceeds to fund the program.

According to Forbes Magazine, Haslam became America's wealthiest politician this year, "thanks to a family oil and gas fortune" and "doesn't seem to mind the lack of spotlight.

"Since taking office in 2011, he has eschewed the culture wars in favor of a practical approach to unsexy issues like civil service reform and teacher tenure," the magazine noted. "It was in 2013 that Haslam first sought to make his mark on higher ed, with an initiative to increase the proportion of Tennesseans who have a certificate or degree beyond high school from 32 to 55 percent," Politico noted.

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Tennessee officials promote "low-cost labor force" to lure foreign industries to state

Richard Locker, Memphis Commercial Appeal

The state Department of Economic and Community Development (ECD) posted on the state's website Monday a "request for information" from individuals and firms in Europe, Asia and South America interested in representing Tennessee's efforts in their regions, to increase foreign investments and jobs in the state.

"Tennessee is proud to be a right-to-work state with a low-cost labor force and no personal income tax on wages," the posting says. "Our state and local tax burdens are some of the lowest in the region. We have the lowest debt per capita in the region and very low unionization rates - factors which continue to make our state attractive for foreign direct investment."

A request for information is the first step for a state agency deciding whether it wants to pursue an outsourcing initiative. An RFI invites firms potentially interested in contracting with the state to submit responses on how they would provide the service. If state officials like the ideas and strategies in the responses, they issue a more formal request for proposals or bids for contracts.

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TN prison audit includes 3 sites; more attacks reported

Dave Boucher, The Tennessean

The Tennessee Department of Correction released a copy Friday of the purchase order for the "safety assurance review" from the American Correctional Association. The cost of the review and the number of sites included in the review are different than the original information released by the department.

Department spokeswoman Neysa Taylor didn't immediately respond to a question as to which facilities would be inspected.

... Schofield and the department originally said they anticipated the ACA looking into staffing patterns, scheduling and how incidents are reported in at least five of the state's 13 prisons. Taylor originally said the review would cost \$5,000, not \$7,922. In comparison, the state spent \$46,000 on the heavily scrutinized project to develop the controversial new state logo.

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Video shows officer beaten, dragged inside prison

Jeremy Finley, WSMV

The video shows an inmate trying to talk to a correctional officer, who then opens the door to the pod. The attack begins moments later.

The correctional officer was repeatedly punched, dragged and beaten to the ground. Inmates gathered to watch nearly 30 seconds before another correctional officer came to help.

The incident report obtained by the I-Team shows the inmate struck, kicked and dragged the officer. The officer was taken to Horizon Medical Center in Dickson, then by ambulance to Skyline Medical Center.

"Here we have a guy beaten half to death," said Rep. Mike Stewart, D-Nashville.

"The astonishing thing is the records we've received is that this is the second brutal attack at this facility," Stewart said.

The second attack is spelled out in an incident report from Turney dated Aug. 28. An inmate punched an officer in the face, knocked him to the floor, and began to stomp and kick him.

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Stewart Detention Center (GA) on Lockdown as Detainees Protest Inhumane Conditions

Anna Simonton, Atlanta Progressive News

ATLANTA - Detainees at Stewart Detention Center in Lumpkin, Georgia were apparently met with retaliation for protesting inhumane conditions this week.

In response to this most recent protest, Stewart officials not only cut off phone access and visitation, they also suspended religious services and regular meal service, according to Georgia Detention Watch.

Stewart Detention Center is owned and operated by Corrections Corporations of America, the largest owner of for-profit prisons and immigration detention facilities in the nation.

According to the Center For Media and Democracy, CCA's revenue in 2013 was 300 million dollars, the entirety of which came from taxpayers via government contracts.

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Corrections Corp of America Director Buys \$29,290.00 in Stock

Masoud Bidgoli, Mideast Times

Director Mark A. Emkes bought 1,000 shares of the firm's stock in a transaction dated Tuesday, September 8th. The stock was purchased at an average price of \$29.29 per share, with a total value of \$29,290.00. Following the transaction, the director now owns 5,093 shares in the company, valued at approximately \$149,173.97.

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TN children's commission asks for state budget hikes

Anita Wadhvani, The Tennessean

The Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth has made a series of recommendations to Gov. Bill Haslam to improve the lives of children, where more than one in four kids live in poverty.

The commission also urged the governor to create alternatives to "youth prisons" operated by the Department of Children's Services. In 2014, two teens committed suicide within weeks of one another at the Mountain View Development Center in east Tennessee. A few months later, a riot, assaults and escapes erupted at Woodland Hills Development Center in Nashville. DCS has since added more community programs for delinquent youths, but "now would be an optimal time ... to reduce or eliminate 'youth prisons,' " the commission noted.

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DHS Launches No Tennessee Child Goes Hungry

Initiative

DHS News Release, The Chattanooga

The Tennessee Department of Human Services is requesting feedback from Tennesseans regarding its food programs to ensure No Tennessee Child Goes Hungry in an effort to help increase community impact in alleviating hunger. Tennesseans are asked to email their comments to the department regarding the 2015 Reauthorization of Child Food Nutrition Programs also known as the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act. In addition, 2015 Summer Food Service Program sponsors are encouraged to participate in the first ever No Tennessee Child Hungry Excellence Awards.

"We are so excited to announce the No Tennessee Child Hungry Excellence Awards founded on the abilities of summer 2015 SFSP sponsors," said DHS Commissioner Dr. Raquel Hatter. "We are committed to maintaining momentum and continue to see a positive trend in the number of children served in recent years. Please add your strength to this very important cause. Tennessee children are counting on all of us. Let's do it."

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educated and informed
electorate so vital to our
democracy."

- Brad Henry

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