



March 10, 2016

This week started with the flags flying at half staff in memory of Nancy Reagan on Monday, and followed with International Women’s Day on Tuesday. You might ask, “What were the men doing?” Well, the men were delivering 250 pounds of bologna as part of the Warren County Day on the Hill. Less delicious, but equally important, the Tennessee YMCA State Alliance, Tennessee CASA Network, and the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth hosted their Days on the Hill. See our photo of the week for a look at this year’s Child Advocacy Days.

End of Session

The General Assembly is in the ninth week of the legislative session, and the end is near. There are several final calendars scheduled for next week. Lawmakers were told this week to put their bills on notice if they want them heard. This means the next few weeks will be filled with long committee meetings to work through long agendas. In the Senate Republican caucus meeting, members were told, “It’s crunch time, folks. Everybody stay in a good mood.”

Budget Amendments

The House Finance Committee is now accepting budget appropriation amendments, says Finance Chair Charles Sargent. They are to be filed by 2:00 pm on March 17, 2016. As mentioned last week, budget appropriation amendments are due in the Senate by 4:00 pm, also on March 17, 2016.

Old Hickory Dam

This week, the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Subcommittee defeated a bill to prohibit the operation of a rock quarry adjacent to the Old Hickory Dam. In a rare appearance at the Legislature, U.S. Rep. Jim Cooper showed up to testify in support of the bill, saying, “This is not just accidents happen. Or an act of God. Or we could get a big rain. This is more like Russian roulette where we needlessly put a bullet in the chamber and spun it around hoping we wouldn’t get hurt. This is a tragic and foolish risk.” After an hour of testimony, the Dam Safety Act was defeated by a voice vote.

Firearms Signage

A bill to set signage requirements for business owners who want to ban customers from carrying firearms inside their establishments passed unanimously in the Senate this week. The bill would require signs to have the language “No Firearms Allowed” written at least 8 inches wide and an inch high, along with an image of a gun with a slash drawn through it. The House approved the bill last year, but will have to approve a minor change by the Senate before it could head to Governor Haslam’s desk.

Constitutional Carry

The controversial ‘constitutional carry’ bill failed to get the votes needed to pass out of the Senate Judiciary Committee this week. The bill would have let anyone over the age of 21 carry a weapon so long as they aren’t prohibited by law from possessing a weapon. The gun could either be concealed or carried in the open. The companion bill was removed from the House Civil Justice Subcommittee, effectively halting any action this year.

Suicide Prevention Bill

A student club created in Kingston Springs to promote suicide awareness and prevention, led efforts to pass a bill to expand suicide prevention efforts in all school districts. According to the Department of Health, there were 49 suicide deaths in Tennessee for ages 10-19 in 2014. Supporters say that more education about suicide prevention could help save lives. The expanded bill will require the Department of Education to develop materials for training school personnel about suicide prevention and establish a model policy in suicide prevention. Additionally, the bill will require school districts to create policy addressing suicide prevention. The bill passed the House and Senate and is now headed to Governor Haslam's desk.

Contraception Bill

Legislation to allow women easier access to birth control passed the Senate this week. The bill, sponsored by Sen. Steve Dickerson (R-Nashville), will allow women 18 or older to obtain contraceptives directly from pharmacists, in addition to physicians. After hearing opposition from Sens. Mark Green (R-Clarksville); Mae Beavers (R-Mt. Juliet); and Joey Hensley (R-Hohenwald) — debate was closed and the chamber approved the legislation with a 24-4 vote. Five senators did not vote on the bill. The companion bill is will be taken up in House Health Subcommittee next week.

Photo of the Week

Meagan Frazier with Juvenile Court Judge Michael Meise and CASA's Jessica Hopper at the Capitol for Child Advocacy Days.

