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Session

Do you know what is fun when you're rushing through the halls of Legislative Plaza trying to get to a committee meeting? Bumping into someone wearing a life-sized Dr. Seuss costume. This week, in addition to advocacy groups for mental illness and intellectual disabilities on the Hill, Nashville Public Television showed up with a cardboard cutout of Lady Mary from *Downton Abbey* and someone dressed as Dr. Seuss. Legislators and lobbyists lined up to have their picture taken with both, as you'll see below in our photo of the week.

Budget Amendments

The Senate Finance Committee has announced that appropriations amendments are to be filed by close of business (4:00 pm) on March 17, 2016.

Wine In Grocery Stores

After the bill's sponsor, Rep. Curry Todd (R-Collierville) tabled the bill in the House last week, the Senate this week passed their, which will allow grocery stores to stock before the July 1 effective date. The Senate bill also includes a controversial provision to re-institute a two-store maximum on liquor store ownership. Stay tuned as action to bring the issue back up in the House is expected.

8th Congressional District

This week Mark Luttrell, Shelby County Mayor, declared his candidacy for Congress in the 8th Congressional District, a spot being vacated by U.S. Rep. Stephen Fincher. Mayor Luttrell joins a crowded field, including eight Republican candidates and two Democrats. Both Sen. Brian Kelsey (R-Germantown) and George Flinn, a radiologist in Memphis, have pulled qualifying papers to run for Rep. Fincher's congressional seat.

Hall Tax

Conversations about the future of the Hall Income Tax continue, with the Senate expected to discuss various scenarios in Committee very soon. The Senate Finance Ways and Means Revenue Subcommittee met on Tuesday and gave positive recommendations to two pieces of Hall Income Tax legislation: [SB 1491](#) and [SB 1492](#), both sponsored by Sen. Doug Overbey (R-Maryville). The companion bills will be taken up in the House Finance Ways and Means Subcommittee in the coming weeks.

Heritage Protection Act

The Tennessee Heritage Protection Act of 2016, a bill to make it harder to remove Civil War memorials, passed the Senate this week. The bill, sponsored by Sen. Bill Ketron (R-Murfreesboro), outlines a process for someone wanting to remove or rename a controversial memorial or monument by requiring a two thirds affirmative vote by the Tennessee Historical Commission. The bill has already passed in the House and is headed to Governor Haslam's desk.

UT Diversity

University of Tennessee and Tennessee Board of Regents officials made the case for diversity and inclusion efforts during a House Joint Education Committee meeting this week. The hearing was for informational purposes only. It was not tied to legislation. The hearing was requested by the Knox County Delegation after controversial posts were made online at the Knoxville campus. Following this hearing, the Senate Education Committee voted to strip all state funding from the University of Tennessee-Knoxville's diversity office and transfer those funds to agricultural extension and rural outreach.

Ban the Box

The Senate passed a bill to prohibit a state employer from inquiring about an applicant's criminal history on an initial application form for employment under certain circumstances. The bill, dubbed "Ban the Box", is sponsored by Sen. Sara Kyle (D-Memphis) and passed by a 25-7 vote. The bill is still pending in the House.

Photo of the Week

We have no idea if Lou and Dalton have ever seen an episode of *Downton Abbey*, but we appreciate them being good sports.

