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This was a busy week that included long calendars and late nights, but good news! You shouldn't have to wait an hour and a half to get into Legislative Plaza anymore, and session should end in a few weeks. We realize one of these things is only exciting to us, but we do hope that the shorter lines at Legislative Plaza make your Hill visits easier and less stressful. Our photo of the week comes from the third big announcement this week, which we'll jump right into now.

Ramsey Not Seeking Re-Election

Lieutenant Governor Ron Ramsey announced this week his plan to retire at the end of the year, after 24 years in the Legislature and a decade as the Senate's leader. The Lt. Gov. delivered his stunning announcement from the well of the Senate at the conclusion of Wednesday's session, citing his priority to spend more time with his growing family. Ramsey said, "When I ran for office four years ago, I had a 1-year-old grandson. I now have four grandsons. My first granddaughter will be born today." As he fought back tears, he went on to say, "life is flying by" and that he can't obligate himself to another four years in office. A link to his full statement is available [here](#), and a video of the 3-minute announcement is available [here](#). Lt Gov Ramsey has been a remarkable leader of the Tennessee Senate and his shoes will be very hard to fill.

End of Session

If the pace of this week is any indication, we are nearing the final weeks of Session. The House Health Committee had so many bills that it had to schedule an additional meeting to work through its 44-bill agenda. And it didn't finish up so will be meeting again next week! Speaker Ramsey would like to send lawmakers home by April 15, which would be the earliest adjournment in recent history, but he says April 22 may be more realistic.

Appropriations Bill

The House and Senate deadline for filing legislative amendments to the appropriations bill is today by close of business. The Governor's budget amendment to the Appropriations bill is scheduled to be presented on Tuesday, March 29. If there is a particular budget item you are interested in, please let us know. We can provide details on any budget items of interest.

State Revenues

Larry Martin, Commissioner of the Department of Finance and Administration, announced this week that state revenues exceeded estimates by \$20 million in the month of February. Commissioner Martin cited low tax growth in February sales tax and negative growth in franchise and excise taxes.

Insure Tennessee

The House Banking and Insurance Subcommittee took up two pieces of Insure Tennessee legislation this week. The first, sponsored by Rep. Larry Miller (D-Memphis), proposes to empower the Governor to enact Insure Tennessee through any means necessary. The second, sponsored by Rep. Craig Fitzhugh (D-Ripley), would put a non-binding referendum on the November ballot asking whether voters support expansion with a "yes" or "no". Both bills failed to make it out of committee. Rep. Fitzhugh's bill was sent to summer study by a motion introduced by Rep. Jeremy Durham (R-Franklin), who said, "It's important to have as much information as

possible even before we put it to voters. We need to know who the President is."

“Old Fashioned” Health Care

The Senate voted 32-0 on Monday to approve [SB 2443](#), a bill to encourage physicians to revert to "old fashioned" health care. Senator Kerry Roberts (R-Springfield), sponsor of the legislation, called the Health Care Empowerment Act, said, “It’s something done completely independent of insurance. It’s done completely independent of TennCare. It truly is a free-market solution to providing people with affordable health care.” The companion bill will be heard in House Health Committee on March 23, 2016.

Contraception Bill

The companion bill to Senator Steve Dickerson’s (R-Nashville) contraception bill, which has passed the Senate, was heard in House Health Subcommittee this week. The House bill, sponsored by Rep. Patsy Hazlewood (R-Signal Mountain), passed out of House Health Subcommittee and will be heard in full House Health Committee on March 23.

Old Hickory Dam

A bill we mentioned last week, the Dam Safety Act, would prohibit the operation of a rock quarry adjacent to the Old Hickory Dam. While it failed last week, two bills offering alternative ideas to block the quarry were heard in House Agriculture and Natural Resources Subcommittee this week. Both of these bills also failed to make it out of committee.

LP Security

If you’ve been to Legislative Plaza lately, then you’ve likely experienced the bottleneck at the entrance. Amidst reports of visitors waiting upwards of an hour and a half to enter, Speakers Ramsey and Harwell have written a joint letter to Safety Commissioner Bill Gibbons ordering an end to the photo ID checks and scans at the entrance to the Legislative Plaza. Only standard government-issue metal detectors, staffed by state troopers, will remain.

Photo of the Week

Our photo this week comes from Senator John Stevens (R-Huntingdon), one of many to capture a photo of the Lt. Gov. announcing his retirement on the Floor of the Senate this week. The hash tag #itmatterswhogoverns was a popular one on Wednesday morning.

