



511 Union Street
Suite 710
Nashville, TN 37219
615.255.2643 office
615.254.4866 fax



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Sine Die

The 109th General Assembly has adjourned Sine Die. There were a few pieces of legislation that delayed adjournment this week: defunding the UT Office of Diversity; reduction of the Hall tax; and restoring a program that provides property tax subsidies for disabled veterans.

Last week, we mentioned the importance of legislative staff. What we didn't mention is how much levity they bring to the long days of Session. John Kerr, budget analyst and general funnyman, ended Session by sending out a parody song of "Hello" by Adele. In "Goodbye", he writes:

Hello to life outside.

It's been months since I've seen the sky.

So put up the gavel and lock away in its box.

The next time I'll see you is in Government Ops... that's today?

Lt. Governor Ron Ramsey led the Senate to a steady finish. As we have noted, he is not running for re-election but he continues to serve as Lt. Governor until a new one is elected in January 2017 at a session he will preside over.

The House honored Rep. David Shepard (D-Dickson) as he retires from the Legislature after 16 years of service. Rep. Shepard received a standing ovation, surrounded by a special caucus, as you'll see in our photo of the week.

UT Office of Diversity

One of the issues that held up the Legislature this week is the future of the funding for certain programs in the UT Office of Diversity. The Senate and House passed different measures and they must concur before the bill can go to the Governor. The Senate version would move money from the UT Diversity Office to minority engineering scholarships for a year. The House version proposes to split the money between scholarships for minority students and decals for police cruisers that say "In God We Trust."

On Friday, a compromise was reached and adopted by a House-Senate Conference Committee and approved by both chambers. The bill will take money designated for certain salaries in the Office of

Diversity and use it to fund minority engineering scholarships in 2016-17.

Hall Tax

A bill to reduce the current Hall tax by 1%, effectively giving those paying the Hall tax a 17% decrease, passed and is headed to the Governor. The bill, sponsored by Sen. Mark Green (R-Clarksville) and Rep Charles Sargent (R-Franklin), reduces the Hall tax to 5% for the 2017 tax year with the intention of totally eliminating the tax by 2022.

Bible Bill Veto

Plans to override the Governor's veto of the "the Bible as the state book bill" failed this week. After a heated two-hour debate on the House floor, the veto override failed by 7 votes. The override needed 50 "Yes" votes, but only received 43, thus ending the issue for the year. As the original legislation passed the House first, the House was the first to act on the veto override. Failure to override the House veto means the Senate had no opportunity to act. The veto stands.

Of Interest:

Good news, online voter registration is coming to Tennessee on July 1, 2017! The new system will allow anyone with a Tennessee driver's license or photo ID to register to vote online. Thanks to Sen. Ken Yager (R-Kingston), Rep. Gerald McCormick (R-Chattanooga), and Secretary of State Tre Hargett for all their hard work. More information is available [here](#).

Sen. Steve Dickerson (R-Nashville) and Rep Patsy Hazelwood (R-Signal Mountain) pushed through their behind-the-counter contraception bill and is headed to the Governor's desk. This legislation will allow women 18 or older to obtain contraceptives directly from pharmacists, in addition to physicians.

The much talked about and much debated "bathroom bill" was pulled for the year. The House sponsor, Rep. Susan Lynn (R-Lebanon) plans to reintroduce the proposal next year after working out its legal challenges. The bill would require transgender students to use the bathroom of their birth sex. When the House sponsor pulled the bill, Rep. Mike Bell (R-Riceville) left his Senate version in general subcommittee of the Senate Finance Ways & Means Committee.

Rep. Andy Holt (R-Dresden) passed legislation to allow public university employees to carry concealed guns on public campuses. The measure passed with a 69-24 vote, and now heads to the Governor.

Photo of the Week:

@RepDavidShepard Shep's last bill
(w/the seersucker caucus) #TNLeg



Here we have Rep. David Shepard being honored on the House floor in his retirement surrounded by his friends in the “Seersucker Caucus.” Rep. Shepard is a true statesman whose desire to serve comes straight from the heart. He will be dearly missed.