

***A Legislative Update by the Tennessee School Boards Association*****Legislators return; Special session on ethics begins**

Members of the General Assembly returned to Nashville on Tuesday to begin a special session on ethics after being charged by Governor Bredesen to take bold action to enact tougher regulation of lobbyists and campaign finance rules that require more disclosure of where and how legislators receive money.

The special session is expected to last three to four weeks, during which time action of the General Assembly will be limited to legislation related to the issue of ethics. Regular committees of the General Assembly may meet during this time for informational purposes or to take action on unfinished business from last year; however, no new legislation will be considered by the regular committees until the special session ends and the General Assembly goes into regular session.

We will keep you posted on the special session as it progresses and notify you of any proposals that could affect local school boards.

**Comptroller proposes major education funding reform**

Earlier this month, state Comptroller John Morgan presented a plan to the Tennessee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (TACIR) calling for the state to take over most of public school funding, leaving only school construction to local governments.

Morgan's plan would significantly increase state funding for public education and would be accomplished through acquisition of half of the maximum local option sales tax and a new state property tax. According to Morgan, the property tax would be approximately \$1.92 per \$100 of assessed value and would most likely be coupled with a reduction in local property tax rates, although such reduction would be at the discretion of local governments.

The plan has not yet been proposed to the General Assembly or the Governor and the chances of a proposal of this magnitude passing during this legislative session are minimal. However, more details of the funding plan are expected soon, as members of the

Education Oversight Committee, during a meeting on Thursday, expressed a desire to hear from the Comptroller in the near future.

**House District 22 seat filled; Miller not seeking re-election**

Republican Eric Watson was elected on Thursday to fill the House District 22 seat vacated by Chris Newton last year. Newton resigned his seat after pleading guilty to illegally accepting money during the Tennessee Waltz sting operation. District 22 encompasses all of Polk and Meigs counties and part of Bradley County.

The seat had been occupied by Sally Love, a Democrat appointed by the Polk County Commission after Newton's resignation. Watson defeated Love on Thursday in a special election. The seat will be up for re-election again in the fall.

In other election news, Senator Jeff Miller (R-Cleveland), who represents all of the counties included in House District 22, along with McMinn County, announced he will not seek re-election.

**Day on the Hill**

TSBA will hold its annual "Day on the Hill" event on Tuesday, February 21, 2006, at the Sheraton Downtown hotel in Nashville. The program begins at 7 a.m. with a breakfast and is followed by a legislative briefing and visits to your legislators' offices.

All board chairmen and board secretaries have been mailed registration forms. Also, don't forget you can also register on line at [www.tsba.net](http://www.tsba.net).

For hotel reservations, call the Sheraton Downtown at 800/447-9825 or 615/259-2000. When making reservations, indicate you are with the Tennessee School Boards Association to receive the discounted rate for a single or double room. The deadline for making reservations is January 20, 2006.

**Hurricane Relief Update**

The U.S. Department of Education has placed the official notice of availability of hurricane relief funds

for schools in the Federal Register and established a February 2nd deadline by which state departments of education must submit applications requesting funds for school districts enrolling students displaced by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Local school districts should be hearing from the Tennessee Department of Education soon regarding the process and deadlines for providing information to receive federal relief funds approved by Congress in late December. The Federal Register indicates local districts will need to submit their applications to the state by January 26th.

**Stay Informed**

For the most current legislative information related to education, be sure to visit the TSBA Web site. Just click on the “Capitol Watch” button.

**Next Edition**

The special session on ethics will drive our publication schedule for TLN Notes during the next few weeks. Depending on legislative action or news related to education, weekly updates may or may not be published. Once the special session ends and the regular session begins, we will resume our regular Friday publications.

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