

From the Desk of the Executive Director



It's Time!

With the new year always comes the return of the Tennessee General Assembly. Although TML's legislative advocacy and engagement runs year-round, our team will be "game-on" advancing proposals that benefit cities, as well as working to avoid those that adversely impact them. It's a fine line for any organization to walk because the people you need to help you be successful, will also have proposals you must defeat. It's a dynamic we constantly work – defeating or amending proposals hurtful to cities while keeping the door open to advance proposals that are needed.

Our legislators need to hear from you regularly. In the coming weeks, there will no shortage of proposals from industry groups,

political think tanks, and out of state interests, all with legislative proposals that run counter to the best interests of cities and their citizens. In engaging legislators always be respectful, but clear and firm. Inform your citizens – Rotary groups, home owners associations, and weekly newspapers - about the issues, and the importance that your legislators stand with you.

TML will provide regular updates from the legislature during the coming months. Go to our website and follow us on social media. Everything that happens in the legislature affects the city and people you love. Be engaged!

To access information on the League's legislative priorities and issues, click here, <https://www.tml1.org/2025-tn-ml-legislative-priorities-and-advocacy-materials>

Registration now open!

Make plans to attend TML Legislative Conference March 3-4 in Nashville

Join us in Nashville to network with fellow city officials, ensure your community's needs are heard by legislators, and gain valuable insights into the legislation that will shape the future of local government.

The TML Legislative Conference is a chance to hear from influential state leaders, make connections with officials like you, and to meet with your Representatives and Senators.

There's also an opportunity to earn two (2) CMFO or Utility Board Training credits during our dynamic Tuesday morning workshops. Topics to include Ethics and Cybersecurity.

The Tennessee Municipal League has a block of rooms with the DoubleTree by Hilton Nashville Downtown. In order to book a room and receive the group rate, you must register for the conference first. For more information and to register, go to <https://www.tml1.org/2025-legislative-conference>



Tentative Agenda

Monday, March 3

- 8:30 am Registration Opens
- 9:30 – 11:30 am Coffee Meet & Greet
- 11:30 am Lunch
- 12:30 – 3:30 pm Speakers Legislative Update
- 4 pm House and Senate Floor Sessions at State Capitol

Tuesday, March 4

- 7:30 – 8 am Breakfast
- 8 – 10 am CMFO/Utility Board Training
 - Ethics
 - Cybersecurity
- 10:30 am Senate State & Local Committee

Boyd Center report shows TN economy to surpass US growth

With the effects of the pandemic and economic recovery largely behind it, Tennessee's economy is expected to find a more stable growth path and expand faster than the U.S. overall in 2025, according to a new report by the Boyd Center for Business and Economic Research at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

The 2025 Economic Report to the Governor of Tennessee, using data available through the second quarter of 2024, projects that Tennessee's economy will have grown at a slightly slower rate than the nation in 2024 but will experience faster growth in 2025.

"This is largely driven by timing, as Tennessee's economy recovered much more quickly from the pandemic and is therefore stabilizing sooner as well," said Larry Kessler, research associate professor at the Boyd Center and project director.

Tennessee's inflation-adjusted gross domestic product (real GDP) is projected to have grown by 2.4% in 2024 and to grow by 2.5% in 2025, while the U.S. economy is expected to grow by only 2% in 2025 after a growth rate of 2.7% in 2024. Tennessee's slight dip follows substantial growth of 9% in 2021 and 4% in 2022, indicat-

ing a rapid economic recovery and ongoing stabilization.

"Tennessee is on track to see continued economic growth over the next two years, albeit at a slightly slower pace as the economy continues to normalize," said Kessler.

Similarly, job growth in Tennessee has moderated as the recovery winds down. The state added nearly 58,000 jobs in 2023 but is expected to record only 22,500 jobs in 2024 and 36,400 jobs in 2025.

"The state continues to add workers, but job gains have slowed," said Kessler. "Still, around 184,000 more people are working in Tennessee today than there were prior to the pandemic."

Labor Force in Tennessee

Although job growth across Tennessee will remain positive, gains are expected to be smaller as the state's economy cools, potentially making it more challenging for some job seekers to find work. That change could lead to an increase in Tennessee's unemployment rate. After reaching an all-time low of 3% in the summer of 2024, the state's unemployment rate is projected to rise to an annual average of 3.3% in 2025 and 3.4% in 2026.

114th TN General Assembly convenes; McNally, Sexton re-elected Speakers



Lt. Gov. Randy McNally gaveling in the Senate of the 114th General Assembly.



Speaker Cameron Sexton is sworn in for his third full term as Speaker of the House.

State lawmakers headed back to Nashville this week to convene the first session of the 114th Tennessee General Assembly. The Senate and House were gavelled into session Tuesday, Jan. 14, to swear in legislators and to formally elect leadership positions.

Lt. Gov. Randy McNally was re-elected for a fifth term as Speaker of the Senate. McNally has served in that role since 2017. Speaker Cameron Sexton was re-elected to

a third full term as Speaker of the House. He has served in the role since August 2019.

"It is hard to describe the true honor it is to once again be elected Speaker of the Senate," said McNally. "Each General Assembly I have gavelled in as speaker has been better than the last. Tennessee has made remarkable progress over the last decade. We have low debt, a triple AAA credit rating and an economy that is the envy of the

nation."

Speaker Sexton spoke of the importance of efficient government that empowers Tennesseans.

"Over the last five years, we've all learned a lot," said Sexton. "My goal is to be more efficient, empower Tennesseans over the government and uphold our constitutional duty of public oversight."

Twelve freshmen legislators were among those members sworn See LEGISLATORS on Page 10

Gov Lee calls Special Session to address school vouchers, disaster relief, and illegal immigration

Gov. Bill Lee announced that he will call for the Tennessee General Assembly to convene a Special Session on Monday, Jan. 27, to pass the Education Freedom Act. Additionally, the Governor will introduce a disaster relief legislative package addressing recovery needs for Hurricane Helene, as well as future natural disasters. The session will also address public safety measures regarding illegal immigration, as the incoming Trump Administration has called on states to prepare for policy implementation.

Gov. Lee and legislative leadership introduced the unified Education Freedom Act (SB1/HB1) on Nov. 6, 2024, that establishes a statewide school choice plan that provides 20,000 scholarships for Tennessee students. If passed, scholarship amounts will equal the per pupil base funds allocated to public school students each year, which is currently \$7,075. In addition to establishing Education Freedom Scholarships, the Act further invests in public schools and teachers

by delivering teacher bonuses, increasing K-12 facilities funding, and ensuring state funding to school districts will never decrease due to disenrollment.

The session will also address disaster relief for Hurricane Helene and illegal immigration public safety measures.

Hurricane Helene eligible damage-related costs is estimated to be \$1.2 billion. Gov. Lee is proposing

immediate legislative and budgetary action to support ongoing recovery efforts and allow for proactive preparation for future emergencies. The comprehensive plan invests more than \$450 million in direct disaster relief.

The Tennessee General Assembly will also consider public safety measures related to illegal immigration to ensure the state is prepared for federal policy implementation.

All three constitutional officers re-elected to another term

Members of the Tennessee Senate and House re-elected all three of the state's constitutional officers during a joint session of the 114th General Assembly on Jan. 15. Jason Mumpower was re-elected to his third, two-year term as Tennessee Comptroller of the Treasury. David Lillard was re-elected to his eighth, two-year term as State Treasurer; and Tre Hargett, Secretary of State, was re-elected his fifth, four-year term.

Secretary Hargett was first elected in 2009 to serve as Tennessee's 37th secretary of state. "I don't take the trust you've given me lightly," said Hargett. "It is an incredible honor to continue to serve as Secretary of State."

Hargett is the chief executive officer of the Department of State with oversight of more than 300 employees. He also serves on 16 boards and commissions, on two of which he is the presiding member. The services and oversight found in the Secretary of State's office reach every department and agency in state government. Hargett served in the Tennessee House of Representatives for a decade representing District 97 (Bartlett and Memphis) and was twice elected Republican Leader by his colleagues.

Mumpower was first elected in 2021 as Tennessee's 35th Comptroller of the Treasury. "I am grateful to the members of the Tennessee General Assembly for their continued trust and support," said Mumpower. "It's my honor and privilege to lead a staff of dedicated professionals who ensure Tennessee governments are fiscally responsible and who are committed to our mission to make government work better for all Tennesseans."

Mumpower first joined the Comptroller's Office in 2010, serving as former Comptroller Justin P. Wilson's deputy comptroller and chief of staff. He is responsible for leading the Office of the Comptrol- See OFFICERS on Page 6



Tre Hargett Secretary of State



Jason Mumpower Comptroller of the Treasury



David Lillard State Treasurer

NEWS ACROSS TENNESSEE



BROWNSVILLE

The city of Brownsville and the West Delta Heritage Center are raising funds to honor Queen of Rock and Roll Tina Turner in Brownsville's Heritage Park. A six-foot bronze statue of Turner – born Anna Mae Bullock in Brownsville – will be erected in the park across the street from the historic Carver High School in Brownsville, where Turner attended and was a member of both the cheerleading squad and basketball team. The high school is now home to the Dunbar Carver Museum which showcases the history of the African American community and students who attended, including Turner. The one-room elementary schoolhouse Turner attended is now located on the grounds of the West Delta Heritage Museum. Fred Ajanogha, aka Ajano, will design the statue with plans to unveil it at Brownsville's Tina Turner Heritage Days in September. Those interested in donating to the cause may do so at WestTNHeritage.com/donate.

CHATTANOOGA

Microtex Composites, Inc. officials announced the company will expand its presence by locating the company's first U.S. operations, creating 26 new jobs and investing nearly \$3.8 million in Chattanooga through the project. Based in Italy, the composites manufacturer has experienced rapid growth in its European markets due to increased demand from its customers in the automotive and aerospace industries. The move to Chattanooga will establish the company's manufacturing presence in the U.S., allowing Microtex Composites continued global growth.

COLLIERVILLE

The town of Collierville has successfully begun its roll-out of a project transitioning to Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI). The new system uses smart meters and communication networks to provide real-time data on utilities usage. This technology allows for the automatic collection, transmission, and management of utility data. It also enhances the efficiency, reliability, and transparency of utility services by providing accurate and timely information to both customers and utility providers. Customers can monitor their usage in real-time, allowing them to make informed decisions about water conservation while city officials can quickly detect and respond to unusual activity, leading to faster restoration times.

JACKSON

Bobrick Washroom Equipment officials announced the company will expand its manufacturing operations in Jackson. Through the project, Bobrick will create 26 new jobs and invest approximately \$17 million. This is the company's third expansion, demonstrating its consistent growth in the state's Southwest region. Founded in 1906, Bobrick Washroom Equipment has experienced immense growth in its almost 125 years. The company operates seven manufacturing divisions across the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom, with trading relationships that extend into more than 100 markets worldwide.

JACKSON

ALUKO Group officials announced the company has selected Jackson to locate its first U.S. manufacturing facility. The project will create 55 new jobs and represents an investment of \$36.3 million. The new facility will manufacture aluminum battery casings for operations at Ford Motor Company's BlueOval City. Based in South Korea, the ALUKO Group consists of ALUKO, Hyundai Aluminum, Gogang Aluminum, Alutec, KPTU, Hyundai Aluminum Vina and Alutec Vina. Today, the company has approximately 4,500 employees worldwide.

KINGSPORT

The city of Kingsport has opened a new, larger convenience center to allow residents to drop off recyclables in a safer, more controlled environment. The facility at 300 Industry Drive will replace an older

location on the same road and will include both collection for county recycling and construction debris recycling for Kingsport residents. The convenience center will be manned by a city employee and open Monday through Saturday.

KNOXVILLE

Three miles of former railroad track is being converted into a new art walk in South Knoxville. The former line of the Gulf and Ohio Railway line will become the So-Kno Art Walk, connecting Kerns Food Hall to the Ijams Nature Center through the South Knoxville Business District. The trail will improve walkability in the area and offers more connection to local businesses. The area is presently seeing a great deal of redevelopment of its historic buildings. It is also home to the Knoxville's Urban Wilderness – a spectacular outdoor destination where you can hike, bike, climb, paddle, or just wander in the woods – all within the heart of the city. Three miles of Tennessee River waterfront and over 60 miles of trails and greenways connect you to a beautiful nature center, pristine lakes, historic sites, dramatic quarries, adventure playgrounds, five city parks, and a 600-acre wildlife area.

KNOXVILLE

The city of Knoxville has been awarded a \$24.7 million Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation to help realize the South Knoxville Pedestrian Bridge. This is the third application the city has made for the bridge project, which was born out of community input and the South Waterfront Vision Plan more than 15 years ago. The city has also received \$20 million from the state of Tennessee for the project, which will provide pedestrians greater access to local greenway systems, Suttree Landing Park, the Urban Wilderness, the University of Tennessee, the UT Athletics Entertainment districts, and local neighborhoods. UT and Knoxville's Community Development Corp. (KCDC) have secured land on the south side of the river for housing and mixed-use projects. The bridge would span the river from Clancy Avenue on the south side to the pedestrian concourse on the north, located between Thompson-Boling Arena and Pratt Pavilion.

MORRISTOWN

Performance Food Group Company (PFG) officials announced the company is expanding its presence in Tennessee with a new facility in Morristown. PFG is investing approximately \$33.2 million, allowing the company to create 37 new jobs as part of its growth in Morristown. The expansion better supports PFG's growing customer base by creating additional jobs in the local market. PFG's facility is located at 5262 Air Park Blvd. PFG has more than 150 locations across North America with five broadline food service locations in Tennessee including Morristown, Johnson City, Knoxville, Lebanon and Nashville. The company's roots date back to 1885 when the founder began selling groceries for a wholesaler in Richmond, Va. The company officially became PFG in 1987.

MT. PLEASANT

Petainer Manufacturing USA, Inc. officials announced the company will expand to a new location at 315 Joe Frank Porter Drive in Mt. Pleasant. Petainer will invest \$10 million through the expansion, creating 35 new jobs at the Cherry Glen Industrial Park, a [Select Tennessee Certified Site](#) Upon

Columbia rededicates West Haven Park



Officials with the city of Columbia celebrated the completion of significant upgrades to the city's West Haven Park with a rededication ceremony. New features of the park include a pavilion with picnic tables for gatherings and events, inclusive swings, ADA-compliant parking spaces, and a newly installed access path.

Farragut receives grant to develop new park



The town of Farragut has been awarded a \$2,750,000 grant that will be used to develop park property that was purchased in 2023. The Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund Grant, managed locally by the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC), was a 50% match of the total purchase price of the property. The 70-acre parcel, which includes 15 acres of donated land, is on the west side of McFee Road near the junction with Boyd Station Road. The grant requires that construction of recreational facilities begin by 2027. The Farragut Parks & Recreation Department will be soliciting extensive community feedback on desired amenities for the new park. The LWCF Grant program is part of a nationwide competitive grant cycle. Funds can be used for land acquisition, indoor and outdoor recreation facilities and trail development.

Springfield welcomes newest fire truck



Officials with the city of Springfield and Springfield Fire Department held a push-in and truck wash ceremony to welcome a brand new fire truck into service. The truck wash involved firefighters, children, and local residents followed by a ceremonial push-in, which dates back to when engines were pulled by horses. The new truck was purchased for \$849,089 and is equipped with advanced technology and capabilities that will improve the effectiveness of firefighting as well as aid in rescues, medical emergencies, and other critical situations.

completion, the project will more than double Petainer's headcount statewide. With more than 35 years of experience in designing and manufacturing cost-efficient products, Petainer offers a wide range of lightweight, sustainable PET packaging solutions to help companies in the Americas, Europe, and Asia grow their business and reduce their carbon footprint.

NASHVILLE

Nashville has been named one of Frommer's "Best Places to Go in 2025," making the 14th consecutive year the travel guide has named the city one of its top global destinations. Nashville was one of just four U.S. destinations to make it onto the global list of 20 locations. Frommer's, a globally respected travel authority,

cites the 100th anniversary of both the Grand Ole Opry and Belcourt Theatre, along with other attractions celebrating milestones, including Adventure Science Center's 80th and Cheekwood's 65th. Nearly 17 million people visited Music City last year, generating \$10.77 billion in visitor spending and providing \$1.11 billion in local and state tax revenue. The industry employs 73,000 workers with \$2.84 billion in labor income. Visitors spend \$29.5 million per day in the city, and tourism saves each Nashville household \$3,671 in annual taxes.

NOLENSVILLE

The Nolensville Police Department has received a donation of life-saving equipment from HCA Healthcare. Recognizing an increase in heart-related medical

emergencies in the community, the Nolensville Police Department conducted an equipment inventory and found a need for enhanced life-saving tools. In response, HCA Healthcare donated 20 Bag Valve Masks (BVMs), empowering Nolensville officers with the critical equipment necessary to deliver life-saving care in the vital moments before emergency medical services and fire departments arrive. Each Nolensville Police vehicle is already equipped with Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs), and all officers have received training in CPR and critical care. These resources, combined with the newly donated equipment, position the department as a frontline responder in cardiac emergencies.

WAUFORD

J. R. Wauford & Company, Consulting Engineers, Inc.

Cookeville, NAMI show community collaboration can address citizens in crisis

By KATE COIL
TT&C Assistant Editor

As municipalities look to explore and expand crisis intervention care in their communities, a statewide mental health advocacy organization is hoping to help them connect what resources they have and fill the gaps in between.

NAMI Tennessee, the state chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, is a grassroots, non-profit organization founded by family members of those diagnosed with mental illnesses dedicated to improving quality of life for people with mental illness and their families through support, education, and advocacy. One of the goals of the organization is to help facilitate local solutions to mental health issues in ways that fit individual needs and aims of the community.

Katrina Gay, executive director of NAMI Tennessee, said the organization wants to help smaller cities.

“NAMI is good at a lot of things, but one of the things we are really the best at is convening,” she said. “We don’t have any financial skin in the game. In these communities, we are about the individuals and families who are impacted. As a statewide organization, we are advocates for good solutions to problems, particularly those that impact those with mental health conditions. A lot of smaller communities don’t have the social service safety net that could be there for this.”

Gay said that mental health issues are often the source of other community issues, such as homelessness, substance abuse. NAMI Tennessee recently partnered with the Cookeville Police Department, Cookeville Fire Department, and Volunteer Behavioral Health Services to launch the [Cookeville Community Response \(CCR\) program](#), as part of the federal [Connect and Protect Initiative](#).

The program aims to address mental health crises with informed care and specialized support for individuals and families, providing a compassionate alternative to traditional law enforcement response. This may include crisis counseling, suicide prevention, substance use disorder, grief and loss counseling, housing crisis assistance, and resource connection and referrals.

“These funds are from the Department of Justice for the Connect and Protect Initiative, and there is more funding available to replicate what we’ve done Cookeville,” Gay said. “We are looking for another community or two to replicate what we’ve done here.”

The program offers safe, effective interactions with Cookeville residents experiencing mental health crises through a collaborative response. In the case of a crisis, callers are advised to contact the



The Cookeville Community Response (CCR) team provides crisis intervention in situations where law enforcement isn’t needed, freeing up time and energy for law enforcement to focus on other calls. The service works on situations such as crisis counseling for suicide and grief, connecting residents to emergency housing and resources, and working to provide a safety net to prevent repeat calls to emergency services.



Cookeville Police Department’s non-emergency number where dispatchers will take information and send out the CCR team, or law enforcement as necessary.

The team includes a Volunteer Behavioral Health mental health clinician and a certified EMT from the Cookeville Fire Department, offering on-site crisis intervention and connection to behavioral health, healthcare and social service resources.

The CCR model is expected to reduce the strain on law enforcement by ensuring mental health professionals and first responders take the lead in situations where their expertise is best suited to de-escalate and assist. As part of the program, individuals in crisis will be linked to behavioral health and social services for ongoing support, enabling long-term assistance and recovery within the community.

“Cookeville is pleased to see this program come to fruition,” said Cookeville City Manager James Mills. “For several years, we have explored methods to better serve a portion of our population that frequently needs assistance which is best provided by mental health

professionals. We are especially thankful to the personnel in our police and fire departments who have worked diligently to make this program a reality.”

Even in the first month of operation, the program was already seeing results. Cookeville Police Chief Randy Evans highlighted the value of the CCR program for community safety.

“This initiative brings a much-needed layer of compassion and expertise to our response model,” he said. “By working closely with NAMI Tennessee, the Cookeville Fire Department, and Volunteer Behavioral Health, we’re making sure those in crisis get specialized care when they need it most. This partnership will allow our officers to focus on public safety while connecting people with the right resources for recovery.”

Tennessee Technical University is also partnering with the program to do research to show how the intervention team saves money, lives, and time for the community. In the first two months of the pilot, police intervention was only needed in one call the CCR team was dispatched to.

One goal of the program is to ensure that time and resources are spent wisely.

“Police did not get into the business of policing to get sent to these calls they aren’t equipped to help with,” she said. “It is taking their time away from somewhere they can. Police in Cookeville are really eager to get trained on crisis intervention, and that has been hugely helpful when they get a domestic violence call. This program fills a gap. Now, when one of these mental health crisis calls come in, they know that this is not a call that requires police. This is a call of someone who slept in the entryway of a store and is not moving.”

Gay said NAMI Tennessee’s goal is now to help other communities find other solutions, often by connecting resources already present in the area to best work together. Many times, she said resources are present but community members and leaders are unaware of what those resources are or how they can be accessed.

“There are solutions across the country where they have found creative ways of addressing mental health issues, and there are many ways you can respond,” she said. “The community can choose the model they want, and it’s really important they have buy-in. We get people in the room to see what we are doing, who knows who, and building that safety net by making sure we are not just coordinating it. We identify where needs are and look for potential solutions from existing community providers, especially within the faith commu-

nity. If they don’t know who offers what or no one is coordinating, they may not know what needs to fill.”

At one meeting for stakeholders of Cookeville’s CCR program, Gay said an official with the local library expressed an issue the library was having with individuals using sinks in the restrooms at the library to do their laundry. Another stakeholder mentioned that a local church did a once-a-week laundry ministry for those in need.

Library officials were then able to refer individuals and put up information about the service, connecting residents to the church. Gay said she has found many communities have solved crisis-response related issues like this in their community merely by educating each other about what services and organizations are already available to help.

Gay encouraged city leaders to reach out to NAMI Tennessee to help get the right people from their community around the table to start the necessary conversations of identifying issues, collecting data on these issues, and connecting stakeholders.

“Not one person can do this; it’s a collaborative approach,” Gay said. “Having an advocate group as a leader gives you a neutral party in the community to support the establishment of the effort. The creation of it and getting everyone in the same page is what takes the time and effort. After that, it often becomes self-sustaining.”

Learn more at <https://namitn.org/>.

No loan is too large or too small



The City of Madisonville recently closed a \$700,500 note issued to finance the purchase of a new fire truck. The city has used the TMBF loan programs seven times since 1999. Seated L to R are: City Recorder Sherri McCrary and Mayor Scott Hunt. Standing is Steve Queener, TMBF Marketing Representative.



The Town of Tiptonville has used the TMBF loan programs three times since 1998. The most recent was for a \$1,000,000 fixed rate loan through the Clarks-ville Public Building Authority to renovate the Reelfoot Lake Armory Building to use as a community center for the town. A portion of the funds will also be used to renovate the town’s baseball complex. Seated L to R are: City Recorder Fran Hearn and Mayor Cliff Berry. Standing is Justin Hanson, TMBF Marketing Representative.



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PEOPLE

Metro Nashville officers who responded to Covenant shooting receive Medal of Valor

Phillip Batts has been sworn in as the new police chief for the Dandridge Police Department. Batts was serving as the Jefferson County Department of Education's transportation and safety supervisor before being selected to replace retiring Chief Carson Williams. Before going to work for the Jefferson County DOE in 2022, Batts accrued 17 years of experience in law enforcement both with the city of Dandridge Police Department and the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office, including time spent as a school resource officer.



Phillip Batts

Michele Diebold, human resources director for the city of Gatlinburg, was awarded the Tennessee Public Risk Management Association (TN PRIMA) President's Award at the organization's annual conference. The award was presented for her commitment and dedication to the organization, as well as her exceptional contributions to the profession and the TN PRIMA organization. Diebold serves as the vice president of East Tennessee PRIMA. Diebold has been with the city of Gatlinburg since 2014, first serving as a human resources manager and then as human resources director four years later. In her role, she is also responsible for the safety and risk management of Gatlinburg's 359 full-time employees.



Michele Diebold



Five Metro Nashville Police Officers involved in ending the Covenant School shooting have been awarded the Public Safety Officer Medal of Valor, the highest national award for valor by a public safety officer.

Five Metro Nashville Police Officers involved in ending the Covenant School shooting have been awarded the Public Safety Officer Medal of Valor, the highest national award for valor by a public safety officer.

the officers in the Oval Office .

The Medal of Valor is the nation's highest award for valor by a public safety officer.

The nominees were recommended by the Attorney General and the Medal of Valor Review Board, whose members are appointed to four-year terms by the President, the Senate majority and minority leaders, the Speaker of the House, and the House minority leader. The medal recipients have exhibited exceptional courage—disregarding their own personal safety—in attempting to save or protect human life.

On March 27, 2023, Mathes, Engelbert, Collazo, Cagle, and Plese ran towards gunfire to take down an active shooter at The Covenant School, a Nashville school. The heavily-armed shooter had already killed six people, including three nine-year-old students.

The officers rushed to the scene, and as they arrived, the shooter opened fire on them. Still, the officers entered the school, cleared classroom after classroom, and ran towards the sounds of gunfire where they encountered and took down the shooter.

Carol Berz, Chattanooga councilmember for District 6, died unexpectedly of natural causes on Dec. 11, 2024. Berz was first elected in a special election 2008 and was planning to run for re-election in 2025. The owner and chief executive of Private Dispute Resolution Services, LLC, Berz has held several roles in the Chattanooga area including as director of forensic services and executive director of the Joseph W. Johnson Mental Health Center, a visiting professor at UTC, and spending 11 years as a commissioner with the Chattanooga Human Rights/Human Relations Commission. She also served on numerous boards and commissions on the local and state level. She held a doctoral degree in social policy, a master's degree in administration, and a bachelor's degree in human services management from the University of Tennessee as well as a law degree from the Nashville School of Law.



Carol Berz

Kevin Goins has been named the general manager of the Loudon Utility Board. Goins has 25 years of experience from working with the Athens Utility Board, most recently as power superintendent. Goins began his work with AUB at 18 as a part-time summer job laying water and sewer lines. He worked his way up from a laborer to a lineman and continued to climb to ranks before becoming director of power system operations and then power superintendent.



Kevin Goins

President Joe Biden announced Metro Nashville Police Sgt. Jeffrey Mathes, Detectives Michael Collazo, Ryan Cagle and Zachary Plese, and Officer Rex Engelbert are among the eight recipients of the award this year. Officer Engelbert was not present for the presentation, but Metro Nashville Police Chief John Drake stood with

Brad Bivens has retired after serving more than 23 years as city engineer for the city of Forest Hills. Bivens was employed with Neel-Schaffer Engineering and was assigned to the Forest Hills for more than two decades, providing both professional services and institutional knowledge for the betterment of the city. Luke Sullivan with Neel-Schaffer will be taking on the role as the city engineer for the city of Forest Hills. Sullivan has more than 15 years' experience and will be a great asset to the city.



Brad Bivens

Colin Hurst has been appointed as the new fire chief of the Alcoa Fire Department. Hurst began his career with AFD in 2005 and has served the community for nearly two decades. He most recently served as the deputy fire chief of the department for the past four years. Hurst holds an associate's degree in applied science from Columbia Southern University and is presently pursuing a bachelor's degree in fire administration. He has earned numerous prestigious professional certifications and honors, including the Chief's Award and the Life Saving Award.



Colin Hurst

as a codes enforcement officer and city planner for Mountain Home, Idaho. Janis holds a bachelor's degree in psychology and business administration as well as a master's of public administration. She also has several inspector certifications through the International Code Council (ICC).

State Rep. Harold Love Jr., D-Nashville, has been sworn in as president of the National Black Caucus of State Legislators (NBCSL) during the 48th Annual Legislative Conference. Love, who represents District 58, also serves as Tennessee House Democratic assistant leader. A native of Nashville, Love is the son of Harold Love Sr. Who served as a Nashville city councilman from 1962 to 1970 and in the Tennessee House from 1968 to 1994. Love holds a bachelor's degree in economics and finance as well as a Ph.D. in public policy and administration from Tennessee State University, and a master's in theological studies from Vanderbilt. Additionally, State Rep. Raumesh Akbari, D-Nashville, was sworn in as president-elect of the NBCSL.



Harold Love Jr.

Doyle Richardson, former mayor of Tullahoma, died Saturday, Dec. 28, 2024, in Jacksonville, Fla., at the age of 89. Richardson served as mayor for Tullahoma between 1986 and 1987. He also had a career as an attorney and served as president

of the Tullahoma Chamber of Commerce, on the Tullahoma Industrial Board, as a Coffee County Commissioner, and a magistrate of the Coffee County Court.



Doyle Richardson

Cpl. Nate Robinson with the Maryville Police Department died Dec. 20, 2024, after a short battle with cancer. Robinson was 33. He joined the Maryville Police Department in 2013, serving as a field training officer and a member of the SWAT Team. He had been promoted to the rank of corporal in 2022.



Nate Robinson

Nick Robbins has won a run-off election for the Collierville Alderman Position 3 on the Collierville Board of Mayor and Aldermen. Robbins defeated challenger Chad Lindsay for the seat. Robbins will take over the seat previously held by John Worley, who decided not to seek a fourth term. A Collierville native and graduate of Collierville High School, Robbins has owned a design-build construc-



Nick Robbins

tion company for the past 15 years.

Dustin Smith has been selected as the new city administrator of Sevierville following the retirement of longtime City Administrator Russell Treadway. Smith has served as deputy city administrator for Sevierville since 2023 and first joined the city in 2015, working in a variety of aspects of city government. A native of Johnson City, Smith earned a bachelor's degree in political science and a master's in public administration with a concentration in city management both from East Tennessee State University.



Dustin Smith

Bill Stinnett, longtime Ashland City municipal judge, died Jan. 7, 2024, at the age of 95. Serving in the Navy before studying at Middle Tennessee State University and then YMCA Night Law School – now the Nashville School of Law – Stinnett earned his law degree in 1967. He moved to Ashland City in 1969 to practice law, becoming a partner in the firm Stinnett, Wilkinson, and Wilson. He was first appointed municipal court judge for Ashland City in 1996 and was then elected to the position in 1998. He held the role until his death.



Bill Stinnett

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As retirements peak, how local governments are finding ways to recruit, retain employees

By KATE COIL
TT&C Assistant Editor

As the silver tsunami begins to crest, state and local governments are finding incentives like hybrid and shortened work schedules, increased compensation and wages, and changes to educational and civil service requirements are making recruitment and retention less challenging.

Since 2009, the Mission Square Research Institute – in conjunction with the National Association of State Personnel Executives (NAPSE) and Public Sector HR Association (PSHRA; formerly IMPA-HR) – [has conducted a workforce survey](#) to highlight employment challenges facing state and local governments.

While all sectors saw employment downturns during the pandemic, it has taken governments longer to recover. Private sector workforce recovery was met by April 2022 while recovery thresholds weren't met by state government until January 2023 and local governments until December 2023.

Since then, [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported](#) some government departments have even expanded staff past pre-pandemic numbers, such as landscaping and groundskeepers, computer and information systems, civil engineers, health workers, highway maintenance workers, accountants, librarians, and emergency services.

At the same time, governments have eliminated positions seen as outdated or better performed by technology. These positions largely included typists, file clerks, chief executives, customer service reps, receptionists, information clerks, office and billing clerks, secretaries and administrative assistants, buyers, purchasing agents, cashiers, and meter readers.

RATE OF RETIREMENT

With 2024 identified as the year the greatest number of Baby Boomers turned 65, 54% of local governments surveyed said they anticipate a large wave of retirements in the next few years.

As a result, 37% of local governments have reported succession planning is among their top concerns. However, only 12% of respondents have a succession planning process in place while



While some retirees are coming back to the office, there are still more individuals retiring than returning or putting off their retirement. As a result, succession planning and offering incentives to recruit and retain employees have become a priority for many governments.

only 20% are in the middle of developing such plans.

"If indeed the largest share of pending retirements is going to be occurring in the next few years, the completion of any formal or informal processes would help to ease that transition to the next generation of state and local government leaders and potentially also mitigate the exist interview concerns about a lack of internal advancement opportunities," the report found.

Interestingly, the most common hiring practice reported by local governments in 2024 was the rehiring of staff members who had previously retired. This number was up to 37% in 2024 from 25% in 2022. This may be related to the fact that 48% of governments feel their employees are not financially prepared for retirement.

There are still more employees moving up their retirement date (26%) than postponing it (22%).

RECRUITMENT CHALLENGES

Hiring challenges remain in the areas of public safety, healthcare, and professional positions like engineers.

In the past year, the most difficult positions to hire for local governments were mental health professionals (83%), nurses (77%), corrections (74%), engineering (71%), policing (68%), skilled trades (65%), dispatchers (64%), building permitting and inspectors (55%), and driving/equipment operators with CDLs (55%).

Many reported issues attracting qualified candidates. The survey found 79% of police, 78%

of engineering, 77% of nursing, 69% of corrections, 55% of maintenance, and 49% of IT applicants were deemed unqualified. Because of this, more than half of local governments reported having to either reopen or extend the application process with 41% doing so occasionally, 31% somewhat frequently, and 17% very frequently.

Others found outdated civil service requirements or job descriptions hindered filling positions. Nearly half (46%) of local governments reported updating job specifications to change minimum education, skills, or licensing requirements. Additionally, 29% said they dropped education requirements for at least some positions.

After changing educational requirements, 33% of governments said their number of applicants increased. While some HR officials expressed concern that dropping requirements meant hiring employees unable to perform their full duties, others said this allowed the hiring of individuals working to complete licensing before they were hired elsewhere.

The most successful locations for advertising positions to qualified candidates are:

- government websites (60%),
- social media (59%),
- employee referrals (57%),
- profession-specific media (39%), and
- commercial websites (39%)

BENEFITS AND COMPENSATION

Outside of retirement (32%), the most common reasons government employees gave for leaving

positions were:

- uncompetitive compensation (41%),
- dissatisfaction with supervisors (30%),
- lack of internal advancement opportunities (28%),
- the ability to advance with another employer (25%), and
- personal/family priorities (23%).

Many local governments are recognizing the importance of wages and compensation to keep employees. Of local governments, 79% said a competitive compensation package was important to their organization and 73% said they felt their compensation is competitive.

Likewise, 60% said they felt their wages were competitive and 42% saw having pay equal to that of the private sector as important. To ensure this equity, 53% reported providing broad-based pay increases. The average broad-based pay increase offered was 4-6%.

To help with recruitment, a third of local governments (33%) also reported targeted hiring bonuses (33%).

The other large factor in recruitment and retention was a positive culture. Issues like employee morale (65%), employee development (60%), and employee engagement (60%) were among top priorities for government workforces.



Most local governments are expecting to see the biggest number of Baby Boomer-related retirements in the coming years. Competitive wages and compensation, flexible and hybrid schedules, and a positive office culture are key tools for recruiting and retaining employees.

Offering flexible work options is helping many governments accomplish this. More than half of local governments (51%) offer some type of hybrid schedule with the number even higher for state governments (85%). Additionally, 58% of local governments reported they offered flexible work days, such as letting employees work 10 hours a day for four days.

Other common culture and morale-based benefits include:

- Employee assistant programs

(EAPS) and mental health support (94%),

- Funds and reimbursement for training or tuition (73%),
- Employee development for leadership development (58%) or career paths (41%),
- Wellness programs (57%) and reimbursement (34%),
- Paid family leave (48%), and
- Offering employee-paid voluntary benefits (44%)

State officials issue guidance to protect humans, animals from bird flu

By KATE COIL

As bird flu becomes an increasing concern for hunters, farmers, pet owners, and backyard birders, Tennessee state agencies are advising all residents to take proper precautions.

Known as "highly pathogenic" avian influenza (HPAI) viruses, "bird flu" can include H5N1 viruses and can cause both severe disease and death in poultry. While most wild birds don't get sick from HPAI, they can circulate the disease to more vulnerable populations wherever they go.

"Numerous states in the Mississippi Flyway are reporting HPAI detections that are leading to dead and dying birds, mainly snow geese," said Jamie Feddersen, TWRA Migratory Gamebird Coordinator. "Tennessee is also finding ducks and geese with HPAI. Hunters should follow safety precautions when handling these birds."

The first reported incident of bird flu being found in the state during this current wave was at a commercial chicken facility in Gibson County in November. Avian flu was also confirmed in a flock of backyard fowl in Tipton County in January.

TWRA has issued [precaution guides for hunters](#) and for homeowners who may have bird baths, houses, or feeders in their yards. If homeowners find dead birds, they are encouraged to avoid contact with the dead or dying bird but should wash hands with soap and water and change clothing before making contact with any other bird.

If dead birds are found, homeowners should stop feeding birds and cover bird baths. Any excess feed that has spilled or was placed on the ground should be cleaned up and feeders and baths should be cleaned with a 10% bleach solution.

Meanwhile, the Department of Agriculture is providing [guidance for domestic birds](#), such as



While bird flu has been reported in Tennessee, officials with the Department of Agriculture and Tennessee TWRA said there are measures all residents can take to prevent the spread.

backyard flocks and pets, as well as cattle and other pets that may be impacted. State officials also advise owners of pet birds to consult their veterinarians for advice on how to prevent bird flu in their pets as well as what to do if their pet is exhibiting symptoms.

A multi-state outbreak of bird flu in cattle began in March 2024 and has been monitored by the CDC and U.S. Department of Agriculture. At present, there are 925 herds in 16 states – not including Tennessee – where bird flu has been reported in lactating dairy cows.

The first known human-related contraction of bird flu came from an individual in Texas who had exposure to dairy cows rather than birds. Since the outbreak, there have been 66 human cases of bird flu and one bird-flu related death in a human reported in Louisiana.

Additionally, bird flu has been

found in domestic pets other than birds – [most notably cats](#). Pets that live on farms with birds or that have had access to dead birds or unpasteurized milk from infected cows, eat raw meat that is infected, are at a higher risk of contracting the virus.

Pet owners are encouraged to keep cats indoors and consult with their veterinarians if they have any concerns. The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) [has guidance](#) on what signs other pets may exhibit if they have contracted bird flu.

Look for signs of illness and report a sudden increase in the number of sick birds or bird deaths to the Tennessee State Veterinarian's office at (615) 837-5120 and/or USDA at 1-866-536-7593. For wild birds, [report dead or dying bird sightings to TWRA](#).

Find more biosecurity tips and [HPAI resources online](#).

Bird Flu Guidance

In the Backyard

As songbirds are at low risk, there is currently no recommendation to take down bird feeders, houses, or baths unless you also keep domestic poultry. It is recommended to [clean bird feeders and birdbaths regularly](#) as a way to keep many kinds of diseases at bay.

For Pet Birds

Wash your hands thoroughly before and after interacting with domesticated birds. Keep cages clean but don't clean any equipment in the kitchen sink visit the vet regularly. Learn more about more [domestic bird prevention here](#).

For Domestic Fowl

Dedicate a pair of shoes to only be worn in coops. Clean those shoes after each visit. Regularly disinfect any equipment used in coops. [See further coop guidance here](#). Deter wild birds from interacting with domesticated birds. Consider hanging noisemakers in trees or, if local rules allow, set off firecrackers intermittently or when you see vultures or geese on your property.

For Other Pets

Keep cats indoors. Keep pets that do go outdoors away from wild birds, poultry, and cattle and their environments. Prevent pets from eating dead birds or other animals. Avoid feeding pets raw meat or poultry and unpasteurized milk. Immediately contact your veterinarian if you notice any signs of HPAI.

For Hunters

Hunters who handle wild birds should dress game birds in the field when possible and remains from processed birds can be buried where the animal was harvested or double bagged and disposed along with normal household waste.

How to report suspected cases

Look for signs of illness and report a sudden increase in the number of sick birds or bird deaths to the Tennessee State Veterinarian's office at (615) 837-5120 and/or USDA at 1-866-536-7593. Find more tips and [HPAI resources online](#).

STATE BRIEFS

Tennessee's unemployment rate increased to 3.5% in November, up from 3.4% in October. According to Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development (TDLWD), Tennessee's November 2024 unemployment rate was unchanged from its November 2023 rate. The state's unemployment rate still remains below the national average of 4.2%. Additionally, Tennessee added 56,000 nonfarm jobs between November 2023 and November 2024, the highest month-by-month comparison in 2024. TDLWD's analysis of the November 2024 unemployment data is [available here](#).

Nearly 70,000 pounds of litter was removed from communities throughout Tennessee as part of the Tennessee Department of Transportation's (TDOT) 4th Annual No Trash November, a month-long initiative to ensure the state's roadways and waterways are safe from the harmful effects of litter. Spearheaded by TDOT's Nobody Trashes Tennessee campaign, No Trash November brings together Keep Tennessee Beautiful affiliates, TDOT Grantees, Adopt-A-Highway groups, youth groups, water groups, and individuals who are working together to end littering. All told, 2,412 volunteers participated in 175 cleanups, collecting 3,207 bags of litter, weighing 69,776 pounds. At any given time, there are 88 million pieces of litter on the state's roadways. TDOT spends more than \$23 million annually on litter pickup and prevention education, which is funded through dedicated revenue from Tennessee's Soft Drink and Malt Beverage industries.

Tennessee is one of the top states for entrepreneurs, according to information compiled from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data. Tennessee ranked as the fifth most popular state for new businesses with the number of new businesses in the state growing by 8% between 2022 and 2023. The state saw more than 16,000 new businesses open during that time frame. Oregon was the top state for new businesses with a 9.9% increase in new business filings, followed by Montana, Michigan, and Hawaii.

Tennessee has achieved its highest seat belt usage rate on record for the second year in a row. The Tennessee Highway Safety Office (THSO) conducted an annual roadside observational survey that determined a statewide usage rate of 92.2%, an increase of 0.2% from 2023. Researchers found occupants for sport utility vehicles were the most likely to use seat belts while those in pick-up trucks were the least likely. Additionally, female

occupants had a higher usage rate than males while front-seat passengers were more likely to use their seat belt than drivers.

The Tennessee Department of Agriculture Division of Forestry has announced the creation of the new 5,477-acre Wolf River State Forest, the 16th state forest in Tennessee. Opening to visitors in 2025, the land is a portion of the historical Ames Plantation that is now home to the Hobart Ames Foundation and benefits the University of Tennessee's (UT) scientific research programs and the National Championship for Bird Dogs. Located north of LaGrange and Grand Junction and south of Somerville, the new state forest includes one of the finest examples of bottomland hardwood forests in the state, including white oak stands that provide significant aid to white oak restoration and sustainability efforts. TDF will also conserve more than 30 miles of streams and riparian habitat and 1,560 acres of wetlands in the new state forest, helping to ensure water quality for Memphis drinking water, fisheries, and others downstream.

Tennessee was ranked the second-friendliest state in the nation by the World Population Review's Friendliest States of 2024 Study. Minnesota ranked as the friendliest state followed by Tennessee, South Carolina, Texas, and Wyoming. The survey was compiled from a poll taken by tourists to report which state gave them the friendliest experience. Tennessee retained its second-place ranking from last year.

All advisories urging the public to avoid contact with bodies of water affected by Hurricane Helene have been lifted by the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation. The advisory had been put into place on Oct. 2, 2024, and specifically referenced the Doe, French Broad, Nolichucky, Pigeon and Watauga river watersheds and all other affected waterways. The state had been sampling 17 rivers and streams to ensure that they were not contaminated with bacteria such as E. coli or heavy metals like lead and mercury as a result of storm damage. Flood waters often carry harmful bacteria and chemicals with many East Tennessee counties offering free tetanus, hepatitis A, and flu vaccines to those who had contact with flood waters. State officials said there is no reason for spring recreation not to continue as usual on East Tennessee waterways, though work is still ongoing to remove the shoreline from Douglas Lake. TVA is working with TEMA to clean up the lake, which had an influx of debris from upriver in North Carolina.

Boyd Center report shows TN economy to surpass US growth

TN ECONOMY, from Page 1 support new and innovative companies that pair well our skilled workforce, strong business climate and exceptional quality of life."

Real estate investment, construction spending and construction employment are expected to receive an additional boost in 2025 if the Federal Reserve continues to reduce interest rates as anticipated. Tennessee Population Projections Tennessee added 77,513 new residents between 2022 and 2023, a 1.1% increase that was more than double the U.S. growth rate of 0.5% during the same period. That growth placed Tennessee sixth in population growth among all states, behind only South Carolina, Georgia, North Carolina, Florida and Texas.

The Boyd Center updated its population projections earlier this year, predicting that Tennessee's population will grow by 600,000 residents between 2020 and 2030. From 2030 to 2040, growth is expected to moderate to 427,000 new residents. This smaller increase is attributed to a slowdown in the record high levels of domestic immigration following the pandemic, lower fertility rates and higher deaths among an aging population. Artificial Intelligence and Tennessee's Economy

The third chapter of the re-

port focuses on the rapid growth of artificial intelligence and its potential economic implications. Tennessee is already preparing for AI integration through higher education and workforce development initiatives.

According to U.S. Census data, roughly 5% of U.S. firms use AI to produce goods and services, with Tennessee ranking 17th at 4.9%. Nationally, the highest AI adoption rates are in information (18.1%); professional, scientific and technical services (12%); and educational services (9.1%). The lowest adoption rates are in construction (1.4%); agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting (1.4%); and transportation and warehousing (1.5%).

AI is expected to enhance economic efficiency, with a survey on AI adoption revealing that 55% of AI-adopting manufacturing firms in the U.S. reported cost savings while 66% reported revenue growth. AI is also expected to reduce task completion times significantly; a Microsoft analysis found that workers using AI tools could reduce task completion times by up to 73%. The report cites law clerks, tax preparers, proofreaders and pilots among the most AI-exposed professions, while the least exposed are HR managers, sales managers, cashiers and bartenders.

Five cities receive state water loans

Five cities are sharing five loans through the State Revolving Fund Loan Program according to the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC).

The cities of Dandridge and Fayetteville each received a single loan while the town of White Pine received two loans. A joint loan was also issued for Caryville and Jacksboro in conjunction with the Caryville/Jacksboro Utilities Commission.

The \$400,000 loan to **Dandridge** comes from the Clean Water State Revolving Fund Loan Program. It will address infiltration and inflow corrections, including planning and design for the rehabilitation/replacement of sewer lines and the replacement of manholes. The loan has a five-year term at 2.38% interest. Dandridge received \$200,000 in principal forgiveness with the remainder of the loan amount to be paid back as principal.

Fayetteville received a \$15 million loan from the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Loan Program. The loan addresses waterline replacement to improve pressure and reduce water loss. It has a 20-year term at 1.87% interest.

The town of **White Pine**



Fayetteville's water treatment plant.

received \$650,000 in loans. Of those funds, \$500,000 come from the Clean Water State Revolving Fund Loan Program for collection system rehabilitation. The loan has a five-year term at 2.38% interest. White Pine received \$250,000 in principal forgiveness with the remainder of the loan amount to be paid back as principal.

The remaining \$150,000 from the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Loan Program for the planning and design of a new water storage tank. The loan has a five-year term at 2.38% interest. White

Pine received \$75,000 in principal forgiveness with the remainder of the loan amount to be paid back as principal.

A \$242,500 loan for the **Jacksboro** and the **Caryville/Jacksboro** Utilities Commission comes from the Clean Water State Revolving Fund Loan Program. It will address wastewater treatment plant improvements. The loan has a five-year term at 2.38% interest. The recipients were given \$121,250 in principal forgiveness with the remainder of the loan amount to be paid back as principal.

November revenues \$129.8M less than budgeted

Tennessee Department of Finance and Administration Commissioner Jim Bryson announced that revenues for November were \$1.35 billion, which is \$72.2 million less than November of last year and \$129.8 million less than the budgeted estimate.

General fund revenues were \$137.3 million less than the November estimate, but the four other funds that share in state tax revenues were \$7.5 million more than the estimates.

On an accrual basis, November is the fourth month in the 2024-2025 fiscal year.

"November revenues fell below our forecasted estimates due to weak corporate tax receipts," Bryson said. "Corporate tax revenues, specifically franchise and excise taxes, experienced a decline due to refunds issued to calendar-year corporate tax filers. However, sales tax revenues, which reflect consumer activity from October, remained strong. Adjusting for last year's forgone revenue, sales tax collections grew by 3.9% compared to November 2023. All other state tax categories combined grew by nearly 5 percent."

"Although November's revenue numbers were below our budgeted estimates, we are encouraged by some positive trends and will continue to monitor state spending

and ongoing economic activity."

On a year-to-date basis, August through November, total tax revenues are 0.86% less than the budget estimate, or \$57.4 million below expectations. When compared to this same period last year, total tax revenues have grown 0.09% or \$5.7 million.

General fund revenues are 1.38% less than the year-to-date budgeted estimate, or \$75.6 million lower. Likewise, general fund collections compared to this same period last year have increased by 0.27% or \$14.6 million.

Individual tax performance compared to November 2024 Budgeted Estimates:

- Sales Taxes: Above estimate by 4.51% or \$53.4 million
- Corporate Taxes (Franchise & Excise): Below estimate by 417.28% or \$195.2 million
- Fuel Taxes: Below estimate by 1.44% or \$1.5 million
- All other taxes: Above estimate by 9.23% or \$13.5 million

Year-to-date performance compared to Budgeted Estimates:

- Sales Taxes: Above estimate by 1.83% or \$87.4 million
- Corporate Taxes (Franchise & Excise): Below estimate by 22.86% or \$188.8 million
- Fuel Taxes: Above estimate

by 0.39% or \$1.7 million

- All other taxes: Above estimate by 6.79% or \$42.3 million

Individual tax performance compared to November 2023:

- Sales Taxes: Up 9.45% or \$106.7 million
- Corporate Taxes (Franchise & Excise): Down 443.24% or \$191.6 million
- Fuel Taxes: Down 0.12% or \$0.1 million
- All other taxes: Up 8.76% or \$12.8 million

Individual tax performance compared to August through November 2023:

- Sales Taxes: Up 6.28% or \$287 million
- Corporate Taxes (Franchise & Excise): Down 31.89% or \$298.2 million
- Fuel Taxes: Up 0.26% or \$1.1 million
- All other taxes: Up 2.42% or \$15.7 million

The budgeted revenue estimates for 2024-2025 are based upon the State Funding Board's consensus recommendation from Nov. 29, 2023, and adopted by the second session of the 113th General Assembly in April 2024. A

All monthly estimates are [available on the state's website](#).

All three constitutional officers re-elected

OFFICERS, from Page 1

ler of the Treasury, which comprises of 12 divisions and more than 560 employees, and ensuring the office fulfills its mission to make government work better. Prior to his service with the Comptroller's Office, Mumpower served in the Tennessee General Assembly as the state representative for Sullivan and Johnson counties. He was first elected to office at age 23. During his 14-year tenure, he held the positions of House Majority Leader and House Minority Leader.

Lillard was re-elected to his seventh, two-year term as state

treasurer. "It is the honor of my life to continue to work for the citizens of Tennessee," said Lillard. "Tennessee continues to receive great accolades for its financial management and it is mostly due to the great leadership of the Tennessee General Assembly."

As Treasurer, Lillard directs multiple state programs with a staff of approximately 275 employees and a department budget of \$74.4 million.

Treasurer Lillard has championed issues of financial literacy and strives to find new ways to improve the financial lives of Tennesseans.

Since first elected in 2009, he has worked with the Treasury Department to provide Tennesseans with financial tools needed to lead a better quality of life. Treasurer Lillard has extensive professional experience in public and private corporate finance transactions, municipal finance, governmental budgeting and related fields.

Both the comptroller and the treasurer serve two-year terms; whereas, the secretary of state serves four-year terms. All are elected to their positions by a joint convention of the House and Senate.

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E-BRIDGE Act eases deployment of broadband infrastructure in rural areas

Makes projects eligible for certain federal grants and allows recipients to use private sector expertise in broadband development and deployment.

BY CHRIS TEALE,
Managing Editor
Route Fifty

Just days before the end of his term, President Joe Biden signed into law an effort to make it easier to deploy broadband infrastructure in rural areas.

Biden signed the Eliminating Barriers to Rural Internet Development Grant Eligibility Act, known as the E-BRIDGE Act, as part of the sweeping biannual Water Resources Development Act that deals with various aspects of water resources and projects but has other bills added to it.

The legislation makes broadband projects in distressed communities eligible for grants from the Economic Development Authority by eliminating barriers to investment in last-mile projects, which connect to homes and other buildings. It clarifies that eligible grant recipients can use public-private partnerships and other consortia to make use of private sector expertise in developing and deploying their projects.

The law also provides more flexibility in the procurement process to reflect the sometimes-limited broadband options in distressed and rural communities, clarifies that funds can be combined with other federal resources and adds flexibility in accounting for in-kind

payments to meet non-federal cost sharing requirements.

“Unfortunately, too many of our communities, particularly in rural America, still lack broadband access,” Rep. Sam Graves, the Missouri Republican who chairs the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, said in a statement. “In some cases, just completing that ‘last mile’ is what stands in the way of connecting people to a job they need. The E-BRIDGE Act will help spur projects that attract jobs and businesses to expand economic development and opportunity in rural and poor communities.”

The E-BRIDGE Act has long been a priority for the House. It has passed the chamber on several occasions, and this time around received approval from the transportation committee in July 2023. It then passed the full House again almost a year later.

Elected officials hope it will help attract new and support current businesses in distressed regions of the country, to help lay the groundwork for economic recovery in those areas and better prepare them for future disasters or epidemics.

While the prospect of federal investment in rural broadband — either through the \$42 billion Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Program or the myriad other grant programs — is enticing, it can be difficult to make those projects work financially. Companies are reluctant to lay fiber in rural areas as the customer base would not provide a large enough return on their investment, so many

places are left behind while more densely populated areas receive better infrastructure.

In their stead, electric co-operatives have been among those to step up to provide service, similar to the 1930s when they provided electricity service in parts of the country that had been left behind by the big players.

Broadband’s benefits can be tremendous for rural communities. A report last year from the Center on Rural Innovation found that businesses grew more than 200% in rural areas with high broadband utilization rates. Meanwhile, NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association said last year creating a digital equity plan, building partnerships and engaging in community outreach are just some of the ways rural communities can reduce the digital divide.

While BEAD has at times proven politically controversial and could be subject to changes from President-elect Donald Trump and his incoming administration, House leaders said legislation like the E-BRIDGE Act could be a perfect way to get projects off the ground, especially in rural and distressed areas.

“For America to thrive, people in rural America must thrive,” Rep. Tracey Mann, a Kansas Republican, said in a statement when the E-BRIDGE Act was introduced in 2023. “We all rely on high-speed broadband for both our personal and professional lives, and communities making investments in their own rural broadband access shouldn’t have to deal with mountains of red tape while they do it.

NATIONAL BRIEFS



U.S. job growth slowed but remained healthy in December while the unemployment rate held steady at 4.2%. The Labor Department reported the addition of 256,000 jobs in December, including 160,000 new non-farm jobs. Average hourly earnings rose 0.3% in December after gaining 0.4% in November. The annual increase in wages is seen unchanged at 4.0% in December. Overall, the U.S. added 2.144 million jobs in 2024, equivalent to 179,000 jobs per month.

U.S. inflation ticked upward in December to 2.9%, the highest rate since July and the third straight increase after inflation fell to a 3.5-year low in September. The Labor Department said prices for gas, eggs, and used cars were fueling the inflation increase. However, the core inflation that strips out more volatile fuel and food prices declined to 3.2% in December despite

being stuck at 3.3% for three months. This slowdown in core prices is a relief to many economists and investors worried that inflation had gotten stuck above the Fed’s 2% target after steady declines in 2023 and much of 2024. Economists have predicted inflation to decline as apartment rental prices, wages, and car insurance costs grow more slowly but caution potentially inflationary policies from the incoming administration could reverse this. The unemployment rate ticked down to a low of 4.1% last month, showing that consumers are able to keep spending and drive growth. However, if demand exceeds what companies can produce inflation could be driven up further.

Homelessness hit its highest ever rate in the U.S. in 2024 with more than 770,000 people experiencing homelessness. This was an 18% increase from 2023 and the largest year-over-year increase since HUD began collecting data in 2007. The surge

in homelessness was driven by a lack of affordable housing, a rise in people seeking shelter, and natural disasters. Home prices were at a record high in 2024 with the cost of borrowing to purchase a home remaining persistently high even as the Federal Reserve cut interest rates three times in the past year. The demand for homes as also vastly outstripped supply after decades of under building. Rents have also continued climbing with more than 30% of their income on housing, which qualifies them as cost-burdened.

The U.S. median home price is expected to hit \$410,700 for existing homes in 2025 with the National Association of Realtors projecting a 2% increase in costs in both 2025 and 2026. NAR forecasts that mortgage rates will stabilize near 6% in 2025 at a “new normal.” The association is projecting 4.5 million in sales of existing homes with an addition of 1.45 million new housing starts, just below a historical average of 1.5 million units per year.



TENNESSEE FESTIVALS

Jan. 17: Pigeon Forge [Smoky Mountain Elvis Festival](#)
The Smoky Mountain Ultimate Elvis Weekend is held in Pigeon Forge, celebrating the life and music of Elvis Presley. Enjoy a variety of events including Elvis tribute artist performances.

Jan. 17-19: Knoxville [Ullr Festival](#)
Join us at Barrelhouse Knoxville for a weekend filled with winter festivities. From live music by The Crossjack to axe throwing with Til Ragnarok, there's something for everyone.

Jan. 18-19: Dayton [34th Annual Tennessee Sandhill Crane Festival](#)
With up to 20,000 sandhill cranes returning to the area each year, you’re bound to be caught up in the spectacular display of the sandhill cranes, eagles, waterfowl, and more on the refuge. Volunteers will be on hand with spotting scopes, but you’re welcome to bring your own binoculars. Dress for the weather, rain or shine.

Jan. 27-Feb.2: Nashville [Hot Chicken Week](#)
Heat things up this winter with the Nashville Scene’s annual Hot Chicken Week. For one week only, 30+ of Middle Tennessee’s top restaurants will offer \$8 hot chicken specials in hopes of winning your vote and being crowned the winner of Best Hot Chicken.

Feb. 8: Johnson City [Maple Syrup Festival and Pancake Breakfast](#)
The Tipton-Haynes State Historic Site in Johnson City invites guests to watch as sap gathered from their maple trees is boiled down to sweet maple syrup with an accompanying pancake breakfast. Delicious, pure maple syrup will also be on sale.

Feb. 22: Oak Ridge [Oak Ridge Children's Museum International Festival](#)
Join us for our annual International Festival, a Children’s Museum of Oak Ridge tradition! The Festival features a variety of world cultures through performances, food, crafts, children’s activities, and more.

Feb. 22: Townsend [Tennessee Winter Beer Fest](#)
Join us for the best craft beer festival around. Enjoy a beautiful open-air setting at Company Distilling in Townsend with several local Tennessee breweries that will bring their best brews for sampling and voting along with delicious food, live music, a silent auction, and proceeding benefiting New Hope Blount County Children’s Advocacy Center

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Ed Stewart, ChFC, CLU, CF
Financial Advisor

Legislators sworn in, elect leaders, conduct business during opening days of 114th TN General Assembly

LEGISLATORS. *from Page 1*
into office – three new senators and 9 new House members. Republicans hold the super majority with 27 of 33 seats in the Senate, and 75 seats in the 99-member House.

New rules were approved by the House to make changes to committees and subcommittees and to reduce the bill limit for Representatives. The new rules reduce the number of bills that a House member can file from 15 to 12. Next year, the limit will be further reduced to 10. In addition to the bills that rank-and-file members are allowed, full committee chairmen are allowed five additional caption bills, and subcommittee chairs get two additional bills. The Senate does not limit the number of bills its members can file.

Changes to committees and subcommittees were also adopted in the House. Of particular interest to local governments is the recombined State and Local Government committee, which had previously

been split into two committees when Glen Casada was speaker.

Other changes include the deletion of the Property and Planning Subcommittee, previously chaired by retired Rep. Dale Carr.

Also of interest is the naming of Rep. Gary Hicks as chair of the House Finance Committee, previously held by Rep. Patsy Hazlewood, who did not win re-election.

On the Senate side, Sen. Dawn White was named chair of the Senate Education Committee, previously chaired by Sen. Jon Lundberg, who did not win re-election.

To review committee assignments for both the Senate and the House, go to:

- [Senate Committees](#)
- [House Committees](#)

Both the Senate and House are in recess until Jan. 27, when members of the General Assembly will be called into a Special Session on school vouchers, disaster relief, and illegal immigration.



(L to R) Rep Brock Martin, Rep. Jeremy Faison, and Rep. Ryan Williams are among the 99 House members sworn into office. (Photo by Erik Schelzig, *State Affairs*.)



(L to R) Sen Bill Powers, Sen Page Walley, Sen Shane Reeves, and Sen Tom Hatcher are sworn into office on opening day of the 114th General Assembly.



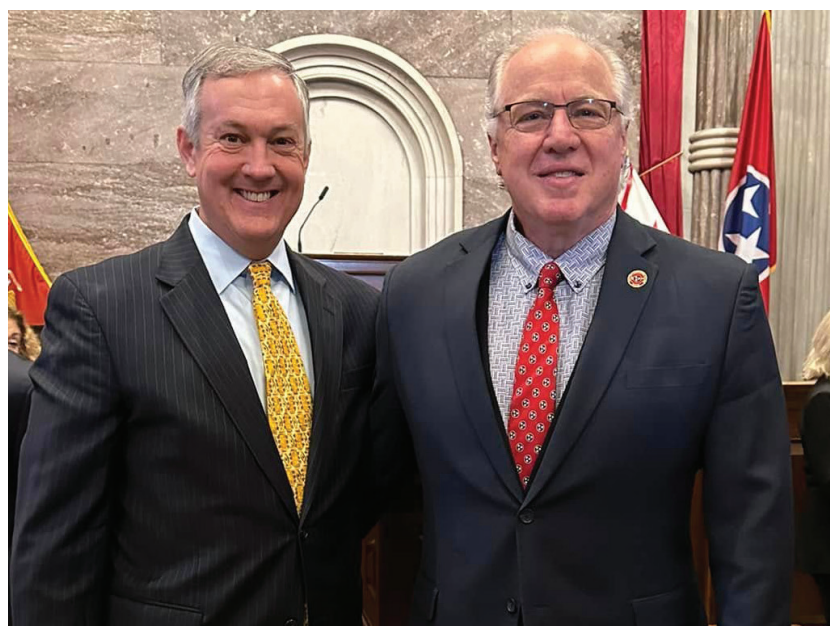
(L to R) Rep. William Lamberth talks with Rep. Karen Camper and Rep. John Ray Clemmons (AP Photo)



(L to R) Sen. Jack Johnson, Sen. Dawn White, Lt. Gov. Randy McNally, Sen. Ken Yager, Sen. Shane Reeves, and Sen. Bill Powers.



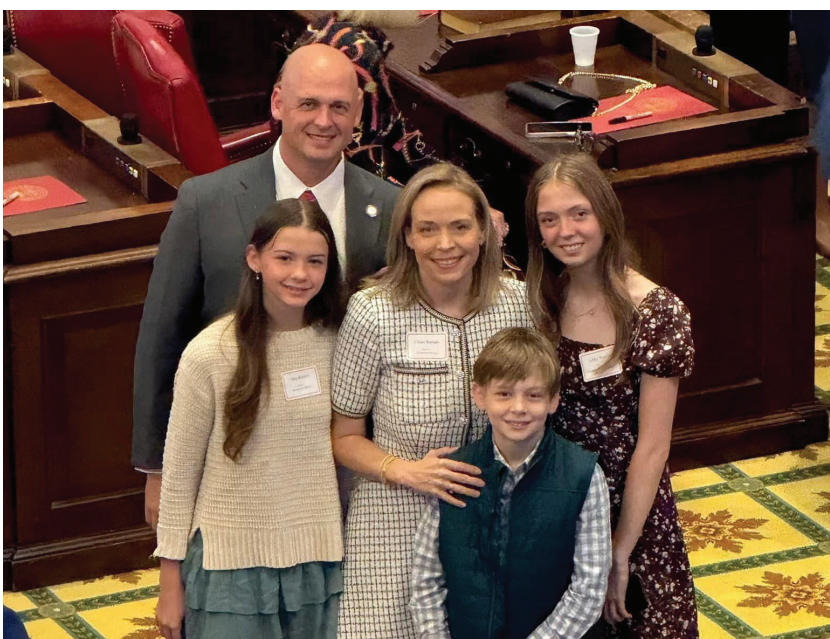
Sen. Shane Reeves with his wife and daughter on opening day.



Top Left: Secretary of State Tre Hargett and Sen. Page Walley.



Top Right: Freshmen Legislators Rep. Gabby Salinas and Rep. Shaundelle Brooks being sworn into office.



Bottom Left: Freshman Legislator Lee Reeves with family on Opening Day.



Bottom Right: Rep. Pat Marsh and Rep. Mark White.