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BOYS STATE

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BOYS' STATE OPENS WITH ORIENTATION AND MEMORIAL SERVICE

Circuit Court Judge John Maddux, in his 34th year as Boys' State Board of Directors chairman, opened the orientation and memorial service on Sunday evening by telling the audience that the week of sacrificing time, energy and attention would be worth the experience. Tennessee American Legion Adjutant Dean A. Tuttle placed the POW-MIA flag. Also, Tuttle, representing more than 30,000 Tennessee American Legion members, placed the memorial wreath.

Charles McCaskey, retired Army chaplain and minister of Cookeville's First Cumberland Presbyterian Church, asked delegates to remember the 1,363,000 individuals who died in defense of this country since its inception.

"In America, what Memorial Day means to many people is a picnic, maybe fireworks. What it is about is the 1,363,000 who have given their lives so that you may have freedom. Your freedom is bought with a price, a price of sacrifice. Don't take it for granted. Pass it on," said McCaskey.

Cookeville/Putnam County Chamber of Commerce president George Halford encouraged delegates to "have a big time" and listen and learn and meet people. "With 600 miles from Mountain City to Memphis, most people never get together in the state like you are. Make the most of it," he said.

Former Tennessee Tech University President Bob Bell welcomed everyone to campus. Marc Burnett, Boys' State director, encouraged participants by talking about the legacy built by previous delegates. 2012 Boys' State Gov. Coleman Hawkins led this year's delegate in taking the Boys' State pledge.

Judge Maddux informed the audience that Tennessee's Boys' State program is considered the best of the 55 programs in the world. CPR/AED training will be offered to each participant. Streaming video will allow parents and friends to watch assembly speakers and parade ground activities on the Boys' State website. A mobile application is also available this year.

"Our form of government can be improved only when citizens understand and participate in democracy," said Maddux. "Run for office, campaign for others, participate and help. It's not failure you should think about, but the fear of failure. Most of all, make friends this week."

REMEMBER ME?

Judge John Maddux offered a well-received presentation on "Remembering Names and Faces." Boys' Staters learned the importance of remembering names in order to influence, communicate, impress, sell and create and maintain friendships. He challenged delegates to learn every person's name in their cities by noon on Wednesday.

Judge Maddux gave five steps and an acronym (INRAW) for remembering a person's name:

1. Be Interested
2. Get the Name (listen, ask about spelling and origin)
3. Repeat the Name (aloud, silently several times)
4. Associate Mental Image with Name (recall features, be silly)

STATE REPS. RYAN WILLIAMS, CAMERON SEXTON ON MAJOR STATE POLITICAL ISSUES

State Reps. Ryan Williams of Cookeville and Cameron Sexton of Crossville spoke to delegates Monday morning.

Sexton presented four recent pieces of legislation considered in the state legislature: wine sales in grocery stores, beer tax, Hall income tax and the inheritance tax. He explained how changing policy can affect state revenues, local revenues and the health of businesses. "It's hard to have people think in terms of five to 10 years from now," he said. "It's easy to determine the immediate cost, but will it bring benefit in the long run? This is really an issue about taxes. We should not hinder, but aid, business growth," he said.

Williams pointed out federal decisions that affect us at a state level, including the affordable health care act and gun ownership rights. "Our state has conservative principles; our constitution states we have to balance the budget. So the Medicaid policy and spending of other states affects us negatively," he said. He also echoed Sexton's concern about how legislative decisions affect businesses. "Tennessee is the third best place in America to start or grow a business. Our goal is not to make decisions that negatively affect other groups," he said.

Rep. Williams fielded questions from delegates.

Q: Why did the state choose \$40,000 as the cutoff for Hall income tax?

A: We phased the amount up over time in order to be able to adjust to a fair exemption while allowing the state to adjust to the decreased revenue.

Q: How did you get involved in state government?

A: In 2000 my family went to D.C. with a church group. We learned a lot, and we were interested in service. In 2006 my wife encouraged me to not to complain about a local issue, but to run for office and to do something about it. You can see change in local government faster than in state government.

Q: Do you foresee the food tax dropped lower?

A: I carried a bill that would eliminate sales tax on all unprepared food. But you have to be careful not to under tax because we need to provide services. I don't think you will see it reduced. But I think we can incentivize people to make better choices.

Q: Can you tell me about common core standards and where we stand as a state in education?

A: Tennessee was given \$500 million with Race to the Top to improve education. The standards were raised because of this. I believe our expectations of children should be higher. Common core standards create a database, but there are some concerns about truth of textbooks and too many data points that might not be measuring the right data.

Q: How much attention do you give to citizens' opinions?

A: A lot to people who call or email from my district. It is disheartening that not a lot of people call or email. It's nice that I'm trusted, but I'd like to hear more opinions.

Q: Where does Tennessee stand on gun control?

A: I'm a strong advocate of the Second Amendment. I believe it was written to protect us from tyrannical governments. I think this state is one of the safest places for gun rights, and your Second Amendment rights are protected well here.

