

TENNESSEE AMERICAN LEGION

BOYS STATE

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BOYS' STATE OPENS WITH ORIENTATION AND MEMORIAL SERVICE

In his first year overseeing the program, Judge Gary McKenzie 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. McKenzie follows in the footsteps of Judge John Maddux, who served 35 years as Boys State Board of Directors chairman. Tennessee American Legion Adjutant Dean A. Tuttle placed the POW-MIA flag on stage and the wreath at the foot of the American flag to honor those who have given their lives for our freedom.

Charles McCaskey, retired Army chaplain and minister of Cookeville's First Cumberland Presbyterian Church, told delegates at least 1,240,000 troops have lost lives in combat since the Civil War. "I have buried dozens of those, and I've held their wives' hands while they cried," he said. "I've put their children on my knee and bounced them while they tried to figure out why daddy didn't come home.

"When you eat breakfast in the morning, you give thanks for one of those people. When you stand in formation, you give thanks. When you return to high school, you give thanks. When you register to vote, give thanks," he admonished.

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.

Marc Burnett, Boys State director, encouraged participants to lead. "As you go through the week, there are many people here who are leaders who look for other leaders to follow in their footsteps," he said.

2014 Boys State Gov. Rafiq Malek led this year's delegates in taking the Boys State pledge. "Don't be bitter over elections. It's very competitive, but that's fine if you make sure it is not harmful. Don't be shy; too many delegates regret being too shy to run or not overcoming fear. Make friends. You will end up making friends you will have for a lifetime."

Judge McKenzie 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.

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)
5. Write it down (carry a notepad)

Williams, Bailey and Keisling speak on Major Political Issues in Tennessee

State Rep. Ryan Williams, Rep. Kelly Keisling and Sen. Paul Bailey led an information and Q&A session on hot topics being discussed in the state legislature. They covered top issues, including assisted suicide, a state gas tax, medical marijuana, Medicaid expansion, and Common Core.

Bailey, Keisling and Williams all emphasized that party affiliations weren't the strongest bonds that exist when voting. All described most votes being determined by whether or not an elected official represents an urban or rural area. All three also spoke of the recent emotional testimony of statesman John J. Hooker who suffers from melanoma. He asked for support of an assisted suicide bill that would allow two physicians to agree to provide the patient with a drug cocktail to self-administer.

All three elected officials extended their availability to students and met with dozens of Boys Staters after the scheduled session to listen and answer questions.

Do other states have a gas tax? PB: We have one of the lowest taxes in the nation. We are a "pay as we go" state and should stay that way. We don't owe on our road system and a gas tax is the best place to start as a user fee. The state does an excellent job of actually using all dollars collected on roads and highways.

How do you decide to vote when your constituents support something you might not support otherwise? KK: I always vote with my heart; I will not go against the wishes of my district. PB: My view is that I support a referendum regardless of my moral beliefs if I have a vote that the majority of my constituents agree on what they support. RW: What the public believes about a bill is not necessarily the truth. It is my job to help them understand what the bill really says.

How do you feel about Medicaid expansion in Tennessee? RW: I don't trust the federal government and would have to see an agreement in writing. My constituents don't send me to vote on what might be real. And it is borrowed money. As a young person, I'd be concerned. KK: I understand that if the bill had made it through the Senate committee, the governor was going to make sure he had a signed letter from Washington. PB: I asked the governor when he came on a tour to Sparta about the estimate of 280,000 new enrollees. I had heard more than 500,000, and if we are paying with a hospital assessment fee, when does that fee and the number of enrollees not match up and taxpayers have to pay the rest?

How can you legalize marijuana in Tennessee? RW: You can't legalize it as it relates to the federal statute. The bill I'm talking about would allow the rewriting of a current bill to allow only vapor, oil or patches to be used. This is a case where states are beginning to make decisions that are best for the states.

How is Tennessee addressing the Common Core controversy? RW: We have started a three-year process to throw out Common Core and to develop similar standards but with a board of teachers deciding how best to do this instead of trusting the federal government. We have to listen to our teachers and find a way that works for three divisions of Tennessee that are really culturally different. I personally oppose the data collection related to Common Core.

Wouldn't the state be better off with a state income tax to pay for roads and other needs? PB: In November 2014, the legislature voted to totally eliminate the possibility of Tennessee ever having a state income tax.

