

# TENNESSEE GOVERNMENT

## Update

### NEWS FOR THE CLIENTS AND FRIENDS OF BASS, BERRY & SIMS PLC

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This Update is devoted to Tennessee politics. Please be assured that the legislature continues its routine mid-season work. In the meantime, though, political matters are of slightly more interest.

#### **The Republican (or not) Senate**

Republican Senator Mike Williams of Maynardville announced Wednesday that he is now an Independent. The Senate is now evenly split by party 16 to 16 with one independent – Williams.

The legislative political landscape changed in January when Ron Ramsey (R- Blountville) was elected Speaker of the Senate, a body composed of 17 Republicans and 16 Democrats. The crucial vote for Speaker in the dramatic opening floor session came from Rosalind Kurita (D- Clarksville) who crossed over to support the Republican Ramsey. Senator Williams also cast his vote for Ramsey. Williams had provided a crucial vote for John Wilder (D- Mason) in the previous General Assembly, a vote that enabled Wilder to maintain the Speaker's post, even though Republicans held the majority of Senate seats. All the committees in the Senate now have a Republican majority and Republicans chair the important committees.

Williams has indicated that he will not caucus with the Democrats. Since Senate rules would require a two-thirds vote of the Senate to suspend the rules to hold another election for Speaker, Ramsey will remain in the top post and committee assignments will not change.

#### **Absent Senators**

After a fall at his home last weekend, Senator John Wilder is out of the hospital. He cut his head and required an emergency blood transfusion. The 85-year-old Wilder is expected back in Nashville on Monday. Senator Jerry Cooper (D- Morrison), recovering from a near-fatal traffic accident, has been absent for most of the session and not expected back in the near future. Memphis Senator Ophelia Ford, also a Democrat, has also been absent more than she has been present.

#### **Democrats, as expected, take two special elections in Memphis**

Democratic State Representative Beverly Robison Marrero will move to the Senate after winning a special election to fill former Senator Steve Cohen's seat, District 30 (Cohen was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives). Democrat G.A. Hardaway was elected to fill the District 92 state House seat previously held by Henri Brooks, who now serves as a Shelby County Commissioner.

### **Presidential Aspirations**

Former U.S. Senator and current actor Fred Thompson is “leaving the door open” to a run for the White House. Republican Party Chairman Bob Davis, a former top aide to Thompson, did not hide his enthusiasm. “He’s the one American who could bring this country together,” opined Davis. “If Fred Thompson got involved there would be a floodgate busted open with individuals lining up to support him.” U.S. Representative Zach Wamp of Chattanooga has been a vocal supporter, claiming that conservatives have a “raw, gut feeling” when it comes to Thompson.

### **Gubernatorial Aspirations**

A few weeks ago, former U.S. Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist let it be known that he might be interested in running for governor in 2010. This week, word is out that former Congressman Harold Ford, Jr., may share Frist's ambition. Ford's Democratic colleague in the U.S. House, Congressman Lincoln Davis, has also indicated that he is interested. To round out the early field, other Republicans known to be interested are Knoxville Mayor Bill Haslam and former State Party Chair and State Representative Beth Harwell.

### **Popular Election of the Lieutenant Governor**

Senator Joe Haynes (D- Nashville) has proposed a constitutional amendment to elect by popular vote the lieutenant governor. Newly-installed Senate Speaker and Lieutenant Governor Ron Ramsey, whose election broke John Wilder’s 36-year reign, called the timing “somewhat ironic.”

Speaker Pro Tempore Rosalind Kurita (D-Clarksville) has long urged the popular election of Tennessee's Treasurer, Comptroller and Secretary of State. During the 2006 election season, all three constitutional officers lent their names to Democratic fundraisers across the state. These activities were protested by Republicans at the election of Comptroller and Treasurer. Republicans did not field their own candidate but they did largely abstain from voting. Speaker Ramsey is a co-sponsor of Senator Kurita's Resolutions.

### **Tennessee to be part of “Super-Duper” Tuesday?**

The general election for president is November 4, 2008. A bill, supported by both parties, to move the Tennessee primary to February 5, 2008, is making its way through the legislature. Iowa’s caucuses are January 14, and Nevada’s January 16. New Hampshire holds a primary on January 22, and South Carolina on January 29. Many states, including California, have already moved their primary date to the February 5, and more may follow. Tennessee's primary is currently scheduled for March 4, 2008.

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