HASLAM SHIFTS ‘DRIVE TO 55’ INITIATIVE INTO HIGH GEAR
Goal to have 55 percent of Tennesseans with certificates or degrees beyond high school by 2025

NASHVILLE – Tennessee Gov. Bill Haslam today convened key stakeholders including members of the General Assembly and leaders from Tennessee’s four-year colleges and universities, community colleges, colleges of applied technology, chambers of commerce, the business community, and the state board of education to discuss the challenges Tennessee faces in building a strong workforce for today and in the future.

“We want Tennesseans working in Tennessee jobs. We want Tennesseans to have an opportunity to get a good job and for those in the workplace to be able to advance and get an even better job,” Haslam said. “Currently in Tennessee, only 32 percent of us have a certificate or degree beyond high school, and studies show that by the year 2025 that number needs to be at least 55 percent for us to keep up with job demand. We have a lot of work ahead of us.”

The governor outlined Tennessee’s current situation including:

- Nearly 70 percent of Tennessee students entering community college need remedial classes before they can take college level courses;

- More than 20,000 Tennessee high school graduates choose not to continue their education each year.

- There are approximately 940,000 adult Tennesseans that have some college credit but haven’t earned an associate or four-year degree.

- On the state’s current path, Tennessee is projected to reach 39 percent of citizens with a certificate or degree beyond high school by the year 2025. To reach 55 percent would be 494,000 more people.

Two national experts participated in the event, held at the Music City Center in Nashville, to give global perspectives on workforce trends, the importance of workforce readiness, and innovations in post-secondary education.

Jeff Strohl, the director of research at the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, leads a team that researches how education impacts the workforce and focuses on
how to quantify skills and better understand competencies in the context of an evolving workplace.

Anant Agarwal serves as president of edX, a worldwide, online learning initiative of Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Harvard University. He is also a professor in MIT’s Electrical Engineering and Computer Science department.

The governor’s special advisor for Higher Education, Randy Boyd, also gave an update on the progress made to date on the “Drive to 55” initiative including:

- $16.5 million in this year’s budget for equipment and technology related to workforce development programs at Tennessee colleges of applied technology and community colleges, which institutions will begin receiving in the coming weeks.

- Launch of WGU Tennessee - an online, competency-based university aimed at the 940,000 adult Tennesseans that have some college credit but didn’t graduate with an associate or four-year degree.

- Newly created endowment of $47 million using operational reserve funds from the Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation (TSAC) to provide nearly $2 million each year to support scholarships for “last dollar” scholarship programs such as tnAchieves. These scholarships fill the gaps between students’ financial aid and the real costs of college including books, supplies, room and board.

- Launching the SAILS program, Seamless Alignment and Integrated Learning Support, to give students who need extra support in math attention during their senior year in high school so they can avoid remediation when they enter college.

- Legislation sponsored by Majority Leaders Mark Norris and Gerald McCormick to create the Labor Education Alignment Program – or LEAP – to better coordinate key stakeholders on the state and local level to address workforce readiness.

- And new online learning innovations in Tennessee through partnerships with edX and Coursera.

Haslam appointed Boyd to the position in January, and he has consulted with a formal working group made up of the governor, executive director of the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC), chancellor of the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR), and president of the
University of Tennessee. Although Boyd’s position is full-time, he is working for the state on a voluntary, unpaid basis.

The governor will be traveling the state in the coming weeks making the case for a stronger emphasis on workforce readiness in Tennessee – equipping more Tennesseans with the skills and training they need beyond high school for the jobs of today and tomorrow.

For more information on the ‘Drive to 55’ initiative, visit www.driveto55.org.

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