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Business Leaders To Legislators: Tennessee Can't Afford To Be Unwelcoming To Immigrants

By BLAKE FARMER • FEB 21, 2017

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Ophthalmologist Ming Wang, speaking at a press conference Tuesday, says immigration is not a zero-sum game.
CHAS SISK/WPLN



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Business leaders swarmed the Tennessee capitol Tuesday to talk about a topic dominating the national news – immigration. Advocates range from the Nashville Hispanic Chamber of Commerce to the Tennessee Farm Bureau.

These groups acknowledge that the federal government is in charge, while suggesting there are smaller ways the state could act.

"Rather than criticizing each other – the natives and the immigrants – let's look at what we can do together to help this great country," said Ming Wang, a Nashville ophthalmologist and entrepreneur who heads the Tennessee Chinese Chamber of Commerce.

Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce president Ralph Schulz says he'd like to see a revival of legislation that would have given any immigrant student who graduates from a Tennessee high school in-state tuition to four-year schools.

"We believe that it's really important for those young immigrants to have access to that higher level of education that's going to create a more qualified workforce for us in the future."

That legislation [fell one vote short of passage in 2015](#) and didn't make it nearly as far last year. However, such a bill, offering in-state tuition to immigrant students, hasn't been revived yet this year, at a time when the nation is taking a more restrictive stance on immigration.

Primarily, business groups say they're playing defense, and they have some new

data in hand from the New American Economy think-tank. It shows that Tennessee now is home to at least 21,000 foreign-born entrepreneurs and immigrants who paid \$2 billion in taxes for 2014.

"Prosperity grows when the population grows," Schulz says. "The immigration and in-migration to Tennessee is part of what's causing that prosperity that we're feeling all around us. So we are here to talk to legislators and take this information, and put it in people's hands."

Schulz, who is known as a Republican defender of immigrants, says they "fill gaps in the economy" that are "important to maintaining our ongoing prosperity."

"That's why at the state level we're focusing on making sure that the state of Tennessee stays a friendly and welcoming place for all immigrants," he says. "That just makes good business sense."

WPLN's Chas Sisk contributed to this report.

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Bill Jackson · 3 days ago

We must all remember that the current administrative actions are aimed at illegal immigration not those that appropriately apply and are approved for immigration.

I fail to see why any American would oppose deporting any illegal immigrant that has committed a felony.

What we need is a policy that addresses how those illegal immigrants that are positively contributing to the growth of America can legally remain and a policy that addresses to see that want to immigrate into America.

We forget that those European and Asian immigrants that came through Ellis Island and more modern ports of entry, did so legally.

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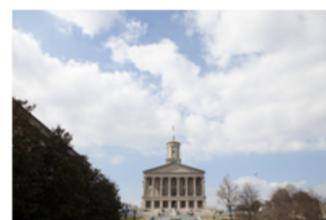
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By CHAS SISK & JASON MOON WILKINS · FEB 17, 2017



STEPHEN JERKINS / WPLN (FILE PHOTO)

It's been only five months since state Representative Jeremy Durham was expelled from the Tennessee General Assembly amid allegations he'd sexually harassed nearly two dozen women.

But lawmakers are already wrestling with the issue again, following the resignation of another legislator: Memphis Representative Mark Lovell. Just weeks after being sworn in,

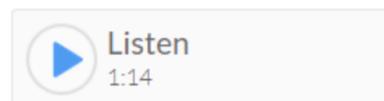
he was accused of touching a woman inappropriately.

Tennessee Lawmakers Say They'll 'Take The High Road' By Not Barring Travel To California

By CHAS SISK · FEB 13, 2017



STEPHEN JERKINS / WPLN (FILE PHOTO)



A group of Republican state lawmakers is condemning a decision by their counterparts in

California to ban all travel to Tennessee.

But they're stopping short of reciprocating. They say they want to end the bickering over differences in social policy

before it gets out of hand.

Bill To Legalize In-Home Haircuts Jumps First Legislative Hurdle

By MERIBAH KNIGHT • FEB 10, 2017



Barbers and hair stylists in Tennessee are one step closer to cutting hair in their customers' homes. On Tuesday, a bill to legalize in-home haircuts jumped its first legislative hurdle when it was passed by the Senate Commerce Committee.

Senate Minority Leader Lee Harris, D-Memphis, sponsored the bill. He sees the current rules, that in most cases bar home haircuts, as an inconvenience for customers.

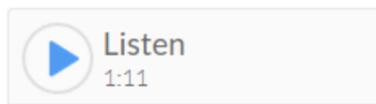
"This bill changes that law and tries to provide a reasonable path for barbers to provide haircuts at the customer's home," Harris says.

One Proposal To Cut Texting While Driving In Tennessee: Breathalyzer-Like Tests For Cell Phones

By CHAS SISK • JAN 25, 2017



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A Tennessee lawmaker says police should have the power to inspect drivers' phones at the

scene of serious accidents.

Supporters call it a "Textalyzer," like a Breathalyzer for cell phones. The idea is to see whether a driver was texting before the crash — just as police can test sobriety if they think a

driver has been drinking.

