

SPEAKER'S REMARKS

As I stated at the beginning of this 101st General Assembly, that we were entering a new century, a new millenium, and we that had a great opportunity to do something for the lives of Tennesseans. Well, we've let that slip by, in my opinion, but we have spent the last several decades working and building on the traditional infrastructures of this state, of building roads, jobs...industrial development. We got our unemployment rate down, but think about it while we're gone these next six months, when you come back. Think about us working on people infrastructure. We need to work on people infrastructure. It's time to build a better Tennessee for all our children. Let me tell you something. During the 101st General Assembly, we've had Beverly Briley born, the daughter of Representative Rob Briley, Tucker Robert Harwell, [son of] Representative Beth Harwell, Harrison Lowe Kisber, son of Chairman Kisber, Meyer Blaine Maddox, the daughter of Representative Mark Maddox, and Josie Gail Phelan, the daughter of Representative Phelan. Also, Ben West has had two grandchildren, Briley Iris Graves and Norman Justin Chumley, [also] Ashley Elizabeth Pugh, Representative Cole's granddaughter, [and] John Charles Tidwell III...no need to mention whose grandson that is, is it...and my own, Sarah Adele Wright. Now ladies and gentlemen, what do we want for these children? I want you to think about it over the next six months while you're gone. What we want is a better life than we had. That's what all parents want, isn't it? Have a better life than they had...I know my dad and mother felt that way.

This is the most difficult session that we've been through. We've all said that...I won't bear any more on that. We started the session with a lot of unanswered questions. We're ending the session with a lot of unanswered questions.

It's probably the type of session that had to happen. Just had to happen. We've got to get our minds and souls and spirits straight. Ladies and Gentlemen, this is the end of a budget process that we have known. We cannot go any further with a budget process like we've just gone through. Representative Westmoreland is exactly right. Anyone that's gone to that Well and talked about the budget process has talked about the openness and how much everyone got to be heard and input and this and that and the other. It was a good process and we did all learn a lot about it. I mean, I bet people know more about this budget than any budget that we have ever passed.

But as we close this session, we have only the future to look forward to. And we've got to look forward to it. These unanswered questions we have today are going to have to be answered, ladies and gentlemen. The most important thing that I take away from this session is that the citizens of this State are demanding more accountability. They want government to be accountable. Ladies and Gentlemen, we need to be accountable. TennCare has to be accountable. We can shove that off and say it's the Administration's problem. It's our problem, also. Our TennCare Oversight Committee spent many, many hours in hearings, but we've got to get that straight. We've got to get our house in order. People sent us here to represent them. Our responsibility never ends. The Legislature moves from one Legislature to the next one...society changes...problems still are the same...issues develop, but the work for the people in this State has got to continue.

And in saying that, let me offer my thanks to our Chief Clerk, Burney Durham, and his staff for their work. To Betty Kay Francis, and the Engrossing Clerk's Office, who got the bills to the Governor in record time this year...so fast he didn't expect them to be there at one o'clock on Friday afternoon after we passed them on Thursday. To Ellen Tewes and the Legal Staff, Ellen, this is her first year and as chief of the Legal Staff and they've done an outstanding job; Connie Hardin and the Legislative Budget Office; Steve Kreigish and the Legislative Information Office; Connie Frederick and the Office of Legislative Administration; Denise Sims and the House Research Division; and Victor Thompson and all the Sergeant at Arms. And help me in thanking these people for the job that they did.

Let me say there's one individual that I want to single out and all of you have seen her—she is in and out of you office. I would like to take a minute to recognize one member of our staff that quietly stands out as one of our finest employees. Dianne Shea started out this session with the receipt of some not so good news. Despite some pretty rough treatments, she has continued to come to work, continues to provide our staff with exceptional computer service, and has continued to have the same cheerful attitude. Her courage should set an example for all of us. And join with me in thanking Dianne for her work and in wishing her the best. Doug can appreciate that, I'm sure.

But I do want to thank the membership, for the way you have stuck with me, in both the good and the bad times this year. And I appreciate all the nice things that you say and that you do, but before I close, I've got to reflect back on what a very quiet, gentle lady said—one of our distinguished colleagues from Hamilton County. Dr. Brown asked in a caucus meeting, "Why do we want to be reelected?" She said people go door to door for us, to help bring us back up here. Her question, "For what?" Ask yourself that question over the next six months. Ask yourself why you want to come back. Is it because you think you're the best in your district to be here? Is it because you think that you can do the best job? Is it personal...and just an ego trip? Get these things set in your mind as to why you want to come back. And while you are out campaigning as I will be...I have an opponent, just like a lot of you...don't make politically expedient statements. Don't be irresponsible in what you say. Don't say you'll never do this or you'll never do that. Or as Representative Westmoreland said, you'll eat those words, come the 102nd General Assembly. If you can't face up to it, you better butt out of it now. Cause folks, we've got some tough times ahead of us, and I'm ready to take that challenge when I get back...and I'm going to. One last thing and I'll quit talking...and I want you to think about this—there's something on the wall in my office...The moral test of government is how it treats those who are in the dawn of life. The aged and those who are in the shadow of life—the sick, the needy, and the handicapped...now that's what you need to come back here and see about. I thank you for allowing me the time and you know, I miss not getting to talk on bills after having been Majority Leader...you want to say things, so I have to say some things that I want to say, but I appreciate your indulgence.