

(The following article was originally published in The Tomahawk newspaper of Johnson County, TN on Nov. 3, 2009. For a link to the newspaper's front page, go to: www.thetomahawk.com)

State treasurer and legislators make a friendly visit to area

Tennessee State Treasurer David H. Lillard, Jr., accompanied by Rep. Jason Mumpower, and Rep. Tony Shipley from Sullivan County State House District 2 met with several local officials last weekend to discuss the impact of the state budget on small, rural areas such as Johnson County with particular emphasis on critical access, education and grant funds. Tennessee Lt. Gov. Ron Ramsey, a candidate for the Republican nomination for governor next year, also had a representative on hand.

"We had a fantastic day in Mountain City," said Rep. Jason Mumpower, "with state treasurer David Lillard, who is originally from Memphis." In many ways the state treasurer has the most difficult and challenging job of all the state officers as he is the official steward of state funds. The treasury department reportedly handles \$40 billion in cash flow investments annually.

Mumpower explained the treasurer is responsible for receiving and disbursing public funds, managing all state investments, including the pension fund, administering the Tennessee Consolidated Retirement System (TCRS), is used by state employees, teachers and some counties and cities, like Johnson County, as their pension plan.

Treasurer Lillard began his public career as a county commissioner in Shelby County and is the first Republican ever to hold the office of Tennessee state treasurer. The TCRS outperformed 80-percent of other pension plans during recent hard times and did it at a much cheaper rate to the investor, noted Mumpower.

Although he has visited upper east Tennessee, this was Treasurer Lillard's first trip to Johnson county. "I was extremely impressed by the beauty and the potential of Johnson County and her people. Johnson Countians are working hard in this depressed economy - and they deserve more recognition from the rest of the state for their success. With the right assistance, the potential for economic development is great."

Accompanied by local leaders such as Northeast Correctional Center's Warden Howard Carlton, Mountain City Mayor Kevin Parsons, Johnson County Community Hospital Administrator Lisa Heaton and others, the visitors made an informative whirlwind trip across the county first meeting at the hospital before continuing to the Northeast Correctional facility in Doe Valley before concluding the trip at the Johnson County Career and Technical Education facility where the group was treated to a guided tour of the impressive aquacenter by instructor Thomas Boyd. "Everyone was wowed with the program and the facility," remarked Mumpower.

The group paused for lunch at Bizzies Restaurant while visiting with the Johnson County Republican Women. "Treasurer Lillard was really interested in the Laurel Creek Trail project which is being constructed in the northeastern section of the county along Highway 91," said Linda Moon, local GOP spokesperson, who was pleased with the reception given by the dignitaries. "This really wasn't a partisan discussion," she said. "It was about explaining what we need here in Johnson County."

While visiting the Johnson County Community Hospital, the need for local medical care was stressed. While Johnson Countians long ago accepted the inconvenience of long trips to enjoy a movie or a shopping mall, access to quality medical care is a different story. More than sixty years ago, the government committed federal dollars to the construction and improvement of hospitals in underserved areas, and in 1997, as part of the Balanced Budget Act, Congress authorized the creation of critical access hospitals (CAH) to support the concept of small rural hospitals. The Johnson County Community Hospital, a two-bed critical access hospital, was opened by Mountain States Health Alliance in 1998 to serve the community. Critical Access Hospitals provide essential services to rural communities and are reimbursed by Medicare on a "reasonable cost basis" for services provided to Medicare patients.

