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2015 LEGISLATURE BEGINS WHILE GUBERNATORIAL ERA ENDS

GOV. JINDAL GIVES FINAL OPENING REMARKS

The Louisiana Legislature convened Monday, April 13 for its biannual 45-day, fiscal-only session. Gov. Bobby Jindal whose term ends next January gave his final opening legislative address. With education reform his hallmark, his remarks on education focused on balancing the state's budget without slashing education, championing the tuition scholarship program, and eliminating *Common Core* standards.

LEGISLATORS FACE \$1.6 BILLION DEFICIT

As reported in the media, the legislature is staring down a \$1.6 Billion deficit in the FY 2016 state budget. Reasons for the deficit are many.

Our concern in the budget battle is protecting the hard-fought and hard-won *Nonpublic Educational Assistance* programs in the Appropriations Bill (HB 1). These include *Required Services Reimbursements, School Lunch Salary Supplements, Textbooks, and Textbook Administration*. We can report that these programs are indeed in the budget and funded at current levels.

Also appropriated are the *Louisiana Scholarship Program* and *Nonpublic School Early Childhood Development*. Since bills can be amended any time we will keep a vigilant eye on attempts to compromise our program funding.

GUARDING AGAINST GOVERNMENT INTRUSION

Every session there are innocuous or well-intentioned attempts to legislate requirements for both public and nonpublic schools. For example, during the first week of the session, SB 28 was heard seeking to require public and nonpublic schools to provide information on accessing the State Library of Louisiana in student handbooks, on school websites, and on visible signage inside the school.

While this may be a good idea, it should be at the discretion of local private and parochial schools. In speaking with the bill's author Sen. Troy Brown he acknowledged our concerns but was committed to his bill and students gaining as much access as possible to resources for help with homework.

When the bill was heard in committee Sen. Dan Claitor offered an amendment to exempt nonpublic schools, and Sen. Brown, to his credit, agreed to the amendment. The bill passed out of committee as amended, and we thank Senators Brown and Claitor.

We will monitor SB 28 and all other bills and/or amendments that bring unwarranted government intrusiveness into nonpublic schools.

TAX CREDITS ARE ON THE TABLE

Throughout the Capitol—in committee rooms, legislative chambers, hallways and even the cafeteria—the major topic of conversation is how to fill the \$1.6 Billion gap in FY 2016. The talk inevitably turns to ways in which Louisiana generously distributes tax credits, exemptions, refunds and rebates.

On the table is the \$25 state income tax credit for educational expenses applicable to public and nonpublic school students. This credit has a history of being suspended during years of financial distress, and then reinstated. However, this year HB 277 proposes to *totally repeal the law*.

Another measure (SB 93) would disallow taking the \$25 tax credit if the deduction from income is taken for payment of elementary and secondary school tuition and fees.

We will track these bills and gauge how likely they are to pass. If necessary, we will alert our membership via *VoterVoice* to the need for advocacy with legislators.

Nonpublic school parents already SAVE Louisiana taxpayers more than ONE BILLION DOLLARS annually by paying for the education of their children. It would be unfair to take away any of the benefits they receive from the state.



STO CONTRIBUTION REBATES TARGETED

A victory for parental choice was scored in the 2012 session with passage by Rep. Kirk Talbot of a Louisiana tuition scholarship rebate program (*Act 25*). Entitled *School Tuition Organization*, the STO receives voluntary contributions from taxpayers and dispenses the funds through tuition grants to qualifying students to attend qualified parochial or private schools. (See *The Bulletin Board, Vol.46, No.1, Sept 2012* at louisianacec.org). STOs operate very successfully in a number of other states.

Contributors to these nonprofit 501(c)3 STOs must be taxpayers who file a Louisiana tax return. Under current law, an STO donor receives a 100% rebate of his contribution minus 5% for administration of the STO after the scholarship is awarded.

Unfortunately, a bill has been introduced (HB 635) that would reduce the rebate to 80%, therefore making contributions less appealing to potential contributors. CEC will work to defeat any attempts to weaken the strength of STOs. They offer hope to parents who otherwise would not have the option of choosing alternative, private education for their children.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!



Thanks to all who remitted 2014-15 CEC membership dues, and a special thank-you to those with multiple memberships!
If your school and/or parent club has not joined yet this year it's not too late to do so and be included in our end-of-year membership roster. Current member status can be found on the roster included with this newsletter or our website's membership page at www.louisianacec.org.