

## **GROUP OF 'LEGISLATORS' RECEIVES MEDALLION AWARD**

As the current session of the Tennessee General Assembly winds down, several interesting pieces of legislation have somehow escaped media attention.

Like a bill that would make it easier for new political parties to be recognized in Tennessee elections. Or another that would discourage ticket revenues generated by red-light cameras from being kept by the private vendors that supply the cameras. Or another that would require that the vending machine contracts at state universities go out for competitive bid.

All three of those items, and others, escaped media attention because they were recently debated not by the General Assembly, but by the Tennessee Intercollegiate State Legislature (TISL), a mock version of the state's legislative body run by college students.

TISL is a nonprofit organization that teaches students about state government and offers them a forum to express their opinions on state issues.

Students who participate in TISL meet annually, much as the General Assembly does, to consider legislation they consider to be important to the state's residents.

In a ceremony at the Tennessee State Capitol June 9, Secretary of State Tre Hargett recognized TISL with a Medallion Award.

The Medallion Awards are presented by individual Secretaries of State across the country. Each Secretary of State may present up to five medallions annually.

The awards are intended to recognize individuals or organizations who have helped promote voter education and participation, civic education and government service.

"TISL creates in many ways, the state legislative process at its best," Secretary Hargett said. "It is a free and open exchange of ideas on the issues of the day simply on the merits. Debating requires critical thinking skills in an open environment in which college students learn the value of working with others from all walks of life. In this regard, I believe TISL represents hope for the future as the organization continues to develop future leaders in our state. Not only does TISL provide college students with access to the State Capitol for their mock legislative sessions and a real-to-life experience of the governing process, but it also creates opportunities for students to meet and begin networking with current elected officials who, in turn, have the opportunity to inspire students to invest themselves in public service."

While the student legislators' actions in TISL don't actually carry the weight of law, the organization has played an important role in public debate over the last four decades.

In several cases, TISL-approved bills later became part of state law.

For example, TISL adopted legislation requiring seat belt use and safety seats for young children before those requirements were added to state law. Also, in the early 1970s, TISL successfully pushed for the General Assembly to add student representatives to the University of Tennessee Board of Trustees and the Tennessee Board of Regents.

Founded in 1966, the TISL's roster of alumni includes some of the state's most prominent government and business leaders.

Secretary Hargett, Tennessee Treasurer David Lillard and Dr. Harvill Eaton, president of Cumberland University, all spoke about the program's importance during the awards ceremony. All three participated in TISL during their college years, as did many other state legislators, judges and other officials.

Secretary Hargett presented the Medallion Award to Gian Gozum, TISL's Secretary of State. Other TISL representatives who spoke at the ceremony included Kristin Tisdale, Senate Speaker Pro Tem; Cory Higdon, House Speaker Pro Tem; and Supreme Court Justice Damon Romano.

The ceremony, held in the old Supreme Court chambers at the Capitol, gave TISL's current crop of student legislators an opportunity to meet with alumni of the program who have gone on to successful careers.