

Chalkboard

By

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About once a year I develop a bad case of “writer’s block”. To date, I have not noticed any serious, earth-shaking consequences of my suffering this malady. Nor can I ever truly ascertain any cause for developing this writing woe.

There certainly have been adequate happenings down at the Capitol during this *Second Extraordinary Session of 2003 of this Arkansas 84th General Assembly* to spark daily news stories in the media. To the date of my penning this article the House has offered 106 bills, the Senate has offered 60, and 33 Acts have been signed into law. I suspect that the number of bills in the House and Senate will have grown by at least 20% in the six days that will pass before this article is printed.

Other than an occasional e-mail to various and sundry legislators, I have watched this political process play out, as most of you have, by watching television, reading the paper, and checking in on the Assembly’s web page, <http://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/>, where current action is continually being up-dated. Even from this great observational distance, it is easy to infer that the political process in Arkansas is miles ahead of any reality program or epic adventure film that any T.V. or movie producer could dream. The action between the House and Senate has not quite reached the pitch as that of the Battle For Minas Tirith in Gondor but the actions of the players are similar. You may cast your own starring roles depending on your perspective of the consolidation issue.

Who is “winning” so far? Currently I note two parties.

First, the business community showed its muscle with Senate Bill 33, which I anticipate will pass and be sent to the governor before this day ends. This bill expands testing requirements for students and is labeled THE ARKANSAS STUDENT ASSESSMENT AND EDUCATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY ACT OF 2004. It sets rewards and sanctions for school districts based on student performance. It also spells out in great detail how the public will be kept abreast of the school’s performance. It has one provision which I really embrace- at least part of the testing will involve monitoring the individual student’s academic performance over a period of time rather than solely determining a school’s performance by comparing different groups of students to one another from year to year.

Second are the communities and schools who did not get consolidated and who will certainly claim a victory. Only time will tell if their victory was also a victory for the students who attend those schools.

In the next few days to come I think there will be enacted a new school funding formula which probably will be some version of Senate Bill 42. I think House Bill 1047, which revises the state's minimum teacher salary schedule, has a chance of being passed. And in conjunction with both, there will probably be an act that raises the state's sales tax by 1 cent.

Maybe it's just the melancholy mood that causes, or is caused by, my writer's block, but so far I have not really seen any legislation that seems designed to guarantee that all the students of the state will be the big winners of this special legislative session.