



Briley: Judicial meetings should remain secret

By John Rodgers, jrodgers@nashvillecitypaper.com

Rep. Rob Briley repeated his defense of closed-door meetings of a powerful judicial panel Thursday, despite Gov. Phil Bredesen's efforts to shine light upon its proceedings.

Briley (D-Nashville) said the Judicial Selection Commission should continue to be allowed to deliberate in private on what nominees it plans to send for open judgeships to the governor.

Gov. Phil Bredesen's administration wanted legislation passed making all of the Judicial Selection Commission's meetings open. But a House panel on which Briley serves killed that bill earlier this month.

Briley said information like TBI background checks and credit and financial data of possible judicial nominees, which could presumably be discussed in private, should be kept that way.

"If it's not, it's unlikely that we're going to get judges to apply for these positions," Briley said.

Bredesen has said he "can't imagine" why the process for selecting judges should be conducted in secret.

"I know it might be uncomfortable for a judge from now and then to have some incident in their past talked over, but, ya know, gosh, that's the way of things in public life," Bredesen said earlier this month. "Anybody who runs for public office, anybody who's in an election has that kind of scrutiny."

Briley says if Bredesen wants the Judicial Selection Commission to have open meetings, then the governor should allow his personal deliberations and interviews when picking a judge to be open as well.

"My point was — the governor can't have his cake and eat it too," Briley said. "If it's open, it's open."

Judicial panel key issue

The Judicial Selection Commission will likely be a key issue to resolve as the Legislature tries to complete its work this year.

Lt. Gov. Ron Ramsey (R-Blountville) wants to change how the selection commission is appointed, giving him and House Speaker Jimmy Naifeh (D-Covington) more latitude in whom they appoint to the 17-person panel.

While Ramsey wants changes, Naifeh said Thursday he is “satisfied” with how the panel is currently appointed.

The debate over how the panel is formed comes as the Judicial Selection Commission itself could expire July 1 if a bill isn’t passed. If that occurred, the panel would have a one-year “wind down” before expiring.

Ramsey has said if he doesn’t achieve changes to how the panel is appointed, he would be willing to let the commission expire.

DCS workers’ bill forming

Legislative leaders said Thursday they would be moving ahead with legislation to protect Department of Children’s Services’ caseworkers’ jobs.

That legislation is needed to temporarily change the state’s civil service rules to keep case managers from losing their jobs.

As a result of a federal rule change, DCS is losing \$73 million in funding, causing Bredesen to say that 160 DCS employees may need to be let go.

The governor intends to cut administrative positions from the DCS, and needs the legislation passed to keep the caseworkers’ jobs.

The Tennessee State Employees Association said they were “very concerned” with the possible layoffs “especially if the reductions are made outside of the laws in effect to protect state employees during necessary layoffs.”