

A Report from THEA President

Rally Day 2023: Nashville, TN., March 28, 2023, the [Tennessee Home Education Association](#) conducted its annual [Rally Day at our State Capitol](#). The House of Representatives Chamber was used for our morning Rally program from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

- Six legislators came to address the homeschoolers who filled the House Chamber and upper east and west side galleries.
- The editor of our [THEA Observer](#) Lindsay Schultz, THEA's legislative Reporter, reported on the bills she tracked while providing weekly reporting to the Tennessee homeschooling community.
- [Outstanding high school seniors](#) representing each of THEA's eight chapters were recognized and honored.
- [Winners of the Sara Lee Harris Apologetics speech contest](#) were recognized with speeches of the winners of the senior and junior division delivered to the audience.
- [Tennessee Eagle Forum President Bobbie Patray](#) greatly encouraged everyone reporting on the impact homeschoolers made in contacting our lawmakers to vote against HB1214.
- Our featured speaker was [Kevin Boden, Esq](#), homeschool father of eight, and the [HSLDA](#) attorney caring for home schooling families in Tennessee who encounter difficulties with school officials and/or face legal issues related to their children's home education.
- [The Heritage Cantus](#) children's homeschool choir, along with their string ensemble, provided prelude music and their harmonic voices lifted our National Anthem and hymns of praise encouraging all who were present.

This year's larger attendance was driven in part by HB1214 which was designed to seduce home school families to enroll their children in 3-4-day public charter schools, which the bill purposely mislabeled as an additional homeschooling option. The schools are in no way home schools as parents are no longer teaching their children and have no control over the curriculum their children are taught. A student's enrollment in these schools is to be paid to these public charter schools with our tax monies with full average daily membership, or ADM, funding of almost \$12,000 per year per student. On the first day the bill was heard in the House Education Administration Committee it

was amended from a very brief sentence to a 13-page amendment making the above additions.

Also added in the 13-page amendment was the establishment of a statewide “local education agency” with appointed, not elected, officials who could clear the way for 24 X 7 X 365 residential schools to be built anywhere in the state. The amended bill would allow those schools to enroll students who were on parole from jail as well as plane loads of non-Tennessee citizen migrant children. THEA views both sections of this bill as very dangerous for home schoolers and education in Tennessee. On the day before Rally Day the bill was “taken off notice” which means it would not be heard this year, but it can and likely will be brought up again for vote when our legislature convenes again in January 2024 for the 2nd of this two-year 113th session.

The purpose of Rally Day is for families who chose the hard work of teaching their children at home to show to our Legislators that their home school program is working. THEA wants to provide a means to give a good report on home education to our legislators. Our lawmakers passed laws to make home education legal, so THEA and the home school community want to make certain they know how we are using that freedom. We do not ask for money from them. We want them to recognize our freedom and confirm and preserve our parental rights to determine the education of our children. In a State with a compulsory attendance statute, we want them to be able to meet homeschooling families so they see our children’s work and meet our families.

Following our Rally program in the House Chamber a number of activities happened simultaneously - lunch was served to homeschoolers in the Legislative Lounge of the Capitol, training for Student Congress judges was conducted in the Senate Chamber, lunch was also provided for all the legislators and their staff on the 8th floor of the Cordell Hull Legislator’s Office where many displays created by home educated students were set up for our lawmakers with others downstairs in the Legislative cafeteria on the first floor.

The trifold displays from across Tennessee showed our students’ schoolwork, science fair exhibits, art projects, robotics, speech and debate, and other extracurricular activities. They also included displays by our Rally Day Outstanding Students, and homeschool co-ops, tutorials, and sports groups. Pam and David Archer coordinated the delivery and setup of the displays. They lined tables along the walls in the room adjacent and connected to our

legislative luncheon on the 8th floor of the Cordell Hull building where our legislative and home school guests are provided seating for their lunches.

Although the United Christian Academy Choir is no longer allowed to step back and sing while meals are served to our legislators and their staff, the choir dons THEA aprons and serves a delicious meal of bar-b-que & fixings, a Memphis sour cream-based potato salad, and desert including homemade chocolate mint brownies.

This entire event is designed to provide personal contacts with our large group to our lawmakers. With a warm smile and open hand, our legislators and their staff are provided with an excellent meal in an environment of open dialogue with an attractive, inviting setting decorated with lattice panels, red and white tablecloths, and fresh flowers. Our goal is to generate a warm experience as they enjoy conversation with homeschoolers and view our displays. We are continually thankful to Julie and Rex Clement and the UCA choir for bringing this special and unique experience representing Tennessee homeschoolers to the 8th floor of our legislators Cordell Hull Office building.

It takes much intention and effort to build and extend goodwill, especially as new faces are continually becoming part of our legislature. Tennessee families who are involved in home education are well represented by the diligent, intelligent, excellent, attractive service, care, visual and victual delights provided on the 8th floor for those who make the laws that govern us. Our students serve their meals, and they see the maturity and quality of homeschooled young people. While we want to clearly express our appreciation to our legislators as they work to serve us, we are also demonstrating to them the strength and vibrancy of the homeschool community in Tennessee.

Back in the Capitol Building home schoolers are consuming their pre-purchased Chick-Fil-A meals. Some homeschoolers are already delivering our signature Gift Bags to the legislator's offices. The much-anticipated Gift Bags are given to every legislator's office by home schoolers. Along with the goodies our gift bags include a copy of our Rally Day program booklet with pictures and bios of our Outstanding Students representing each chapter of THEA. The primary means of impacting our legislators is for them to meet so they get to know homeschooling families from their districts. When they are preparing to vote on a matter impacting home education, before they press their "Yes" or "No" button, we want them to be able to see your face, the face

of your family, their constituents. THEA encourages families to set appointments, to meet with their members of the House and Senate, to get a picture with them, to ask for a Blue Book, and answer any questions about home education from their legislator or their staff.

Also following the Rally program, the Judges for this year's homeschool Student Congress sponsored by [CCT](#) were prepped for two sessions of JV Student Congress, for ages 8-12, and two sessions of SV Student Congress for ages 13-graduation. Student Congress is a style of debate which uses the same Robert's Rules of Order our Tennessee House and Senate use for considering and passing laws. Students write bills for consideration, evaluate all the bills written by their fellow students that may be heard during the session, prepare speeches either in support or in opposition to the bills, make plans to speak persuasively to their fellow student legislators, and vote on the proposed legislation. The objective is for students to learn the processes used by deliberative bodies through all our governmental systems at the nation, state, and local levels. Very similar procedures are used also in business and in churches for governing those groups of people. This is an orderly means of governing where engaged members learn to express themselves to affect the direction and outcomes of the bodies governing portions of their lives. We want to educate citizens to be effectively engaged in their government. We want our students to learn how governments in a republic are to work so they will have the knowledge and skills to impact how their lives are directed by various governmental groups.

This year Student Congress was conducted in the Chambers of the House and Senate and in the Legislative Lounge on the second floor of the Capitol and in the old Supreme Court Chamber on the first floor of the Capitol. In each chamber the presiding officer selected bills for consideration and directed the activities of each legislator as they made relevant motions, worked to persuade their fellow legislators, and conducted the votes. Judges evaluate the performance of each of the student legislators and provide ballots to the tabulation room. Winners were determined and recognized as our Day at the Capitol concluded just before 4:00 pm.

Let me put this day into perspective as we consider the activities of that week. On Monday, the day before Rally Day, a transgender woman shot her way into The Covenant School in Nashville killing 3 adults and 3 nine-year-old students before Nashville Police responded killing her. Channel 5 News reported that the Legislature would not be in session on Tuesday the day of our Rally. Upon

investigation we found that the news report was accurate in that the Legislature would not be in session, but on Tuesday they are almost never in session because that is the day they routinely hold committee meetings. Their committee meetings were not cancelled and THEA's Rally Day 2023 took place.

Later that week, on Thursday, a mob or rioters attempted to enter the same House Chambers we had used for our Rally on Tuesday. The mob attempted to forcibly impose their will on the legislature to pass a gun control law. You may still hear of the ramifications of that effort to subvert the proper function of our legislators as they conduct the activities of our legislative process.

While few groups of people resist bad legislation and improper governmental control while working to protect our God-given and Constitutionally guaranteed rights more fiercely than homeschool parents, the two riotous events of that week contrast so very sharply with the respectful behavior toward our elected officials by Tennessee homeschool families on THEA's Rally Day this year and over all the years since our first-ever event in 1985. We come to the People's House to "Bring the Good Report of Home Education in Tennessee!" so our lawmakers will clearly see and understand the significance of preserving and protecting our rights.

May the peace of God reign in your heart, in your family, in the hearts and homes of our elected officials at the local, state and national levels.

God bless America, please.

Respectfully,

Claiborne Thornton, President

Tennessee Home Education Association

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