

## **Governor Haslam Visits Anderson County**

*by Lynda Edwards of the Knoxville News Sentinel, September 16, 2016*

CLINTON — Tennessee's economic recovery from the Great Recession has surged ahead of the national average, thanks in part to a falling unemployment rate and increased foreign investment, Gov. Bill Haslam said Thursday.

Haslam outlined his take on the recovery and discussed the state's educational successes and challenges during a luncheon hosted by the Anderson County Chamber of Commerce at the Hollingsworth Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership.

Haslam described the unemployment rate as falling more swiftly and foreign investment as increasing more rapidly for Tennessee than other states in the nation.

The governor called Tennessee's drop in unemployment faster than the nationwide norm and praised Tennessee Promise, the program that gives two years' community college tuition to any of the state's high school graduates. He said the program should give hope to even Tennesseans who were "55 and failed the last grade they attended" that a new chance to earn a good living in a secure job was possible.

Haslam told the audience that 9,000 Tennesseans had volunteered to be mentors to students who were the first in their families to go to college. Haslam said volunteers can support a timid first-time college student by checking to make sure they show up to take their SATs and seeing them off to their first day of college.

When an audience member expressed concerns about the Tennessee Department of Transportation getting adequate funding for road improvements, Haslam conceded better technology has created a revenue problem.

"Cars get better gas mileage now, so there is less money coming from gas taxes to use for roads and bridges," he said.

The governor had noted earlier that the state's rainy day fund had tripled in size but said even if that money were spent on infrastructure, a more permanent solution to the continuing need for road repairs had to be found.

Haslam told the audience that when he visited China recently, he was surprised by the pomp and ceremony with which he was greeted. At one point, a dignitary brought him a rose bouquet so enormous, Haslam's wife said it contained more flowers than he had given her in their entire marriage.

Later a Chinese official told Haslam the roses and the formality had all been a rehearsal for an American guest who would be arriving in a few weeks. The Chinese were pretending Haslam was President Barack Obama so they could practice their big welcome.

Haslam's first stop in Anderson County was the South Clinton Elementary School as part of his Capitol to Classroom tours in which he gets feedback from members of his Teachers Cabinet, such as fourth-grade teacher Abbey Kidwell. The governor watched Kidwell as she taught a math lesson. He said he meets with the 17 teachers in his cabinet four times annually to hear their concerns and brainstorm solutions.

Haslam said the state would give various colleges that produce outstanding teachers a system of letter grades so as to make teacher recruitment easier for Tennessee. He said the state had invested \$400 million more in teachers' salaries under his administration.

The governor also noted some challenges facing Tennessee education, especially shortages of teachers in rural areas.

"In one part of the state, there is one physics teacher for five schools," he said.

He didn't say where.