**Glen Casada certainly left his mark on Tennessee’s State Assembly**

By Debra Wines

Glen Casada’s short tenure, as the House Speaker in the State Assembly, has forced the state’s Republican leadership to discuss how they can prevent any future House Speaker from repeating Casada’s behavior in office. Corruption in local, state and federal governments, is more often, than not, acknowledged by a wink and a nod. This is true of both parties, on multiple levels. Since the Republicans have had the majority for several years, in Tennessee, the corruption, questionable tactics to garner votes and the types of bills that are proposed and passed, have left many people wondering how and why this goes on.

Glen Casada has shown Tennesseans that he really doesn’t care about the people. He cared more about the power, prestige and perks that he felt came with the office of the House Speaker. Sadly, for him, he pushed too hard and too fast to grab that power and it bit him in the butt. Sadly, for the people of Tennessee, he will remain a member of the State Assembly, but I get the feeling, his loss of stature will mean he won’t quietly sit back and behave himself.

For the first time in nearly 20 years, in the legislature, Glen Casada could be faced with an examination of his campaign funds by the Registry of Election Finance. This could bring further bad news for Mr. Casada. Currently, Mr. Casada has in excess of $560,000 from his political action committee and his personal campaign committee, at his disposal. He has used hundreds of thousands of dollars from his PAC to pay for food, beverages and his membership to a private club at a Nashville restaurant. It is a bit unusual for this type of scrutiny, because it isn’t just his somewhat questionable spending of campaign funds, it also includes his use of taxpayers’ money from plane travel to renovations of his office. Jeremy Durham, was the last lawmaker to have his campaign finances specifically audited, outside of the normal random (surprise) audits. The 2017 audit discovered Mr. Durham spent many thousands of dollars illegally. He was fined by the Registry for $465,000, which Mr. Durham is currently appealing. It is interest to note that Glen Casada served as Jeremy Durham’s mentor. Jeremy Durham was expelled from the legislature in 2016 for several reasons, one of which was sending inappropriate text messages and having inappropriate sexual contact with at least 22 women. Participating in sending inappropriate text messages was also among the reasons Mr. Casada was forced to step down from his House Speaker position.

Recently Glen Casada claimed he could not afford $4,000 a month in alimony payments to his ex-wife because he was unemployed. After being elected as the House Speaker, he resigned from his full-time job with a large pharmaceutical company. The yearly salary for the speaker is around $73,000. As a rank-and-file legislator, his base yearly salary will be $23,400, not including a daily allowance when the State Assembly in session. Don’t feel badly for Mr. Casada, he still has access to his campaign funds. Granted, state law prohibits lawmakers from using their campaign money on rent, clothing, and various other “personal” expenditures. Now for the loophole…there is no law that limits how PACs can spend their money. Mr. Casada could legally, transfer money from his personal campaign fund into his personal PAC and he could technically pay his living expenses and make his $4,000 a month alimony payment through that fund. Don’t worry about Mr. Casada trying to live on $23,400 a year, or that he could be homeless, without affordable health insurance and wondering where his next meal may be coming from, like a lot of Tennesseans do. He’ll be just fine.

Did I also mention there is also the possibility of Glen Casada being investigated for trying to bribe and threaten his fellow lawmakers into passing Governor Lee’s voucher bill? Yep, Glen Casada was a busy boy during his 6 months as Speaker of the House. I wish I could say that he may not be serving in the Tennessee State Assembly much longer, but I really doubt that will happen. As we’ve seen, on so many levels of our government, the people who believe they are above the law, don’t pay the same price the average person would pay if they tried to get away with the lies, cheating and corruption that has tainted Glen Casada and others.

In the meantime, the House Republicans in the Tennessee State Assembly, elected a new Speaker. Unless something very unusual occurs between now and August 23rd, when Governor Lee called for a special legislative session for the entire House chamber, Rep. Sexton will officially become the Speaker of the House on that day.

According to Mr. Sexton, he believes “Leadership is empowering others to shine. As speaker, I want to make sure we have 73 shining stars that will lead our Tri Star state.” Rep. Sexton was elected caucus chairman in November 2018. Questions arose about the possibility of Mr. Casada’s former legislative staff members helping him with his bid for House Speaker. Mr. Sexton denied that had happened and assured his fellow lawmakers that no one who left Glen Casada’s employment will be coming back to work in any legislative position. He also said there could be others fired under his leadership.

Mr. Sexton also assured the members he would continue to work to bring the caucus together and that he wants the members to vote in the best interest of their district and not to vote solely to please or appease him. He also stated that he “would never implement a system – as some have said occurred under Casada – that leads to lawmakers’ bills being halted by leadership”.

Let’s hope that Cameron Sexton will be able to follow through on his promises and ideas for making our lawmakers in the State Assembly more representative of the good people of Tennessee.