

Ripon Profile

Name: Bill Haslam

Occupation: Tennessee's 49th Governor

What was your first job and what lesson from it sticks with you today? I pumped gas at one of my father's gas stations. I wasn't very good at it at first, but it taught me the importance of good and genuine customer service. At 16 years old, I also had the chance to work for former U.S. Senator Howard Baker.

As a businessman, what principles of the private sector have you tried to bring to your job as Governor and instill in the Government of the State of Tennessee? When you own a business you constantly evaluate if you are offering the services people expect in a customer-focused way and as effectively and efficiently as possible. Also, the most successful businesses employ the best and brightest people. I brought those experiences with me to state government. Setting priorities and measurable outcomes matter. It also matters who you hire. Our administration is accountable to the taxpayers of Tennessee.

Business owners also look for opportunities to promote their product or services. As Tennessee's governor, it is my job to tell our story, and it's a good story to tell. We are well positioned with low taxes and low debt. In the economic climate we are in taxpayers want their elected officials to be thoughtful and strategic in making budget decisions and to be good stewards of public dollars.

You've been in office now for almost one year. What has surprised you most about the job? This may sound funny, but what has surprised me the most is what a big deal it is to be Governor. Not the actual job itself but how Tennesseans feel about and respond to the office of Governor. I had the opportunity to visit Iraq and Afghanistan over the summer because as the Volunteer State, Tennessee has one of the largest contingents of guardsmen and women serving overseas. In having the opportunity to spend time with our troops, I was so moved at how much it meant to them, not to meet Bill Haslam but to meet the Governor of Tennessee. I get the same response as I travel the state, and I'm humbled by the excitement and support of our citizens.

What's been the toughest decision you have had to make, and how did you explain it to the residents of your state? In Tennessee, we have a Constitutional obligation to balance the budget each year. When we're putting the budget together, we're usually making choices about funding or not funding good programs and initiatives, not a bad program and a good one. There are a lot of meaningful programs and important services out there, but when you lose a billion dollars in federal funding, like Tennessee faced this past year, it isn't possible to fund everything you want to and balance the budget. However, the General Assembly, who also represents our stakeholders, agreed with our approach by passing our budget unanimously this year.

When you leave office, what do you hope your greatest accomplishment will be? I hope that we help Tennesseans to expect more. We haven't set the bar high enough when it comes to education or when it comes to the health of our citizens. Let's aspire to be more. Let's raise our expectations for our children. Tennessee is a great place to live, work and raise a family, but we can and should be even better.

Finally, your brother is part owner of the Pittsburgh Steelers. Who do you root for when they play the Titans? Without a doubt, Tennessee Titans.

