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Mike Krause, leading force behind Tennessee Promise scholarship, leaving state government

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Higher education leader Mike Krause, an architect of the Tennessee Promise scholarship and the 2016 plan to create independent boards for six public universities, is leaving state government this week after driving a decade of transformational policies.

Krause, who most recently served as the executive director of the state's higher education commission, oversaw a suite of new programs that expanded access to higher education and made the Volunteer State a national leader. As Tennessee's profile grew in the higher education world, he became a high-profile spokesman for the state's public college system.



Mike Krause (Photo: Mark Denman Photography)

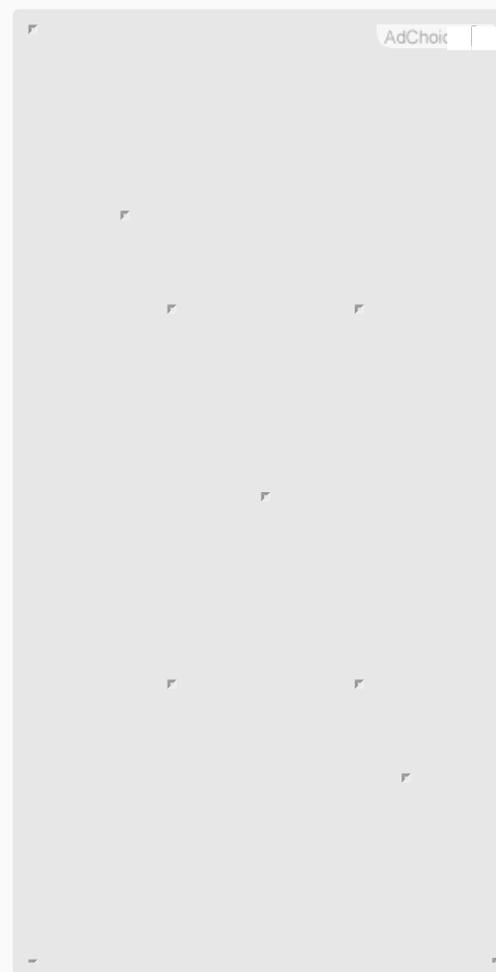
He will join the Nashville law firm Bradley Arant Boult Cummings next week as a senior advisor for government affairs and economic development.

As the commission director and a senior advisor to former Gov. Bill Haslam, Krause was the leading force behind Tennessee Promise, the pioneering scholarship program that gave every Tennessee resident who graduated high school the opportunity to attend community or technical college tuition-free.

It was the first scholarship of its kind to be applied statewide, although several other states followed suit after Tennessee Promise launched in 2015. Krause oversaw the granular details of the roll-out, often

communicating directly with students, parents and financial aid offices to address hiccups.

Since Tennessee Promise started, 104,609 students have used the



scholarship to enter college tuition-free.

Krause, 39, also designed and implemented the FOCUS Act, the 2016 law that created independent boards for six state colleges, including Middle Tennessee State University, Tennessee Tech University and the University of Memphis.

[Haslam tapped Krause to lead the higher education commission](#) shortly after the FOCUS Act passed. As executive director, Krause was the chief advocate for the state's \$2.1 billion higher education budget.



Gov. Bill Haslam talks as Mike Krause, Executive Director, Tennessee Promise/Drive to 55 listens in the Tennessee State Capitol Wednesday, Dec. 16, 2015 in Nashville, Tenn. (Photo: Samuel M. Simpkins/The Tennessean)

This year, Krause coordinated public colleges as they contended with the COVID-19 pandemic, which upended classes, housing and graduations.

As he moves into the private sector, Krause said he hopes to encourage other states to develop higher education programs that encourage more students to enroll, although he will work in other areas as well. He said he was proud of the work he had done since joining the state government 14 years ago.

"You ultimately hope that you'll look back on your work and know that it was directly connected to making people's lives better," Krause said. "There is no better feeling than that."

Leaders from across state government cheered Krause's tenure in higher education in a statement Wednesday.

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"It's hard to imagine anyone that has had a greater impact on higher education in Tennessee than Mike Krause," said University of Tennessee President Randy Boyd, who worked closely with Krause to start Tennessee Promise. "His passion and effectiveness in working with the legislature will be sorely missed."

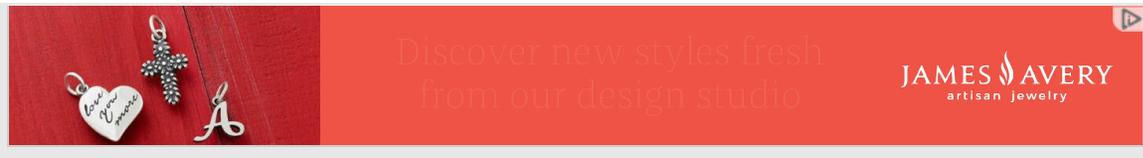
Gov. Bill Lee said Krause had been a "transformational" force in Tennessee higher education.

"Tennessee students have been the beneficiaries of his vision for linking education and workforce development opportunities," Lee said in a statement. "We wish him the best in his new role."

The higher education commission will meet next week to discuss plans to fill Krause's position.

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