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Governor Haslam Announces Startup Tennessee Entrepreneur Initiative

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Gov. Bill Haslam announced today that Tennessee is becoming part of the Startup America Partnership, touting the state's entrepreneurial potential and Nashville's key role in reaching it.

The Republican and members of his administration joined business leaders and entrepreneurs to announce the creation of Startup Tennessee, a public-private partnership that will serve as the state-level version of the national entrepreneurial incubator. Leading Startup Tennessee will be Michael Burcham, CEO of the Nashville Entrepreneur Center.

"I think that we can make some connections there between people and ideas and money," Haslam told dozens at the entrepreneur center's headquarters in downtown Nashville.

The announcement is a new step on an issue Haslam and Commissioner Bill Hagerty of the state's Economic and Community Development Department have repeatedly cited as a major opportunity: linking entrepreneurs with expertise and resources to create new ventures and scores of jobs down the road.

That's been the role locally of the entrepreneur center, where Burcham will stay on. He'll add onto his duties a coordinating role between similar centers around the state, searching for best practices, integrated strategy and networking opportunities that all regions can tap.

"My job is to help facilitate this across the state," Burcham said.

The governor has taken some fire from critics for not pushing more legislation aimed at job creation. Democrats have also cautioned against losing sight of corporate recruitment efforts.

Haslam emphasized today that government's major role is to connect private sector players who create jobs outside the decisions of government officials. His administration has also posted a "request for information" from companies who think they can help the state better leverage organizations like the entrepreneur center in each of the state's key regions.

Scott Case, CEO of the Startup America Partnership, said the organization connects entrepreneurs with expert advice, support services and other resources, including capital through a network of investors. Tennessee, he said, is already well on its way to becoming a strong "startup ecosystem."