



West Virginia's Path Forward

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Policies are not just words on paper – they are the driving force behind the reality you experience. They're the framework that helps shape the trajectory of your life, and those you love.

Policies are the difference between whether you have a job created or lost, a bridge built or delayed, a population that is growing or shrinking and a community that thrives or fades. If you live, work or raise a family in West Virginia, you are personally invested in the outcomes of our state's policy. And that's exactly what the West Virginia Chamber of Commerce advocates for every day. We unite our state's leaders in business, healthcare and education to work for more state progress, with the goal of making the Mountain State the best place to live, work and lead a healthy and successful life.

West Virginians are kind and loyal. We love our state and each other. We are passionate about those things that make our state wonderful. We know we need policies that take us in the direction of prosperity: more jobs, better wages and salaries and more opportunities for our children.

As West Virginians, we must dream big dreams for the future. We can build on a tradition of success and optimism. By pulling together, we will make our state healthier and wealthier. We will have a great future – and that future depends on innovation and creation. It will take optimism and cooperation. We have done all these things before, and we can do all these things now.

We must rededicate ourselves to education for all. Our nation became the greatest, most prosperous nation ever seen on planet earth by making superior public education available to all. We must not lose sight of this.

Our nation is the top producer of medical doctors, PhDs, MBAs, engineers and other advanced degrees in the world. We must keep investing more in education and we must follow the proven paths to success, like making sure children learn to read at grade level by grade three. That is a critical benchmark. First, we learn to read, then all other learning stems from reading.

Additionally, all students must have time to learn. Abbreviating school time automatically results in less learning. Students must be taught by highly qualified teachers, and all students need a caring adult in their lives. These four pillars of education are worth repeating.



If we get these right, our children win, we win and our economy wins:

- Read at grade level by third grade.
- Have enough time in school to learn.
- Highly qualified teachers are required.
- Each child needs a caring adult.

We must also deal with the reality that the most successful schools teach clear and measurable standards of learning and they welcome and embrace transparent accountability for their record of accomplishment. What you do not measure, you cannot manage. This is true in education just as in all other walks of life.

We must also remember that we can do more than one big thing at a time. Economic development and job creation will solve many problems for us individually and as a society. Jobs of the future will require education and skill. This is the direct connection to our education policy. Businesses will not move to a state without a ready and well-prepared workforce. Communities with a robust workforce will grow. Localities with low skill, poorly prepared students will hollow out. The jobs of the future are rapidly moving to centers of gravity that have a concentration of well-educated, diverse-knowledge workers. Our policy choices determine whether we are a center of gravity – or an afterthought.

No one wants to live where the best health services are impossible to access. A good future for West Virginia must include investments in strategic health care services that are the most up-to-date and accessible to all. West Virginia must continue to support and maintain an infrastructure of strong, nationally recognized hospitals and health service providers.

We have great hospitals and wonderful health professionals. Our policy choices will determine whether we create a crisis by “blowing a hole” in the system. To make the right choices, we must listen to the experts – the providers and the hospitals – who know their business better than anyone else.

West Virginia is built on a great and storied past. By working together in the right direction, we will have a wonderful future. The West Virginia Chamber of Commerce brings together the combined talents of our state’s best and brightest leaders to show the way to that place. Your engagement and support for sound policy are the keys to getting us there. Our vision for the future can be found at wvchamber.com

Steve Roberts is the President of the West Virginia Chamber of Commerce. Members of the West Virginia Chamber of Commerce are your small business neighbors. Chamber members employ over half of our state’s workforce and are found across our state. More information on the West Virginia Chamber of Commerce can be found at www.wvchamber.com