

## **Andy Park: Did voters realize they were voting for the good ol' days of 1931? (Gazette)**

By Andy Park

I don't believe West Virginia voters understood in 2014 that the Republican slogan "83 Years is Enough" meant taking our state back 83 years to 1931 and the Great Depression.

In terms of economic policy, that's exactly what they are doing. Austerity and reduction of state spending will make West Virginia's economic decline from bad to worse.

On the other hand, in 1933 Franklin Roosevelt ended the gold standard and expanded the money supply. FDR also increased government spending. He created government jobs to lower the high unemployment rate. The New Deal was aimed at helping ordinary people. The lesson learned was that increased government spending during hard times compensates for losses in the private sector.

Currently, Republicans control both houses of our Legislature. They have passed two controversial bills which are now law after they voted to override Gov. Tomblin's veto. One repealed the prevailing wage law and the other is a so-called right-to-work Law. Both will lower wages in our state and ultimately lower demand.

Unpaid-for tax cuts and declining revenues created a budget deficit that is prohibited by the West Virginian Constitution of 1872. Now Republicans are proposing more cuts.

The end result will be shrinking of our state government which will further depress our state's GDP. This compounds our economic situation due to the decline in the coal industry which is also reducing revenues from the coal severance tax and miner income.

Our representatives are facing problems like balancing the budget, road construction and repair, the need for high-speed broadband internet, funding public and higher education, funding PEIA for state employees, high unemployment from mine closures, and infrastructure needs.

Instead of cutting our state government, we should be finding new sources of revenues that don't hurt our ordinary citizens. Two examples are reinstating corporate taxes and putting a toll on gas and propane being shipped through our state on its way to China. We need to create public jobs to help offset the jobs losses in the coal industry. Our goal should always be full employment.

Without public investment, the private sector would be a fraction of what it is. Cutting the wages of union workers and public employees is wrong. It will lower demand and ultimately hurt small businesses most. After all, workers are really profit creators when they spend their wages.

We need to invest more in tourism and technology. We need to teach coding in our public schools. We need to increase our state budget and invest in West Virginia and its people. This means job creation and free retraining for workers who are unemployed.

Reactionary policies and politics like we are seeing in the West Virginia Legislature will do harm and nothing good.

Andy Park, of Charleston, is a retired teacher.