

## Steve Roberts: Thank you Legislature for leading



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Job growth and economic development in West Virginia are at alarmingly low rates.

The U.S. Census bureau just announced we have lost more population than any other state. Federal data shows we have been last in the nation for job creation for almost the last four years. We are in last place when we look at the percentage of eligible adults of working age who are actually working.

Legislative leaders have decided enough is enough. Dramatic change is needed if West Virginia is to change its direction and grow jobs, opportunity and population.

This year and last our new legislative leaders have proposed and enacted legislation to bring fairness to our courts, improve education, make government work better for the people it serves and create an environment that fosters job creation and economic success.

Many, but not all, of these measures have received broad, bipartisan support.

This year's legislative session has taken off quickly. Measures to improve job creation, help repair our ailing schools, restore balance to an outdated legal system and make our state a job creating engine have already passed one or both houses of the Legislature. At last, West Virginia's chances to compete in a global economy are being modernized and brought into the current era.

And none of this has been easy. The Legislature has every right, in fact legislators have the responsibility, to ask the entrenched state bureaucracy how it spends our hard earned taxpayer money.

Virtually every citizen has some involvement with government and it doesn't take X-ray vision to see that more can be done to improve efficiency, eliminate duplications in service and provide better service at more reasonable cost.

Long entrenched special interests oppose the changes needed for so long in West Virginia. Standing still when in last place is an unacceptable response to a crisis.

I applaud House and Senate Finance Committee chairs Delegate Eric Nelson and Sen. Mike Hall for asking tough questions of the state agencies. West Virginia has more state and local government employees than most states in the nation.

Our business taxes as a share of private sector gross state product are the nation's ninth highest.

It really is OK to ask how nearly 40,000 state employees are managed and what can be done to ease their burden and improve their ability to perform the jobs asked of them.

Before taxes are raised on West Virginia's hard-working wage earners or those businesses struggling to make ends meet, these questions need answers.

Thank you Nelson, Hall, Senate President Bill Cole and House Speaker Tim Armstead for having the courage and conviction to ask and seek answers before following a tax and spend path that has not worked well in the past.

Steve Roberts is president of the West Virginia Chamber of Commerce.