



WEST VIRGINIA'S FIRST WORKFORCE SUMMIT

A column by Governor Earl Ray Tomblin

(May 14, 2015) - Just last week, I was proud to welcome West Virginians from across the state to the state's first Workforce Summit - a comprehensive review of West Virginia's past, present and future workforce development efforts.

During my time as Senate President and now, as your Governor, I have made it a priority to not only improve our state's business climate, but to strengthen and grow West Virginia's workforce to meet the long-term needs of business and industry operating here.

In 2013, West Virginia took the first major step toward achieving this goal by signing comprehensive education reform into law. The foundation of this landmark initiative was re-establishing the West Virginia Workforce Planning Council to better align classroom learning with workplace needs. What was once a seven-member council has transformed and now includes Cabinet secretaries and officials from a number of state agencies ranging from the West Virginia Department of Commerce and the West Virginia Department of Education to the West Virginia Department of Veterans Assistance, the Herbert Henderson Office of Minority Affairs and the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources.

For the past two years, the Workforce Planning Council has operated somewhat behind the scenes, but West Virginia has a great story to tell and it's time we start telling it.

We have worked hard to develop a strong portfolio of programs that encompass the lifespan of an individual leading up to employment - from early childhood, middle school and high school to post-secondary training and opportunities at our Community and Technical Colleges and four-year higher

education institutions.

Anyone who has the desire for a job in West Virginia can do it, and the state stands ready to help by providing the necessary resources, training and support to our residents. Whether through a certificate or apprenticeship program, a two-year or four-year degree or a specialized training course, West Virginians can achieve success in the Mountain State.

The Summit, at BridgeValley Community and Technical College's Advanced Technology Center in South Charleston, featured a series of speakers, representing both the public and private sector. They spoke personally about a few of the many workforce training programs in place across West Virginia.

In addition to my remarks, the Summit include presentations by First Lady Joanne Jaeger Tomblin; Dr. Kathy D'Antoni, Chief Officer of Career and Technical Education at the West Virginia Department of Education; Chancellor Jim Skidmore, West Virginia Community and Technical College System; Steve White, Affiliated Construction Trades Foundation; Todd Fox, DuPont Washington Works; Adjutant General James Hoyer, West Virginia National Guard; Dr. Carolyn Stuart, Herbert Henderson Office of Minority Affairs; and Commerce Secretary Keith Burdette.

Time and time again, I've been asked about our state's workforce efforts and what we're doing to help those who may be unemployed, want to change fields or are just now entering the workforce. The Summit provided us with an opportunity to address those questions and showcase the significant changes we've brought about in the Mountain State.

More than 100 people attended the Summit, which opened the door to productive and collaborative discussions; however, the conversation on workforce development is just beginning for West Virginia - there is much more work to be done.

Each and every day, I strive to create a better West Virginia by strengthening our state's small businesses and securing new investments that will generate jobs for our workforce. Throughout this process, we have worked hard to facilitate and ensure the conversation between business and industry and leaders in our state's primary and post-secondary education systems.

I am committed to continuing these relationships, and our team will work with any business or industry operating in West Virginia to develop specialized training programs and increase the number of opportunities available for West Virginia workers.

Our state's continued success is built on our strong business climate and an educated, skilled workforce. I am confident that if we continue to combine our resources and work together, we can and will realize the bright future waiting for West Virginia.