

## Governor Joe Manchin's State of the State Address January 9, 2008

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**Mr.** President, Mr. Speaker, Members of the Legislature, Distinguished Guests and my fellow West Virginians:

Standing here in this historic chamber delivering my first State of the State address in January of 2005, it was clear that the challenges ahead were daunting, but the possibilities for success were unmistakable.

Our most immediate task was to demonstrate to everyone in this state and across this nation that West Virginia was not only serious about getting its house in order but was also committed to retaining and creating the good jobs with benefits that our people and their families deserve.

Working with a truly progressive Legislature, as well as with individuals and groups from all sides of our state's many aisles, including our Vision Shared partners: the AFL-CIO, West Virginia State Chamber of Commerce, AARP, the Business and Industry Council, West Virginia Education Association, West Virginia Hospital Association and the United Mine Workers of America, I am pleased to say that we have made significant strides in these efforts - strides that would not have been possible without our unsung heroes - our state employees.

State employees are too often taken for granted by all of us, but I want them and everyone listening tonight to know how important the work they do is to this state and how much I truly thank them for helping us to achieve some really important goals.

While I'm sure we can all agree that there is much more to do, I want to share with you some facts regarding what *has* been accomplished in West Virginia since I gave that first address. And I'll start by talking about our most serious and enduring challenge - job creation.

This past year, a study by Expansion Management Magazine and the National Policy Research Council that reviewed 19 million businesses across the country, ranked West Virginia 8th in the nation for business recruitment and attraction.

The state's average unemployment rate last year was 4.6 percent, *the lowest unemployment average in the state's history.*

And, the number of West Virginians working last year averaged 778,269 - *the highest number during a year ever recorded.*

I don't know about you, but I think those are some statistics that you can hang your hat on the next time you're asked, how are things are going in West Virginia?!

But I also know that there are quite a few people out there right now saying, “Yeah, those figures that you’re stating sound good, but how can I be sure these expanding companies and good jobs you keep talking about actually exist - and if they do exist, where are they?”

Well, I’ll tell you where they are. They’re in places like Harrison County, where GrafTech International, which received training assistance from the state, has expanded its advanced graphite materials production facility, and recently added 60 new jobs.

They’re in Beaver, at Klockner Pentaplast, the world’s leading producer of plastic films used in medical and food packaging. This company recently evaluated their operations in West Virginia and has decided to expand their facilities with world-class technology, making this a center of excellence in the southern part of West Virginia. And, because the state has consistently stood by them as a partner, they plan to not only retain 41 good-paying jobs but add 15 more.

They’re in Marshall County, where the largest investment in our state since Toyota is being made. In excess of \$100 million is being spent there to start the CertainTeed gypsum wallboard plant, with the state assisting with an access road, infrastructure and training.

They’re in Barboursville, at Second Creek Technologies, where a seven-member team is growing a world-class computer forensics company right here in West Virginia. In addition, Second Creek is drawing talent back home – talent like West Virginian Todd Nessel. Todd was working out-of-state, but came home to West Virginia and is now helping to build Second Creek.

And they’re in Berkeley Springs where at Washington Homeopathic, owners Joe and Linda Lillard, who have received assistance with their e-commerce capabilities from our Small Business Development Center, run a multi-million-dollar business that exports to more than 40 destinations around the world and is growing by approximately 20 percent every year.

But what illustrates these jobs numbers best are the personal stories of the people who work at these companies and the many others who are choosing to locate or expand in West Virginia.

People like Sonya Buck. Sonya, a single mother, was employed as a security guard at the boarded up Walker Systems plant in Williamstown, W.Va., while also going to school to pursue a better life. If someone came by the guard shack at Walker, they would sometimes see both Sonya and her 10-year-old son, Cody, working on their homework together.

So when the Walker Systems facility was sold, Sonya was concerned. But, the new owners of the plant, Hino Motors, one of the companies I was able to meet with on our economic development trip to Japan, put her fears to rest and hired her as a logistics team member for their new Hino truck production facility – the first assembly plant for Hino Motors in the United States, and now Sonya’s wages, benefits and working hours have all improved, allowing her to pay for her schooling and get back on her feet financially.

And so that you can see for yourselves that the people and companies I've mentioned tonight are real, at this time I would like to ask Joe and Linda Lillard, Todd Nessel, Sonya and Cody Buck and Mark Arrington and David Veasey of Klockner Pentaplast to please stand and be recognized!

I'm also pleased tonight to welcome to West Virginia our 20<sup>th</sup> Japanese company, Kureha Corp. of Tokyo. Kureha will invest more than \$100 million to build a plant to produce and sell a high-performance polymer known as PGA at the DuPont chemical complex in Belle. Construction is scheduled to start early this year with production set to begin in 2010. Liz Gershon and Tom Provost of Kureha Corp. are here with us tonight, so please join me in officially welcoming them and Kureha to the Mountain State.

I also fully appreciate for those of you at home watching or listening tonight, that if you haven't benefited from all that I've just spoken about, it's hard to be too excited about these numbers and stories - which is why I am still not satisfied and will remain totally committed to working hard every day to make things better in West Virginia.

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I also remain committed to running a "Responsible Government."

Since 2004, we've tackled our state's debts, putting an additional \$1.7 billion toward our retirement systems, so that our state employees can be confident that the money they've been working so hard to earn will be there when they need it.

We've also done something that I don't think anyone ever thought could or would be done. We've cut the size of state government for the second year in a row, the first consecutive decrease in employees in at least 16 years, showing that the days of ballooning state payrolls *are officially over*.

And, we've improved services to our citizens. The West Virginia Bureau of Senior Services, for example, has been steadily growing the number of seniors we assist. Over 1,500 seniors and their families have benefited since just last July from the Bureau's new FAIR (Families with Alzheimer's In-Home Respite) and LIGHTHOUSE programs, allowing them to receive services in their own homes - with more seniors to be added this year.

We've committed over \$300 million since 2004 to installing and upgrading water and sewage systems throughout West Virginia, with at least \$77 million worth of additional projects set to begin this year, bringing clean drinking water and safe sewage systems to many West Virginians who have never had them.

It is also estimated that 80 percent of West Virginia households now have access to broadband Internet, up from 58 percent in 2004. And our friends at Cisco Systems, thanks to Mountain State native and Cisco CEO John Chambers, are working closely with us and the state's Internet providers to reach our 100 percent goal by 2010, so that our citizens and businesses can better

compete in today's global and technologically savvy economy. We've also reached an agreement with Verizon to place free public wireless broadband at all rest areas and information centers by the middle of this year.

In addition, this year our Division of Natural Resources, working with The Nature Conservancy, is preserving 4,600 acres of land on the rim of the New River Gorge, providing significant new hunting and recreational opportunities in West Virginia.

And when it comes to putting money back into taxpayers' pockets, I believe we've accomplished more in the past three years than ever before in this state.

West Virginia consumers have benefited from over \$80 million worth of reductions in their insurance costs, with many more insurance companies doing business in West Virginia today than in 2004.

Our workers' compensation system, once known as the Achilles Heel of our state, has been completely transformed. In addition to our injured workers receiving better and quicker service, our businesses workers' comp costs have decreased by an average of 27 percent – resulting in savings of roughly \$150 million.

We've also cut taxes, because West Virginians deserve to keep more of what they earn. Specifically, we've saved the people of our state approximately \$100 million a year by increasing the low-income family tax credit; doubling the amount of the senior citizens refundable homestead exemption tax credit; removing our "Welcome to West Virginia" motor vehicle privilege tax; and, cutting our food tax in half. Additionally, we removed another \$100 million of tax burden from our businesses during the past three years by reducing, among other things, our corporate net income and business franchise taxes. And I will propose more reductions this year.

These things add up. If you combine our tax cuts with our workers' comp decreases and our insurance reforms, that's at least \$430 million that has gone back to the hard-working people and businesses of West Virginia.

And while doing all of this, we have also found ways to consistently increase the pay of our state employees, school service personnel and teachers, with a majority of professional educators receiving increases since 2004 of between 10.5 percent and 19.0 percent. And I am confident that working together, we will continue this consistent and responsible form of compensation.

But do we still have a long way to go? You bet. Are there more things we need to do to create an even more responsible government? Absolutely. And, I can assure you we will do more to make sure that you're able to keep as much money in your own pockets as possible, that local governments will have even more autonomy to operate independently and that the state government in Charleston will assist you, not get in your way. As our economy grows, we will continue to share.

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We must also recognize that we have suffered great losses during these past three years as well. From our state's soldiers who have died serving their country in places like Iraq and Afghanistan, to our emergency service professionals who have died on duty in communities like Ghent, we must not forget tonight to honor those brave men and women who are no longer with us.

Last year, we passed legislation allowing for the beneficiary of a fallen firefighter or EMS responder to receive \$50,000 in death benefits from our state. It was the least that we could do for those who we count on everyday to be there for us in an emergency.

And this year, for our veterans, I know that we are all concerned about the psychological and emotional challenges that they are facing as they return from their dangerous overseas duties, and so I pledge to work with the Legislature and the West Virginia Council of Churches' new program, Carenet: Caring Beyond the Yellow Ribbon, to make sure we are providing our vets with the resources and counseling they need. It is our duty to do right by these amazing men and women who have made such tremendous personal sacrifices on our behalf.

And, of course, we must also pause to remember our lost coal miners, whose deaths have led to so many significant changes to our mine safety laws and procedures, not only in West Virginia but across the country.

Since the tragedies at Sago and Aracoma, we have instituted a "rapid response" accident reporting system, hired additional mine inspectors and better equipped and trained our mine rescue teams. We've made it easier to close an entire mine if a pattern of serious violations exist, have restricted the use of belt air, have strengthened the requirements for the construction of mine seals and instituted additional education courses for mine foremen and fire bosses.

In addition, all underground coal operations in the state are in full compliance with our new emergency air pack requirements, which occurred six months earlier than originally scheduled and amounts to over 40,000 new self-contained self rescuers deployed in our mines during the past year.

West Virginia also received its first underground emergency shelter in November with a total of 308 shelters scheduled to be delivered over the next several months to mining companies throughout the state. And the deployment of wireless communication and tracking devices in West Virginia's mines, which has been a major undertaking, is now well under way. Coal company plans for these devices have been received and approved and the deployment of these systems into our state's mines has begun and will continue throughout 2008 – meaning that all of West Virginia's underground coal mines should have these systems in place at least one year earlier than required by the federal government.

We want our state's workplaces to be the safest in the nation, and we've worked hard to put in place improvements that don't just sound good but that will truly make a difference. And we will not stop, because as everyone knows, one fatality is one too many.

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As we begin to set our priorities for 2008, we must recognize that many West Virginians still struggle everyday, worrying about their financial stability, the future of their children, and if they are going to be able to properly care for their aging parents.

That is why we must continue to get our state's house in order so that we are providing the best possible return on the investments of our citizens while also improving our economic climate so that we are able to retain and attract even more good jobs with benefits.

And, of course, it all starts with education.

At this time, as is tradition, I would like to recognize Eric Kincaid from Morgantown High School, this year's West Virginia Teacher of the Year. Eric is a science teacher who is innovative and dynamic and infuses his students with enthusiasm – even building a life-size whale once as a teaching tool! Eric is here with us tonight. Eric, will you please stand and be recognized? Also with us tonight are Mike Lutz and Jeff Moore from Toyota, which once again is recognizing the importance of our teachers by providing our teacher of the year with a Toyota Prius. Mike and Jeff, please stand so we can say thank you.

As I mentioned earlier, I believe we can make more advances this year when it comes to responsibly compensating classroom teachers like Eric. In addition, I also want to go back this session and revisit a change that we made last year that just hasn't worked as I would have hoped. One of the most important things that we can do to address teachers' salary issues across our state is to provide counties with the flexibility within the School Aid Formula to capture more local funds, so that they can contribute additional money to their teachers' pay based on their specific county needs. We gave that flexibility last year, but I have found that in many cases the money was used for purposes other than the classroom salary supplements that it was meant for. Therefore, I will introduce legislation this year that requires all of our counties to use 100 percent of this extra School Aid Formula money for classroom teachers' salaries.

We also have to take steps to improve the environment that our classroom teachers currently work in and our children currently learn in. Every year during the legislative session, we all come together and work on and talk about education, but I sincerely believe that until we're committed to giving our teachers back the ability and freedom to teach their students, instead of requiring them to spend their days policing their students, we are never going to truly accomplish all of the other things that we know are so important in education.

Our teachers and our students deserve better, and I am determined to do better and to give our teachers every possible tool they need to *take back their classrooms*, and we start tonight.

I have asked the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Jobs Cabinet to develop the “West Virginia Bill of Rights and Responsibilities for Learning.” The Bill of Rights will set standards both for the rights and responsibilities of students while in school and the authority of teachers to protect those rights and enforce those responsibilities.

Specifically, I don’t believe we’ve done enough to prevent the problem of student bullying. Student bullying must stop, and it must stop now.

While the State Board of Education has taken this issue seriously and our schools are required by law to have anti-bullying plans in place, I want to go a step further and establish a commission to thoroughly review the anti-bullying practices of our schools and recommend to me, the Legislature and the State Board of Education, the best ways to expand our efforts to identify and stop dangerous and bullying behavior before it becomes a threat, as well as how to best deal with disruptive students during the school day. For example, what can we learn from the success that has been achieved by the National Guard at the West Virginia Challenge Academy, and how can we take what they’ve learned and apply it to how we handle our most troubled and disruptive students in the future?

I am also proposing that we revoke the driver’s licenses of students who are found to have committed serious offenses like assaulting a teacher or fellow student or bringing a dangerous weapon to school, and add a requirement that in order to obtain and keep a driver’s license between the ages of 16 and 18, you must receive passing grades. A drivers’ license is a privilege, not a right.

Are these steps enough to truly give teachers back their classrooms? No, but they are a start.

And on a positive note for our children, I am proud to announce tonight the development in our schools of Kids First, a kindergarten health screening program.

Through the use of administrative funds from the State Children’s Health Insurance Program, West Virginia will establish a health services initiative that is the first in the nation to ensure every uninsured child entering kindergarten has a wellness screening prior to starting school. A comprehensive wellness screening is an important child development assessment tool and is already covered by PEIA, Medicaid, CHIP and BlueCross BlueShield. By encouraging this early connection to a medical home, we can ensure that children are healthy and ready to learn when school begins, setting the stage for a strong and healthy population down the road. Once this first class of kindergarteners is screened, our intentions are to provide follow-up screenings as they reach 2<sup>nd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades so that we can continue to assess their health as they grow. And I am pleased to say that Mountain State Blue Cross Blue Shield has generously offered to contribute \$1.5 million toward the Kids First program. With us here tonight is Fred Early, of Mountain State Blue Cross Blue Shield. Fred, please stand so that we can say thank you.

I am also pleased to announce the formation of WVRx. Beginning Feb. 1, uninsured working West Virginians will be able to access free prescriptions at West Virginia Health Right. Because of a public-private partnership between my office, West Virginia Health Right, Beckley Health Right, the Benedum Foundation, the Heinz Family Philanthropies, the Attorney General's Office and Health-E West Virginia, doctors, hospitals and patients will be able to access prescription drugs donated by manufacturers by phone or e-mail via an efficient, paperless system.

And for the future health of all of our citizens, we must continue our war on illegal drugs in West Virginia. In the past, we have committed extra money to this effort, but this year, due to the hard work of our State Police as part of an investigation led by federal prosecutors, we will be receiving over \$44 million to help combat our state's drug problem – and I believe that within the spending guidelines and requirements given to us by the federal government, we can make tremendous strides toward winning our drug war once and for all.

As I said in this chamber two years ago, I want our drug criminals to continue to know that wherever you are and wherever you may be hiding or hiding your illegal drugs, our troopers will find you.

Therefore, I am proposing that we use these new funds to institute my strategic spending plan for a drug-free West Virginia.

Obviously, our best hope for reducing future drug use is to make sure our kids never start using or dealing drugs in the first place. West Virginia has been nationally recognized for its Prevention Resource Officer Program, a cooperative effort between schools and law enforcement designed to put officers in schools to teach students about drug and safety issues and to recognize potential danger, prevent violence and respond to dangerous situations. We will build upon the current success of this program and partner with local police and sheriff's departments to put Prevention Resource Officers in more schools in every county of our state.

Healthcare professionals are also a key resource in preventing *prescription* drug abuse, a leading killer in West Virginia, and in helping those who have become addicted to prescription and other illegal drugs. Therefore, we will work to develop and expand addiction training programs for health care professionals throughout the state.

The State of West Virginia has also been implementing a solution known as “drug courts” to help individuals convicted of minor crimes due to substance abuse problems get the treatment they need, become productive members of society, and stay out of jail. Research has documented that drug courts reduce repeat offenders and result in substantial cost savings. That is why, as part of our statewide drug plan, we will provide funding for expanding drug courts and needed substance abuse treatment.

These funds will also be used directly by the State Police on such things as hiring additional drug diversion investigators, adding additional law enforcement training courses, improving

the State Police Academy, installing mobile data terminals and purchasing electronic fingerprint capture stations.

Used properly, these funds give us the opportunity to tackle our drug problems head on – which will improve our law enforcement climate, our educational climate and even our economic climate, because our businesses are looking for good, hard-working and, most especially, *drug free* workers.

In fact, work force development is another one of the challenges we face in West Virginia today.

I never imagined that we would experience a time when companies couldn't find enough skilled workers in our state, but that's exactly what's happening. If I've heard it once when out talking to businesses, I've heard it 100 times – we need more skilled workers, and we need them to be trained for the jobs of today, not the jobs of yesterday. We know we have the hardest-working people in the world; now we just need to make sure we also have the best-trained.

So next to tackling our drug problems, the best thing we can do to improve our work force is to target our higher education and work force development investments toward meeting the needs of the state's growing and emerging industries.

The strategies for investment that I'm about to discuss all started when I visited the University of Kentucky last year and learned about that state's "Bucks for Brains" program that provided money to its two major research universities that was matched with private donations to create new opportunities for state-of-the-art research and entrepreneurship.

From that seed, an entire tree is now about to be planted in West Virginia, with an initiative I like to call "Bucks for Jobs."

West Virginia must be a player in the 21st century world economy, and to do so we need to develop more intellectual and financial capital. "Bucks for Jobs" achieves both these goals by leveraging smart, interconnected investments in economic development, higher education and work force training. First, as part of our own "Bucks for Brains" initiative, and using one-time surplus monies, we will create a \$50 million endowment fund for our two research universities, WVU and Marshall, to stimulate world-class research and development and attract venture capital, which will eventually lead to jobs in emerging high-tech, high-wage industries. The state's investment will be matched, dollar for dollar, by private donations, resulting in sizable funds that will strengthen our most-promising research departments – ultimately leading to business spinoffs, new patents and job creation. At the University of Kentucky, for example, their state investments have so far resulted in 44 new start-up companies with over 870 employees - with the University of Louisville adding another 18 start-up companies.

Second, we will coordinate numerous federal and state work force training programs to create a single and comprehensive "Training Bucks" program. We want to make sure that the money

we're already spending on work force training is being accessed by the businesses that need it and that all businesses in our state know about "Training Bucks" and how to get them.

I am also proposing a major investment in the development of two state-of-the-art advanced technical centers. These centers will offer training that is specialized to meet the needs of existing businesses as well as those new businesses that we are now attracting to the state, and they will collaborate directly with industry to design and deliver high-quality instruction.

In counties throughout West Virginia we also have serious shortages of workers in allied health fields, from nurses, where our deficits are most acute and affect every community statewide, to dental assistants, emergency medical technicians, pharmacy workers and surgery technicians. Therefore, we must begin building the programs necessary to produce the large numbers of critical healthcare specialists we will need to replace retiring Baby Boomers. To that end, we're going to invest in existing programs at our community and technical colleges to fill this growing need. This investment will result in approximately 1,000 new allied health field graduates every year in West Virginia beginning in 2010.

In addition, we must do a better job of keeping our best and brightest here in the Mountain State. The Promise Scholarship has been a great program that I want to see continue, but I think in order to make sure that the people of West Virginia are getting a return on the substantial investment they're making in these students' futures, we need to ensure that our native sons and daughters look seriously at their career options here before assuming that the pastures might be greener on the other side of the state line. Therefore, I am proposing that the Promise Board develop a rule requiring recipients to work in West Virginia following graduation as a condition of not having to pay back the Promise Scholarship.

I am also proposing that we add "payback" requirements for those new state employees who receive additional state-paid training, such as our State Police officers, pilots, engineers and others. Too often, we are spending state dollars to provide training for these new employees only to have them then leave us for other job opportunities outside of state government once their training is complete. While I would never stand in the way of employees bettering themselves or their families, the state must not always be left holding the bag with nothing to show for it.

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And as important as the topics I've discussed so far are, I believe one of the biggest issues that we face not only as a state but as a nation is energy.

Today, we hear the terms *Energy Security* and *Climate Change* spoken almost constantly. As we consider how our nation can provide an adequate energy supply that is environmentally acceptable, we must recognize the critical role of clean coal technologies in this discussion. Because of its wide availability, versatility and reasonable cost, clean coal will be strategically important to our energy future. Coal currently is the fuel source for almost half of the electricity generated in the United States. I sincerely believe that technological solutions

leading to the *greening* of the coal industry hold the key to America's security – which is why I am so committed to working toward the continued development of clean coal technologies and the construction of clean coal power and fuel liquefaction plants.

And with the carbon that these new technologies can capture having been proven to enhance natural gas and oil production, it is clear that those industries have bright futures in our state as well. In 2006 West Virginia produced over 1.7 million barrels of oil, and through enhanced oil recovery, we will now be able to extend the production horizon of our reserves. Natural gas is also a fundamental building block of our state's economy. We produce over 225 billion cubic feet of natural gas a year to heat our homes and fuel our factories, and so I look forward to the continued success of both of these industries in West Virginia.

I also recognize that West Virginia is rich in renewable energy sources too, such as biomass in the form of wood and crop residue that will eventually be used to make fuel. Solar and wind opportunities also have their place in our energy portfolio as well. To that end, I am committed to examining the legal barriers that restrict the post-mining development of surface mining operations and exploring ways to give priority to post-mining uses involving renewable energy projects such as biomass, solar and wind, for the purpose of making these lands productive.

However, we must acknowledge that the main ingredient to a successful energy future is sustainability. We need to keep learning how to optimize the use of our resources, become more energy efficient, and minimize waste. And we can all do our part by simply switching to compact fluorescent bulbs and installing high-efficiency heating and cooling systems, proper insulation and storm doors – and the state will help you with these purchases in 2008 by providing a new “energy efficient products” tax incentive.

We can also promote renewable energy and energy efficiency in our building designs. As part of that effort here at the Capitol, we entered into an energy conservation and savings contract in 2005 that guarantees that the State Capitol Complex will reduce its energy consumption by at least 5 percent. However, I believe we can do more, and so I am directing our agencies to reduce consumption by at least 10 percent this year. And I would ask you, in your homes and your businesses, to do the same. Every little bit of conservation can make a big difference in our overall energy consumption, and it's as simple as turning off a light when you leave a room.

In addition, as we renovate the buildings on the Capitol Complex or build any new buildings in the future, we're going to put in place energy-saving mechanisms that will make these buildings “green.”

Not since the 1970s has there been so much discussion about the role of energy and how it is produced and used – and I challenge us all to do our part to ensure our state and our country have a stable energy supply so that we can control our own destiny and protect our nation's security.

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Going back once more to my first State of the State address, I remember saying then that I believed it was a new day in West Virginia, not only for the families that live here, but for the companies that want to do business and create good jobs here. I still believe that to be true – so much so that if West Virginia were a company about to be listed on the stock market, I am confident that the experts on Wall Street would recommend us as a “buy.”

However, we can't continue down this path without help. As everyone knows, our best resource has always been our people – and not just those who are here today living and working in West Virginia, but those who were born or raised in West Virginia and have left the state because they felt they had no other choice in order to make a living. Unfortunately, we are all guilty of teaching an entire generation that they couldn't find a good job in West Virginia, so don't even bother trying. Well, that's absolutely not true today, and now our challenge is to reverse these thoughts and show those who have left that this is the perfect time to come home.

Some of the most successful people in the country are native West Virginians – Sylvia Matthews, chief operating officer of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation; Wes Bush, president of Northrop Grumman; Ralph Baxter of Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe who has come home to West Virginia to co-chair our 21<sup>st</sup> Century Jobs Cabinet and, of course, as previously mentioned, John Chambers, CEO of Cisco Systems. And I know there are many, many more success stories out there, both large and small, that most of us aren't even aware of – except for the proud mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters who deep-down wish their loved ones were achieving success here in West Virginia.

Regardless of your field of expertise, we need you, and your intellectual capital, ingenuity and work ethic, now more than ever.

We need those of you who have an entrepreneurial spirit, or those who have accomplished your goals and are looking for a place where you can teach others all that you have learned. You'll recognize much of what you left behind, but you'll also find a work force and a business community that have made tremendous advancements.

While your coming home will help us to make this an even better place to live and work, it will also be rewarding for you as well, because you'll be able to give something back to this place that I know you've always carried with you in your heart and is such an important part of who you are.

So to get the word out, we are going to start a “Come Home to West Virginia” campaign this year through our Department of Commerce. This recruiting campaign will be aimed at bringing former West Virginia residents back home to either work in West Virginia's growing industries or to expand in West Virginia the businesses they have started in other places.

As Donna Briggs, a long-time employee at one of our welcome centers once told the New York Times, “Looking over your shoulder and missing home is something West Virginians know a lot about.”

So for those West Virginians out there longing to come home, know that we're keeping the light on for you. I'm pretty positive you know the way, just take the nearest country road back home to the place where you belong: West Virginia. Or, more appropriately based on popular opinion, "Wild, Wonderful West Virginia."

I want to thank each and every one of you for allowing me the opportunity to tell the whole world just how good you are. God bless you and may God save the great State of West Virginia.

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