



VIEW*S* & VISIONS

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Making the Most of Our Economic Potential

The Honorable Joe Manchin III, Senator
United States Senate

U.S. Senator Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.) was sworn into the United States Senate on November 15, 2010, to fill the seat left vacant by the late Senator Robert C. Byrd. For Senator Manchin, serving as West Virginia's Senator is truly an honor and a privilege.

Senator Manchin is defined by his family and the values that he learned growing up among the hardworking men and women of West Virginia which, over time, formed his vigilant desire to be a public servant. From his days as a state legislator to his six years as Governor to his current role, Senator Manchin has always been committed to his philosophy of "retail government" – in other words, connecting with all of his constituents and making service to them his top priority.

Senator Manchin currently serves on the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, the Senate Armed Services Committee, the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation and the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs – four critical Senate committees that tackle the important work of addressing our nation's energy needs, standing up for members of the military, honoring our veterans and finding common sense solutions to boost economic prosperity.

It comes as no surprise that international companies, both large and small, like Macy's, Procter & Gamble, Gat Creek Furniture, Schonstedt Instrument Company, Orbital-ATK and IBM have made significant and lasting investments in the eastern counties of our state. It remains one of our strongest economic regions and has maintained a healthy pattern of growth in the years since the Great Recession. This is due, in part, to its proximity to northern Virginia, Maryland and Washington D.C., allowing for a large number of commuter jobs and successful small business ventures.

In addition to our corporate partners who reside in the Eastern Panhandle, this region boasts some of the most charming Main Streets in America, full of successful small businesses.



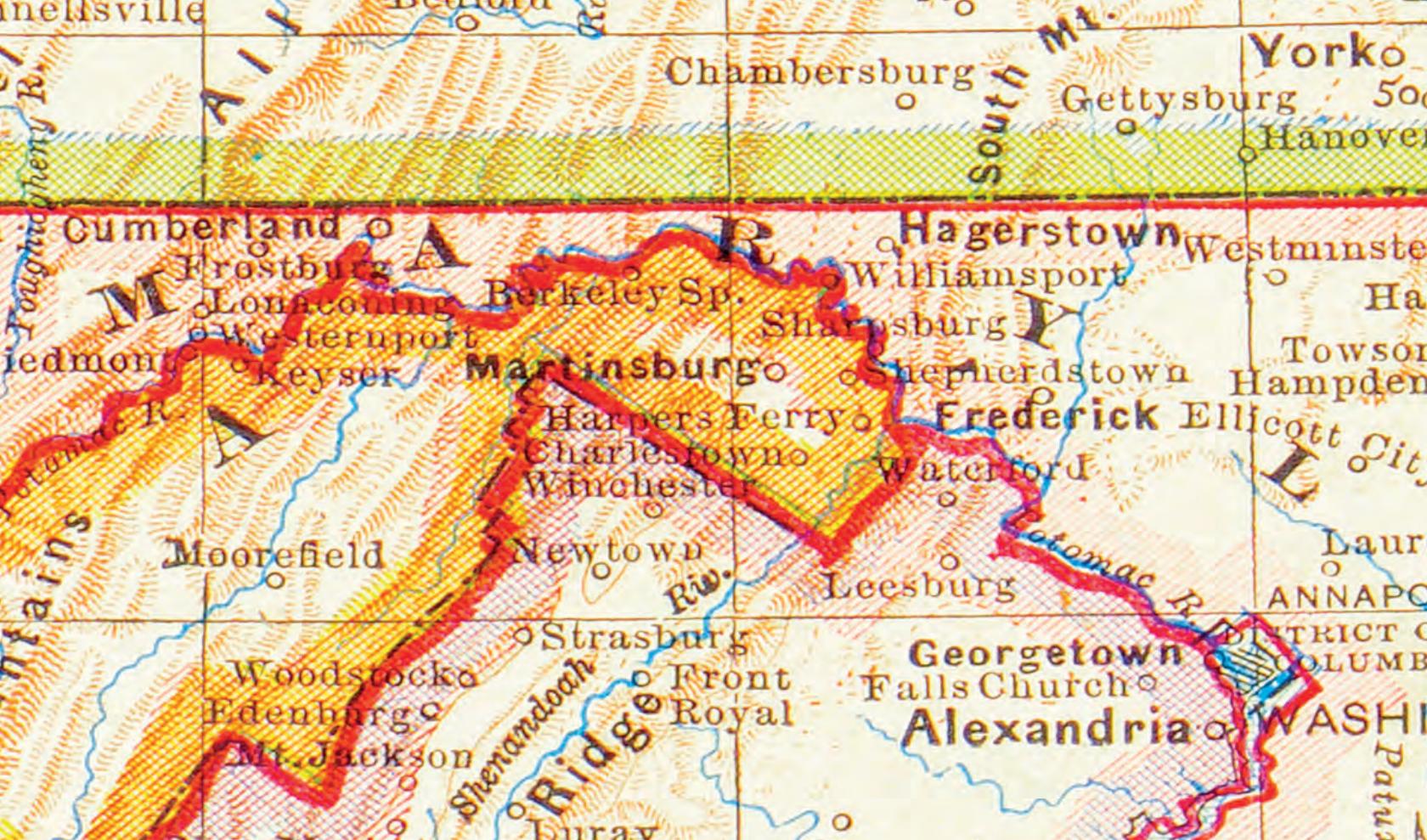
Senator Joe Manchin speaking at the Procter & Gamble groundbreaking on September 18, 2015, in Martinsburg, West Virginia • photo credit: Office of the Governor

These small economic engines are the backbone of our economy and the heart and soul of our communities. Not only do they invest in hiring workers and providing quality services to our population, but small business invests in our people and in the towns in which they serve. I worked in small businesses all my life, and I am very familiar with the contributions they make to our communities and economy. Their importance in communities across West Virginia and the entire nation is the key to economic growth and long-term stability, and the Eastern Panhandle has been setting the bar high for years.

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To add to this success, the area has been consistently ranked as our fastest-growing region since the 1990s, increasing its population by 56 percent, according to a recent study by West Virginia University. It has been an encouraging location for recent graduates who want to stay in the state and are looking for the perfect combination of careers and housing.

Additionally, the trade, defense, cyber, transportation and utilities sectors have shown exceptional employment growth in the region. One example is the opening of the Macy's Fulfillment Center in Berkeley County, which now employs approximately 1,700 workers, with 3,000 temporary positions available during the holidays. Procter & Gamble announced plans to



invest \$500 million and create 700 jobs at a facility scheduled to open in Martinsburg in 2017.

When I talk to the leaders of businesses both large and small, they tell me that the work ethic and loyalty of West Virginians attracts them to our state. That is why I started a job and resource fair program, which not only links West Virginians with good paying jobs, but also highlights the strength of our workforce to potential employers. I co-hosted the first job fair in Martinsburg last fall with WorkForce West Virginia. It was so successful that it has grown into a statewide job fair program. I am proud to announce the tenth job fair will be back in Martinsburg on Monday, September 19.

The bottom line is this: West Virginians are the hardest-working people in the entire nation, and their success is paid back ten-fold to their communities. For this reason, and considering its prime location, history of progress and room for even more expansion, the Eastern Panhandle simply

cannot be overlooked. I am confident that if we work together and use our common sense, we can continue this progress and inspire other areas of our state that have been looking for a tried and tested model to follow.

Together, we are well on our way to showing the rest of the nation that our home state is indeed open for business. ▽

¹John Deskins and Brian Lego, *Eastern Panhandle Economic Outlook 2016*. Published by Bureau of Business & Economic Research, West Virginia University College of Business and Economics.