



VIEW*S* & VISIONS

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Making Change Happen: How Young Leaders are Reshaping West Virginia's Future

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She earned her law degree from the West Virginia University College of Law in 2014, where she was the recipient of CALI Awards for legal research and writing, employment law, advanced legal research, and criminal procedure 1. She is founding president of Generation MOV.

West Virginia is on the cusp of change – vital change. Despite all the headlines that West Virginia's younger workers are leaving for jobs in big cities and that the state budget is in crisis, there is hope. West Virginia is home to some tremendous assets: beautiful mountains, daring outdoor adventures and, of course, kind, hardworking and unique people. But, are West Virginia's assets strong enough to reverse the gloomy forecasts? To answer this question affirmatively, West Virginia must embrace a movement that could change everything – the emergence of young leaders.

Signs of this movement can be seen at local events where young leaders are driving the enthusiasm for community involvement and at workplaces where young employees are developing new ideas for efficiency and effectiveness. This movement is prevalent at several new stores and restaurants opened throughout the state by young

owners. There is even an increased presence of a younger generation at city council meetings, board meetings and on election ballots.

Throughout West Virginia, young leaders are stepping up to advocate for the changes they believe are necessary for the state to reach its full potential. West Virginia's House of Delegates is home to the country's youngest elected representative. And, during the legislative session, myriad young leaders will advocate for causes, listen to introduced bills and think critically about how they can turn the state's present struggles into an abundant future.

West Virginia also benefits from a one-of-a-kind group, Generation West Virginia, which provides an outlet for young leaders to work together and collaborate on ways to bring their ideas to fruition. Generation West Virginia has chapters throughout the state and allows young leaders to interact with one another, as well as with more veteran community and state leaders.

With support to effectuate their ideas, West Virginia's young leaders have the ability to change the state's future from one of despair to one of success.

However, in order to capitalize on this asset, West Virginia must address its crippling population decline. To do this, West Virginia should focus on retaining and attracting more young leaders. Many businesses and government leaders already recognize this and have contributed by actively supporting young leaders individually and by sponsoring groups like Generation West Virginia.





Currently, many young leaders who choose to call West Virginia home do so because they love this state and want to see it succeed, despite the challenges. While they are here advocating for advancement, they see their contemporaries in bigger cities already benefitting from better job markets as well as abundant housing, transportation and entertainment options. Young leaders are aware that other regions already have many of the things they are promoting here. This makes the continued support of these young leaders in their efforts even more urgent. The retention and growth of this young generation is directly tied to the state's ability to develop a valuable population base.

Correspondingly, young leaders should recognize the great opportunity that exists in West Virginia. Although it may lack some of the attractions of more populous regions, it is one of the best places to be a young leader. It is a place where young talent is valued and where business leaders want to help their successors. It is a place

where community members welcome new energy and champion fresh ideas. The opportunities to get involved and leave a lasting impact in this state are abundant. Any young leader who envisions a better West Virginia should get involved and let their voice be heard because, in this small state, it *will* be heard.

Working together, young and veteran leaders can transform West Virginia's economy and reroute the current path of population decline, job loss and diminishing revenues. By utilizing our great asset of involved and committed young leaders, West Virginia's future is taking a new form. These young leaders have fresh ideas and strong enthusiasm. Their bright futures have the potential to make West Virginia's future shine just as bright. ♪