



VIEW*S* & VISIONS

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West Virginia Must Change

The Honorable James C. Justice, Governor
State of West Virginia

James C. Justice, II was elected the 36th governor of West Virginia in November 2016.

After earning his undergraduate degree and an MBA from Marshall University, Jim Justice joined his family's business in 1976. He started Justice Family Farms in 1977 and, under his direction, Justice Farming Operations grew to be a major agricultural enterprise. His companies farm more than 50,000 acres of corn, wheat and soybeans in West Virginia, Virginia, North Carolina and South Carolina, making him the largest farmer east of the Mississippi River.

Upon the death of his father in 1993, he became the President and CEO of Bluestone Industries, Inc. and Bluestone Coal Corporation. Over the next 15 years, he expanded into multiple businesses and, before being elected governor, was the president and CEO of 102 different companies.

Governor Justice is the recipient of many awards for his involvement with youth programs and community improvement. He has coached basketball teams of all ages for the past 36 years and is the head coach of both boys and girls basketball teams at Greenbrier East High School in Lewisburg, West Virginia.

Change is an important word for West Virginia because our great state will remain stuck in 50th place if we don't make serious changes. Earlier this year, I put forward a plan to bring hope, jobs and prosperity to West Virginia. That plan was only partially passed by our Legislature – many politicians turned their backs on change. That's why CNBC recently ranked West Virginia as the worst state for business – 50 out of 50. How pathetic is that?

If the people don't force a change in the mindset of the legislators or we don't change the legislators we send to Charleston, the Legislature

will continue to hold us back in 50th place. I just got to this terrible dance in January, with a massive budget hole, a drug epidemic and a severe lack of good-paying jobs. I'm trying to fix it and the good people of West Virginia need to know who is standing in the way.

This year I put forward a budget plan that would have lowered taxes for middle and lower income families, given rebate checks to the poor, exempted our veterans' military retirement from state income tax, given our seniors a tax cut, created a pool of money to seriously fight the drug epidemic, established the Save Our State (SOS) Fund to spur economic development, and provided money to grow tourism. My plan would have prevented painful cuts to our schools, colleges and universities and programs that help the old, sick, disabled and poor get by. Additionally, my plan gave the teachers a pay raise and would have substantially helped our miners.

The West Virginia Legislature said no, and we are already seeing the impact of their horrendous budget. It has already forced Marshall and West Virginia University to increase tuition next year. Furthermore, Wall Street is taking off like a rocket ship, but the people of West Virginia aren't sharing in the boom because our state Legislature did not support the economic development tools I proposed. It didn't have to be this way.

Last year, I told people that coal prices were on the rise and that severance taxes would increase. The politicians and the media laughed in my face, but I was right – and thank the Good Lord above, because the budget would be even worse without that additional revenue.





Governor Justice visited the King Coal Highway in southern West Virginia to discuss his roads plan. Completion of the King Coal Highway is one of the Governor's priority road projects.

Power-hungry politicians – from both parties – would rather see our people get hurt than step up and do what's best for West Virginia. It was totally unnecessary to hurt all of the families that will feel the pain because of this budget. The Legislature's budget put us \$11 million in the hole at the start of the current fiscal year. My plan would have kept us in the black.

The one bright spot in all of this is the passage of my roads plan. It will create 48,000 jobs and finally fix our roads and infrastructure. At the end of the day, it will save our bacon because it will bring new opportunities to our state.

I'm not a politician, so I'm not going to throw my hands in the air and just tell the public what a great job we all did on the roads. That doesn't cut it for me, because there is so much more that needs to happen to transform our state. However,

if voters don't pass the roads package later this year, just turn out the lights, because we are finished.

West Virginia had a chance to make significant changes and we blew it. It's frustrating to me because we are just too good to accept being 50th, and it's the people who will suffer. If we don't change the way things are done in Charleston, we won't ever be competitive in anything and our young people will continue to leave West Virginia in droves.

I want all West Virginians to know that I won't quit fighting to do what's best for our state and that they need to take a hard look at their state lawmakers. ♾