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West Virginia's New Economy



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Dr. Matthew Rohrbach (R-Cabell) serves as a member of the West Virginia House of Delegates, representing the state's 17th District. He is Vice Chair of the Health and Human Resources Committee and serves on House Committees for Finance; Technology and Infrastructure; Prevention and Treatment of Substance Abuse; and Senior, Children and Family Issues. Rohrbach is also a practicing physician.

Due to the pandemic in 2020, members of the West Virginia Legislature were unable to meet in interim session. Instead, this was replaced by the creation of work groups that were able to meet virtually following the adjournment of the 2020 regular session. One of the groups created was called The New Economy, of which I proudly serve as chairman. Our work group committee delved into the swift changes to the economy that have been occurring due to the pandemic. There have been many changes, and they will certainly continue to occur, but we identified two main themes for the state legislature to focus on.

The reshoring of critical manufacturing in personal protective equipment and in support of the pharmaceutical industries seems to be the first theme. To facilitate the location of those industries to West Virginia, the legislature is taking a comprehensive look at state programs to recruit and retain manufacturing businesses. Where necessary, our programs currently in place will be modified or expanded to enable us to be competitive when we are compared to other states.

The second theme that we focused on was the 21st century workplace. Much of our work in this area revolved around the remote worker. Although workers being able to telecommute is not new, the pandemic has greatly accelerated

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the rate at which companies have embraced this form of work and invested in the necessary technology to allow employees to work remotely. A great deal of study went into this specific area of the economy.

We researched locations that have successful programs in place for the recruitment of remote workers. Tulsa and Birmingham are two cities that have established programs that seem to work very well. Our committee focused on what the remote worker is seeking when looking to relocate. West Virginia seems to be in a very good position to recruit remote workers.





Obviously, adequate broadband is a must, and the state is working on this aspect through the West Virginia Broadband Enhancement Council. Affordable housing and a lower cost of living make West Virginia very attractive when compared to the large metropolitan areas from which remote workers tend to be leaving. The availability of coworking space is important to some remote workers, and several areas of the state have these facilities already in place.

Lastly, we evaluated the overall quality of life issues that remote workers evaluate when seeking a new location to call home. Our research uncovered that one of the main “quality of life” factors that individuals under 40 years of age look for is the availability of year-round outdoor recreation.

The work being done by the Department of Outdoor Recreation at West Virginia

University is really leading the way in creating and expanding the outdoor economy in West Virginia. God provided the Mountain State with an amazing array of outdoor recreational opportunities. Working in conjunction with WVU, the Legislature and the Governor’s office are developing a comprehensive program of asset development and marketing to assure the growth of the outdoor recreation economy. The success of this program will greatly facilitate our growth in the 21st century workplace and in West Virginia’s new economy. 