



# VIEW*S* & VISIONS

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## Improving Life in the Eastern Panhandle

J. Keith Burdette, Cabinet Secretary  
West Virginia Department of Commerce

In 2010, Keith Burdette was appointed by Governor Earl Ray Tomblin as cabinet secretary for the West Virginia Department of Commerce and executive director of the West Virginia Development Office.

Burdette began his career in public service in the West Virginia House of Delegates, where he served two terms. In 1982, he was elected to the West Virginia State Senate. In 1989, Burdette was elected the 42nd president of the State Senate at the age of 34, the youngest Senate president in the state's history.

Upon leaving the legislature in 1994, Burdette formed a government relations and consulting business.

Three days after the 2000 West Virginia gubernatorial election, Governor-Elect Bob Wise asked him to join the new administration, where Burdette served for three years as director of policy and legislative relations. After leaving the administration in 2003, he formed the Burdette Group consulting firm.

In November 2004, the Area Roundtable hired Burdette to manage and operate the Area Roundtable and the Wood County Development Authority. He served as president of the Area Roundtable, which is the umbrella organization for all development activities in Wood County, including the work of the Wood County Development Authority and the Parkersburg-Wood County Development Corporation.

Unless you have been out of the state for the past year, you know that West Virginia's Eastern Panhandle is home to one of the most exciting economic development projects in our state's history. In February 2015, Procter & Gamble Co. announced plans to build a state-of-the-art, million-square-foot-plus manufacturing facility with an anticipated workforce of at least 700 workers.

The scale and magnitude of this project are astounding, but our excitement about adding P&G to West Virginia's list of corporate citizens is immeasurable. P&G is a company whose products reach every corner of the earth. They have operations in 70 countries and generate \$83 billion in annual sales. Of the world's seven billion inhabitants, five billion use a P&G product.

I understand that most people don't have an appreciation for the time and effort necessary to attract new business to our state, but suffice it to say, new companies don't typically just appear on our doorstep. The process of identifying an opportunity, matching it to an appropriate site, recruiting the corporate leadership and closing the deal is complicated and time-consuming, requiring a high level of professionalism, teamwork and perseverance.

In P&G's case, attracting them to West Virginia took almost two years and a lot of hard work from a team led by Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin, professionals in the West Virginia Development Office and the Berkeley County Development Authority. It required the leadership of the Berkeley County Council, the West Virginia Development Authority and many others to bring an array of complicated pieces together. Under the code name "Project Independence," Gov. Tomblin's team and Berkeley County

officials began laying the groundwork with P&G executives in 2013. As you can imagine, it was a highly competitive process for a highly coveted project.

Though they are large, P&G is uncharacteristically disciplined about expansion. The Eastern Panhandle plant is only the second facility they've built in the United States since 1971. So, when they began redesigning their supply chain to distribute their products more efficiently, they were very cautious and selective. The location had to be perfect.

What the company found in Berkeley County's Tabler Station was an expanse of 600 acres situated near Interstate 81 and Interstate 71 with access to CSX and Norfolk Southern rail lines. According to P&G Global Product Supply Officer Yannis Skoufalos, the company's presence in the Eastern Panhandle will enable it to serve retail customers and consumers throughout the eastern half of the United States, reaching 80 percent within one day of transit.

Company officials have said again and again that having access to top state officials, including the governor, was an important factor in choosing to locate here. Having access to decision makers throughout state government who could assist them in overcoming obstacles that naturally occur, both during construction and operation, was important.

Sometimes, small can be better. Although our competing states were much larger, we were nimble enough to be responsive when it counted. P&G evaluated roughly 70 sites across the nation; but, when they looked at costs and incentives over the expected lifetime of the plant, they found West Virginia to be a great value.

They found a welcoming environment. A responsive government. A capable workforce. A competitive business climate. A perfect location.

During the groundbreaking ceremony, a P&G executive remarked that they created careers, not jobs. The men and women who join the Procter & Gamble family in Martinsburg can expect competitive salaries and benefits, and they will be working for a world-class company that has made a huge long-term commitment to West Virginia. These jobs will provide for families for generations to come and bring further stability to one of the brightest spots in our state's economy.

In economics there are vicious cycles and virtuous cycles. The Eastern Panhandle is in a virtuous cycle and gaining momentum. The fruits of that success are sure to have an impact across the entire state. Many of the fundamentals fueling the region's boon are already in place to help the rest of the state achieve the same success: a low cost of doing business; competitive incentives; a strategic location; a dedicated, loyal and flexible workforce; and concierge business services from the West Virginia Development Office and their partners who provide personal attention.

Over the past two decades, our state has worked fervently to increase and expand the diversity of our economic sectors. In the past 10 years, internationally renowned businesses like Amazon, Toyota, Gestamp, Hino and Macy's have come to call West Virginia home and play a prominent role in our state's economy. Now, with P&G, the Eastern Panhandle is leading the way to a new future for West Virginia, and I am convinced that future is going to be bright and prosperous. W



State and local officials announced their success in recruiting Procter & Gamble to Berkeley County, West Virginia, in February 2015. Pictured, left to right, are Kris Hopkins, Director of Business Industrial Development, WV Development Office; Keith Burdette, Cabinet Secretary, Department of Commerce; Steve Christian, former Executive Director, Berkeley County Development Authority; Governor Earl Ray Tomblin; Tony Zelenka, President, Berkeley County Development Authority; Doug Copenhaver, President, Berkeley County Council; and Todd Hooker, Senior Manager of Financial Programs and National Accounts, WV Development Office • photo credit: Office of the Governor



In September 2015, Governor Earl Ray Tomblin joined executives from P&G for the company's groundbreaking of the new \$500 million facility located in the Eastern Panhandle, bringing 1,000 construction jobs and 700 full-time positions to West Virginia • photo credit: Office of the Governor