



## HIGHER EDUCATION

*by Former WVU President James P. Clements, Ph.D., Established Leader*

In West Virginia, children and youth make up approximately 20 percent of our population, and they are our future.

To assure prosperity and progress in West Virginia, the answer is simple: invest in education.

Research has consistently shown that education at all levels generates strong returns on that commitment. In fact, many people would argue that education is the best investment you can make. Even during tough economic times, we need to invest in education, which ultimately an investment in the future.

Throughout America's history, higher education has educated the next generation of scientists and leaders, and it has sparked innovation that produced society's greatest advances, including computing and networking technology, the fundamentals of the GPS, laser technology, microbiology, nanotechnology, and most breakthroughs in modern medicine.

Higher education can help to position West Virginia as a leader in energy research – not just energy production. For many years, West Virginia has been a leading producer of coal. We are now also a leader in shale gas production. With advances in energy technologies, it is impossible to predict what our energy sources will be a century from today. There is no doubt, however, the nation and the world will continue to need rigorous, high-quality research on all energy sources, management, and policy. For much of our history, West Virginia has been essential in providing the raw materials for energy. We can build on that by continuing to provide research and analysis that help to inform energy decisions at all levels, from individual consumers to national and global policymaking.

In higher education, all of our institutions play different roles, and that mission differentiation is part of the great strength of the American higher education system. Some institutions focus on specialized training, others emphasize education and technical assistance, and land-grant universities such as WVU bring together teaching, research, and service. Together, so much can be accomplished to help our nation meet the challenges of today, and prepare the next generation to address the yet unknown challenges of tomorrow.

Higher education has more potential than ever before to spark innovation and the jobs it produces, as well as prepare our children to take on the opportunities and challenges the future will hold. Working together, we can invest in West Virginia by investing in our future – and I believe that education is the key to a prosperous future.



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