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Leaders hope strong regional economy could boost rest of Mountain State

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By Alex Wiederspiel in News | October 16, 2018 at 6:01AM

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MORGANTOWN, W.Va. — An uneven economic recovery in West Virginia has disproportionately served some industries and some geographic regions ahead of others — at least so far.

But Eldon Callen, VP for Intergovernmental Affairs with the Morgantown Area Chamber of Commerce, is hoping a regional economic boom — powered by the Morgantown area — can also power a boom in the state.

“I see a community connected with Preston County to Marion County to Wetzel County,” he said. “We’ve got to open up that I-68 corridor to Ohio.”

Creating a strong regional economy, Callen hopes, will lead to a geographic impact further and further away — a ripple effect of sorts throughout West Virginia’s economically lagging regions. Just two years ago, at least six of West Virginia’s 55 counties were considered to be in an economic depression.

Yet even during the economic downturn, Monongalia County has stayed reasonably prosperous.

“Here locally, we tend to have more of a diverse mix of industries,” said Brian Lego, a WVU Research Assistant Professor with the Bureau of Business & Economic Research. “When one’s down, others can kind of pick up the slack.”

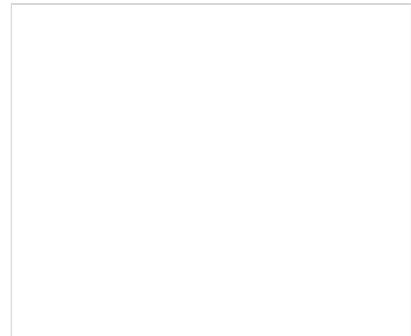
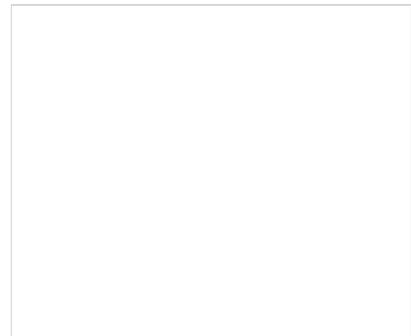
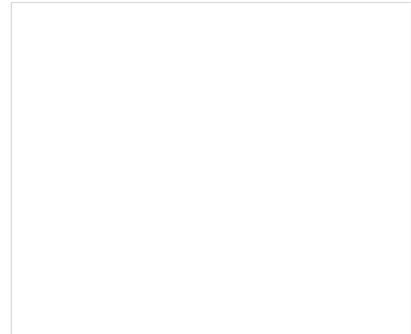
Callen sees that diversity in the North Central West Virginia region as an advantage that maybe no other part of the state can claim. Because of that, he fears many other parts of the state do not have the same rosy outlook on the state’s long-term economic outlook — and future confidence is an important part of economic health.

“There has almost been an acceptance — and I’ve seen it back into the 1950’s — that West Virginia is going to shrink, people are going to leave,” Callen said. “I’ve seen this all my life.”

Dr. Lego said that is true in much of the state’s Southern Coalfields, Metro Valley, and New River Gorge region — though less true in the Eastern Panhandle and to an extent in the Northern Panhandle.

“It would be ideal, of course, to have growth everywhere,” Lego said. “But it is not typically the case in most parts of the world.”

Meaning growth needs to have an epicenter — a place of inception. And what better place as the epicenter than Monongalia County, Callen mused.



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“I predict that we should have one or two more interchanges along I-79,” he said. “I see greater improvement and opening up of infrastructure into (Rt.) 50. We need to open up our market down into Tucker County, down into Pendleton County, and connect into Corridor H.”

Both men agreed that means infrastructure developments. For Callen, that means expansion of I-68 and greater development along the I-79 corridor.

“Two additional interchanges will change the entire complexion of our region here,” Callen said.

You can read more on the state’s economic outlook [here](#).



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Alex Wiederspiel is the News Director and afternoon anchor of WAJR-AM in Morgantown.

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Gary R Keiffer

Finish Route 35 for more economic development.

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Aaron Staats

I've lived in Morgantown going on 5 years now and in my estimation, there are two industries in this region. The first is the extraction of natural gas and all the services that support removing that product from the ground. The second is the processing of state and federal tax dollars that are funneled through West Virginia University, Fairmont State University, Pierpont University and the federal FBI complex in Clarksburg. Other than those two industries, I'm not sure there is a diversity of industry in this region. Perhaps Mr. Wiederspiel can query either Mr. Callen or Mr Lego and let us know what the additional industries that power this region are.

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Jeff Fairley

Your estimation is off. The majority of funding of the FBI center is user fee funds.

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Aaron Staats

Jeff Fairley First, regardless of what you call a tax, a rose by any other name is still a rose.

Also, I'm not sure where you get your information. The 2017 FBI Budget Request includes the following statements.

Under FBI Organizaton, "Additionally, there are several specialized facilities and analytical centers within the FBI that are located across the country, such as the Criminal Justice Information Services Division in Clarksburg, WV;

Under FY 2017 strategy, "The request also includes funding for operations and maintenance (O&M) of the Biometrics Technology Center in Clarksburg, WV."

Not sure where you're getting your information but it's wrong. ... [See More](#)

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Jeff Fairley

Aaron Staats You're wrong. A user fee is not a tax. Your internet bill is a user fee. Your cable bill is a user fee. If you don't want to pay, you don't use it. Millions of people every year have their fingerprints submitted for civilian background checks. CJIS collects those fees and gets to use them to operate the facility. That is where the majority of their funds come from so don't try and claim it is on the backs of the taxpayers because that is a lie.

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Harvey Peyton

Build the two interchanges. Roads and access are proven economic drivers. Do it ASAP

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