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## **W.Va. Chamber Board Endorses 2015 Legislative Initiatives and Meets with New Legislative Leadership**

**Charleston, W.Va.** – At its annual retreat last Friday, the W.Va. Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors endorsed the organization’s “bold” policy positions for the 2015 legislative session. The Board represents a cross-section of large and small businesses throughout the Mountain State. The Chamber is the largest business-advocacy organization in W.Va., and its members employ more than half of the state’s workforce.

The Board also had the opportunity to hear from three new legislative leaders, Senate President-Elect Bill Cole (R-Mercer), House Speaker-Elect Tim Armstead (R-Kanawha) and newly appointed Senate Majority Leader Mitch Carmichael (R-Jackson).

The 2015 legislative policy positions are centered on seven issues critical to the future of West Virginia: Education, Legal Reform, Energy, Fiscal Stability, Economic Development, Health, & Human Resources ([www.wvchamber.com](http://www.wvchamber.com)).

“The Board strongly embraced our 2015 legislative program and is looking forward to working with the new legislative leadership to enact a number of reforms we believe can make a real difference in West Virginia’s future. The heart of our 2015 initiatives involve changes to the state’s out-of-date education system and significant reforms to the state’s obsolete judicial structure,” said Chamber President Steve Roberts.

Roberts continued, “If we don’t start immediately bringing our school system into the mainstream of America, our children in elementary school today will not have the qualifications for the jobs of the future. And, if we don’t bring our justice system in line with the rest of the country, we won’t have the jobs necessary to move West Virginia’s economy forward. Changes to both education and the justice system are way overdue and must be acted upon now.”

Chief among the Chamber’s sought after improvements to the state’s education system are easy-to-understand designations of academic growth in each of the state’s 650 schools, more rigorous admissions criteria for teachers and principals, adoption of alternative certification programs

such as Teach for America to fill vacant teaching positions in hard-to-fill districts, and approval of Charter School legislation.

In regard to legal reform, the Chamber has long been an advocate of critical changes to the state's judicial system that would ensure legal fairness such as awarding of punitive damages, a fair mediation system, non-partisan election or merit selection of judges, a uniform arbitration act and a host of other comprehensive civil justice reforms.

In response to questions from board members, the three new legislative leaders agreed that education, legal reform, review of the state's tax structure and assessment of the state's regulatory climate are some of the state's most pressing needs. In summary, Senate President-Elect Bill Cole commented, "If we don't fix education, everything else is for naught."

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