

## **West Virginians for Manufacturing Jobs 2020 General Election Survey**

### **\*1. Describe your overall philosophy toward the role of state government as it relates to business and industry.**

When I ran four years ago, it was due to my deep concern about the direction of our state. I am still deeply concerned. Just as they have in states throughout this country and in Washington DC, special interests have come to rule our State Capitol. Compromise has become a deeply neglected skill. One need only look to the divisiveness of the legislative sessions of the recent past to understand that things are not going well in West Virginia. When elected officials refuse to listen or compromise, no good can possibly come. Since elected, I have been willing to work with everyone, listen respectfully and make the difficult decisions to shape a better future for West Virginia that lifts everyone.

### **2. What do you bring to the office you seek? Specifically, what have you built, improved, or changed for the benefit of your community or business?**

I am a business owner, employer, and community volunteer.

My wife Sherry and I started our business, Cornerstone Interiors, twenty-four years ago with \$6,000, a dream and hard work. We specialize in commercial interior finishing and have worked on many projects throughout the Kanawha Valley, West Virginia, and surrounding states. We have 155 employees and a \$22 million annual budget.

With my four partners, we purchased the former Charleston House Hotel and made a \$24 million investment to upgrade the property into a multi-use residential and commercial facility, anchoring the city riverfront. I also am an investor and franchise owner of several Pies and Pints restaurants.

### **3. Please list any groups, associations, or non-profits in which you are an active member or volunteer such as civic groups, labor organizations, advocacy groups.**

Sherry and I have been married for thirty-five years. We have two grown children, Ashley, and Austin, and three grandchildren Eli, Emma, and Jaxon. We are members of Cross Lanes Baptist Church. We do a variety of community service projects through our church. We enjoy outdoor activities, fishing, hunting, hiking with our family.

I am involved in volunteer organizations in both Kanawha and Putnam counties, including West Virginia Kids Cancer Crusaders, West Invest, Hope For Appalachia, founder of Mountain Mission Project HOPE for flood recovery, Ridges to Trails Committee, Backpack Buddies, Dunbar Critter Dinner, Down Syndrome Awareness Day, WV Health Right, Get A Life Program with the WV Treasurer's Office.

I am a member of the Putnam County Economic Development Authority, PROTEC, the Contractors Association of West Virginia, trustee on both the WV Carpenters and WV Painters Health Funds, trustee on the WV Carpenters Pension Fund, trustee on WV Carpenters Apprentice Organization, and Past President and member of the Kanawha Valley Builders Association. I have been a member of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America for more than 30 years.

### **4. West Virginia is facing many challenges. What do you consider to be the most important and critical challenge that threatens our state and what is your plan to alleviate this threat?**

Seven months ago, my answer would have been different. Now, recovering from the economic retraction from the pandemic is the most pressing issue we face, for businesses, employees, families, and our state government.

I have been working closely with individuals and businesses to connect them to assistance. I am keeping in close contact with my legislative colleagues and the Governor's office regarding relief efforts. I sit on the advisory committee formed by the Governor on behalf of the Senate.

I have been a strong advocate for our smallest businesses and have appreciated the Governor's willingness to address my concerns. We still have a significant challenge to best help our self-employed and solo entrepreneurs, but I believe we work it out. It will be our focus as a government for several years to help our state and nation to rebuild.

**5. During the 2020 Legislative Session, SJR 9 and SB 837 moved in the West Virginia Senate, but fell short of the votes needed to move to the House of Delegates. The intent of the effort was to allow West Virginians to vote on a constitutional amendment to phase-out/repeal of manufacturing inventory, machinery, and equipment tax, business inventory, and tax on passenger vehicles while making local governments and schools whole. Please describe your ideas for addressing this issue which requires a change to the West Virginia Constitution.**

The legislation faced bipartisan opposition in both bodies of the legislature because it did not make counties whole.

It took taxing authority away from the people and placed it with the legislature.

As a person who pays significant inventory tax, I agree that it is regressive, but pushing it over to citizens, not having a complete plan to replace it, and depending on "growth" was irresponsible.

If we would have made \$320 million in tax cuts for businesses and individuals, with the car tax representing \$150 million of that, then we had \$207 million in tax increases on sales and tobacco, that still left a \$113 million hole in the budgets of counties. Additionally, if a citizen did not own a vehicle, then they would potentially have only received tax increases. The bad math was simple for folks to understand.

I suggested that we make up the difference with Rainy Day funds. We would know quickly if it is indeed the manufacturing tax holding back the state.

**6. What ideas do you have to help build our state's economy and improve West Virginia's position in competing for investment and job growth?**

Serving on the Putnam County Economic Development Authority for many years, we have found that one of the most significant problems for economic development is infrastructure that is inadequate or in disrepair.

I represent the State Senate on the WV Infrastructure and Jobs Development Council. After a couple of meetings, it became apparent that we needed to restructure the way we distribute funding. Many counties found it impossible to come up with the match required to receive state and federal funding to improve water and wastewater systems. With the passage of my legislation, SB 153 in 2019, the Water Development Authority can now use monies in the Infrastructure Fund to provide additional grants, rather than loans. If on January 1, the amount available for grants in a congressional district is below \$150,000, the council may convert up to 30% of the funds available for loans to grants. All funding must stay within the designated congressional district.

Many of our water and wastewater systems in communities around West Virginia are very old and in disrepair. Also, many smaller or rural communities do not have access to clean drinking water and sanitary wastewater systems. This year, we passed SB 589, which allows the West Virginia Infrastructure and Jobs Development Council to direct the Water Development Authority to make loans or grants to address critical needs in water and sewer systems around the state from moneys allocated from the excess lottery funds. It also allows extension of a water or sewer system to add customers with a total project cost of less than \$1,000,000.

My legislation, SB 76, passed in 2017, created the Second Chance for Employment Act which allows non-violent offenders who have paid their debt to society to apply for expungement of their record. This legislation still needs work,

but it is starting to make a real difference for individuals. I strongly believe that a productive citizen who can make an honest living and take care of their family is important to stability in our communities.

HB 203, which passed during the Second Special Session of 2017, was substantially like SB 323, which I submitted during the 2017 regular session to provide tax credits for those who rehabilitate historical buildings in our cities and towns. When Bridge Valley moves to the Stone & Thomas Building in downtown Charleston, we believe that these tax credits can be used.

There is no one magic bullet fix for our state. Our economy continues to struggle during the pandemic. We must focus our energies and resources on what stimulates the economy. Investment in infrastructure, structural and digital, is imperative. We cannot diversify our economy without it.

We must get a handle on our drug crisis. Where there are jobs available, employers often have a difficult time finding reliable employees who can consistently pass drug screening. More private sector treatment centers and drug court programs will help.

Our biggest potential for growth in the Kanawha Valley is to fully realize the economic engines of our higher education organizations, WV State University, Marshall Universities and BridgeValley Community and Technical College. Let's put them to work leading the effort diversify our southern WV economy.

Providing affordable access to higher education and useful technical training will help create and fill the jobs of the future. Proud to have supported SB 1, passed in 2019, to provide tuition for students attending our higher education institutions while pursuing an in-demand technical field. Also, I have offered legislation in the past to expand technical education into our middle schools. HB 4790 which just passed in the 2020 session will help pave the way.

**7. Use of and addiction to opioids in West Virginia and our region have reached crisis levels. This is a problem being recognized not only at the state level, but at the federal level. What ideas do you have to help stop this devastating trend in our state?**

One of the first pieces of legislation I supported after my election was House Bill 2620, which created the Office of Drug Control Policy within the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources. The purpose of the office is to coordinate and improve drug overdose surveillance and help strengthen our response. It created a central repository for drug overdose information, made drug overdoses a notifiable condition and placed limits on opioid prescribing.

Substance abuse is a profoundly complex mental and physical health problem. The Office of Drug Control Policy oversees several programs aimed at helping individuals recover with the help of their families and communities. Programs include, Jobs & Hope West Virginia, ATLAS/Shatterproof, Pilot Programs with our university communities, Collegiate Recovery Programs, Quick Response Teams, Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD), Recovery Residences, Long-Acting Reversible Contraceptives, Children's Mobile Crisis Response and Stabilization, Family Planning Services at Harm Reduction Sites.

One of the first pieces of legislation I introduced was the Second Chance for Employment Act. It gives those who have paid their debt to society a chance to expunge their record. It is not an easy process. The individual who is successful has earned that chance to rebuild their life and help stabilize their family and community.

**8. Racial justice and equity, LGBTQ rights and gender equity are important factors for many current West Virginia employers, companies that consider moving to our State, and employees who may consider relocating to West Virginia. How would you address these issues to recruit and retain companies and employees for whom this is a priority?**

Each person deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. I will support legislation which strives to make our state and union a more perfect one, with equality for all. My district is unique in that it includes some the most urban and most rural parts of our state. The issue of equality is one I often address.

As mentioned earlier, I was the lead sponsor on the Second Chance for Employment legislation. I have been very involved in criminal justice reform with area leaders and pastors in the African American community. As an employer, we have worked directly in prisons to help prepare inmates with life skills and job training.

**9. What are your specific ideas related to developing a diverse and skilled workforce in West Virginia?**

I have touched on ways I work on these goals in previous questions. As an employer who hires skilled union employees, we have learned it is imperative we invest. Through our union partnerships, we do our own training, pay a living wage, provide health care and retirement to keep skilled, safe, and loyal employees. If employers keep looking for a temporary employee who will work for the lowest dollar, how does that build a stable workforce? Stable employees lead to stable communities.

**10. The West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection proposed a rule for the 2021 Legislative Session to adopt a portion of US EPA recommended human health criteria which established limits for certain environmental permits. The WVMA is actively involved in ongoing discussions related to these criteria and supports the WV DEPs approach to establish an active work group to further evaluate these important measures. Please describe your position on the proposed rule.**

As you are aware, I was very involved with trying to come to an agreement with everyone involved. I am willing to keep working for an equitable solution to protect our water and jobs.

**11. Please describe policies that you believe may be helpful in balancing state regulations and environmental rules while maintaining a competitive atmosphere for industrial job growth and investment?**

One possible policy would be to develop air quality regulations that are equivalent and no more stringent than federal regulations to keep our companies competitive with surrounding states.

**12. What would you like to share with our members that we have not asked?**

When this crisis passes, we will need to work together to stabilize our economy and repair our businesses. The WV Small Business Development Center will play a key role. The Legislature likely will need to look at how functions can be enhanced to help. Connecting businesses to resources such as WV Forward, TechConnectWV and other groups and institutions will be vital.

WV must partner with the state and federal agencies to help expand broadband. We are trying to expand broadband access via cellular, satellite and fiber, plus utilize competition through regulations and funding. We need public, private partnerships. The Broadband Enhancement Council has found that every area of WV is underserved. But the Pew Charitable Trust looks at WV as one of 9 states that is pushing the envelope on legislation to improve service. HB 4015 passed in the 2020 session aims to help streamline regulations that are slowing down development.

**13. Would you be available for an interview remotely or in person? Remotely.**

**14. Where may the WVMA follow you on Social Media? Please list social media handles including Facebook, Twitter, and others.**

<https://www.glennjeffries.com/> Facebook, Twitter, Instagram: @GlennJeffrieswv

**15. Senator Glenn Jeffries**

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