

Kolenich for WV Policy Proposals

- I. Education
 - A. Empowering Mountaineer Education
 - B. Empowering Mountaineer Families: The Vision for Universal School Choice
 - C. Strengthening Vocational Education in West Virginia
- II. Economy
 - A. Liberating Mountaineer Careers: Reforming Professional Licensing in West Virginia
 - B. Broadband in WV - Why the “Morrissey Plan” is Another Failed Public Works Project
 - C. Food – Lower Input Costs for Farmers
 - D. Worker Co-Ops That Work
 - E. Saving Main Street
 - F. Tax Reform: Unfunded Federal Mandates
 - 1. Overspending for State Overreach
 - 2. Reforming and Reducing Residential and Agricultural Property Taxes
 - 3. Abolishing the State Personal Income Tax
 - 4. Stopping Legalized Robbery - The Taxpayer Protection Pledge
 - G. Reducing State Agency Spending by 10% Annually
 - H. Safeguarding Property Rights and Reforming West Virginia’s System
- III. Your Rights
 - A. You Do You
 - B. LGBTQ+ Issues
 - C. Second Amendment
 - 1. Reformed Carry Laws
 - 2. Reduced Permit Hassles
- IV. Family Issues
 - A. Childcare Concerns
 - B. Women’s Bodily Autonomy
 - C. Child Care Tax Credit
- V. Healthcare and Medical Freedom
 - A. Consumer and Healthcare-Driven Reform
 - B. Medicare and State-Funded Health Plans
 - C. Licensure
 - D. Telemedicine
- VI. Criminal Justice Reform
 - A. Bail Reform
 - B. Prison Reform
 - C. Drugs, Cannabis, and Hemp
- VII. CPS and Foster Care Reform

I. EDUCATION

EMPOWERING MOUNTAINEER EDUCATION

As we step into 2024, I remain steadfast in my belief that our Mountaineer children are our most precious natural resource. Unencumbered by ties to corporations, unions, or government agencies, I am committed to shaping policies that empower parents to make informed decisions about their children's education. While I am not "anti-public education," I advocate for transformative changes. Our current policies, I believe, lean too heavily toward government control and lack the family-centric approach we need. It's time to Give Education Back To The Parents.

Allow me to share my convictions regarding West Virginia education:

1. **Local Control:** Education should be locally driven. The State Department of Education must relinquish decision-making power to our local School Boards and School District Administrators. Who better understands the unique needs of our communities than those directly involved?
2. **Parental Autonomy:** Parents deserve the ultimate say in their children's education. Whether it's choosing a traditional public school, a private institution, a charter school, or homeschooling, parents should have the freedom to decide what best suits their child's learning journey.
3. **Funding Priorities:** A significant portion of our state budget—42%—is allocated to education. Let's ensure that the majority of these funds flow directly into our classrooms, benefiting our students and teachers alike.
4. **Audit the State Board of Education:** As noted above, a significant amount of money flows into the state board of education, but yet results are poor at the best of times. We will audit the public education system to determine where overspending is occurring and where there may be need for further investment based on real data points, not just the feelings of lobbyists and politicians in Charleston.
5. **Student-Centric Approach:** Dollars should follow the student, unencumbered by restrictions or strings. Whether a child learns in a public school, a private academy, or the comfort of their home, the government should not dictate their educational path. If an alternative educational entity chooses not to accept state funding, that choice should be respected.
6. **Against Common Core:** I stand firmly against the common core curriculum. Every child is unique, and a one-size-fits-all system cannot adequately serve their diverse needs.
7. **Teacher Evaluation:** Our teachers' performance should not hinge solely on standardized test scores. Let's free them from this burden, allowing them to focus on fostering a love for learning.
8. **Abolishing Statewide Standardized Testing:** I would work with the Legislature to abolish all statewide standardized testing. No longer will teachers be bound by teaching to the tests; instead, they can make learning fun and interesting again.
9. **Universal School Choice:** I wholeheartedly support Universal School Choice. The dollars should follow the student, regardless of where parents choose to educate their children—public, private, charter, or homeschool. No restrictions, no strings attached.

Together, let's champion an educational landscape that honors parental choice, values teacher expertise, and celebrates the individuality of each child. As we embark on this journey, I invite you to join me in shaping a brighter future for Mountaineer education.

EMPOWERING MOUNTAINEER FAMILIES: THE VISION FOR UNIVERSAL SCHOOL CHOICE

I am committed to expanding educational opportunities and empowering parents to make the best choices for their children. Let's delve into the my perspective on universal school choice:

1. Parental Autonomy and Real Options:

- **Libertarian Principle:** I believe that parents, not bureaucrats, know what's best for their children. By maximizing school choice, we honor parental autonomy.
- **Diverse Options:** Mountaineer parents should have a rich array of choices:
 - **Public Schools:** Traditional public schools remain an option.
 - **Private Schools:** Parents can choose private schools that align with their values and educational philosophies.
 - **Online Schools:** Technology allows for flexible, personalized learning.
 - **Charter Schools:** These innovative institutions provide alternatives within the public system.
 - **Homeschooling:** Families who prefer home-based education should have full support.

2. Including Non-Accredited Institutions:

- **Inclusive Approach:** Our vision extends beyond accredited schools. We advocate for legislation that includes non-accredited educational institutions.
- **Empowering Parents:** If a non-accredited school meets a family's needs, it should be a valid choice. Parents are the best judges of quality.

3. Funding Equality and Transparency:

- **Equal Funding:** Education funding should follow the child, not the institution. Regardless of school choice, every child deserves the same funding.
- **No Strings Attached:** I reject conditional funding. Parents should receive education dollars without mandates or ideological strings.
- **Transparency:** Clear accounting ensures that taxpayer funds are used effectively.

4. Opting Out of Funding:

- **Voluntary Participation:** Parents who wish to opt out of public funding should have that right.
- **Personal Responsibility:** Opting out means taking full responsibility for educational costs. It's a choice, not a punishment.

5. West Virginia as a Pioneer in Educational Freedom:

- **Lead by Example:** By championing universal school choice, West Virginia becomes a beacon of educational freedom. Other states can learn from our model.
- **Thriving Students:** When parents have real options, students thrive. Competition drives excellence.

Let's break down barriers, empower parents, and create a vibrant educational landscape. By trusting families and respecting their choices, we build a stronger West Virginia—one where every child's potential is unlocked.

STRENGTHENING VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN WEST VIRGINIA

As your next Governor, I will be dedicated to fostering an educational environment that equips our young people with practical skills and prepares them for successful futures. I want to address a critical aspect of our educational system: vocational education.

The Challenge: A Gap in Exposure

Too often, our Mountaineer youth graduate from high school without ever exploring the wealth of career-oriented vocational opportunities available to them. These pathways—ranging from skilled trades to technical fields—are not only desirable but also essential for our state’s growth and prosperity.

The Solution: Reestablishing Vocational Education in K-12 Schools

Rather than focusing solely on post-secondary vocational programs, we must shift our attention to our K-12 public schools. Here’s how we can make a difference:

1. **Early Exposure:** Let’s provide vocational and technical educational opportunities to our young people while they are still in middle school. Early exposure allows them to discover their passions, develop practical skills, and make informed career choices.
2. **Empowering Choices:** Vocational education isn’t an alternative—it’s an empowering choice. Whether a student aspires to be an electrician, a healthcare technician, or an automotive mechanic, we must ensure that these pathways are accessible and celebrated.
3. **Preventing Despair:** By offering vocational education exposure during middle school and education during high school, we address a critical juncture. Let’s intervene BEFORE our youth lose hope or turn to criminal activities. Education becomes a beacon of opportunity, not a missed chance.

Together, we can reinvigorate vocational education in West Virginia’s K-12 schools. Our children deserve pathways that ignite their potential, empower their dreams, and build a stronger Mountaineer workforce.

II. ECONOMY

LIBERATING MOUNTAINEER CAREERS: REFORMING PROFESSIONAL LICENSING IN WEST VIRGINIA

I am committed to fostering economic freedom and removing unnecessary barriers that hinder Mountaineers' pursuit of occupational happiness. Here's how I would achieve professional licensing reform:

1. The Problem with Overregulation:
 - **Libertarian Principle:** We believe that individuals should have the right to freely engage in voluntary transactions, including choosing their careers. Excessive occupational licensing stifles this freedom.
 - **Artificial Barriers:** Current regulations impose burdensome educational requirements and licensing fees. These barriers disproportionately affect aspiring professionals, hindering their entry into various fields.
2. Differentiating Stringency:
 - **Doctors and Lawyers:** Certain occupations, such as doctors and lawyers, require rigorous training due to the potential impact on public health and safety. Stringent licensing is justifiable here.
 - **Common-Sense Approach:** However, professions like hairdressers, plumbers, auctioneers, and real estate agents do not necessarily warrant the same level of regulation. We can adopt a more common-sense approach.
3. Professional Associations and Certification:
 - **Voluntary Certification:** Rather than government-imposed licenses, let's encourage voluntary certification by professional associations. These associations can set standards and provide credentials.
 - **Market-Driven Trust:** Consumers can choose professionals based on their certifications. Trust emerges from market reputation, not bureaucratic mandates.
4. On-the-Job Training and High School Programs:
 - **Practical Experience:** Many occupations thrive on hands-on skills. On-the-job training programs allow aspiring professionals to learn while working.
 - **High School Pathways:** Collaborate with schools to introduce vocational pathways. High school students can explore trades early, preparing them for meaningful careers.
5. Reducing Administrative Costs:
 - **Streamlined Processes:** Simplify licensing procedures. Reducing administrative overhead benefits both professionals and consumers.
 - **Affordability:** Lower licensing fees, especially for entry-level positions. This ensures that financial constraints don't deter talented individuals.
6. Parental Rights and Youth Empowerment:
 - **Encourage Exploration:** Parents and educators should guide—not dictate—the career choices of young Mountaineers. Let's empower youth to explore diverse paths.

- **Holistic Education:** High schools can offer practical courses alongside traditional academics. Carpentry, culinary arts, and other skills deserve equal respect.
7. West Virginia as a Beacon of Opportunity:
- **Lead by Example:** By reforming licensing, we signal that West Virginia values individual initiative and economic liberty.
 - **Thriving Communities:** A dynamic workforce benefits our communities. Let's create an environment where Mountaineers flourish in their chosen fields.

Conclusion: Together, we'll dismantle artificial barriers, promote choice, and unleash the potential of West Virginia's workforce. By embracing sensible licensing reforms, we pave the way for a more prosperous and empowered Mountain state.

BROADBAND IN WEST VIRGINIA - WHY THE “MORRISSEY PLAN” IS ANOTHER FAILED PUBLIC WORKS PROJECT

If one were to visit the Patrick Morrissey website you would find his plan on Broadband as follows:

“West Virginia deserves internet that doesn’t move at the speed of slow. As Attorney General, Morrissey took on companies that had bad consumer practices and has fought to get them to live up to the law and their promises. Morrissey brought in a \$160 million settlement against Frontier and aggressively promotes additional speed expansions which help West Virginia individuals and businesses. As Governor, Morrissey will prioritize broadband build outs that allow West Virginia to better attract citizens to our state. In today’s era, broadband is a central part of a state’s physical infrastructure.”

While Patrick is correct that West Virginia deserves internet that does not move at the speed of slow, the Government is not the answer to this issue. When the government gets involved in things like internet, we have a situation just like he quotes with Frontier where the government has to get involved to “protect” the citizens of West Virginia from the monopoly it has created. How is he going to provide this broadband build out? Will it be another failed public work project? The truth is that broadband access in West Virginia will come when we bring economic development. The key to improving infrastructure in West Virginia is to make sure we have entities other than just the government helping us invest in infrastructure. Creating an environment in West Virginia that has both a tax and regulatory framework which makes our state the place businesses want to locate will assist us in gaining corporate and industrial investment into the infrastructural needs of West Virginia, such as broadband, that those industries will also need to support their work force and other business needs. For example, we should be using the wealth of energy here in West Virginia to open our state to the Bitcoin and AI server community. West Virginia currently ranks 45th in regulation for entrepreneurs. I will endeavor to cut red tape by at least fifteen percent yearly and pledge never to increase unnecessary regulation in order to promote economic development into West Virginia. Further, I will work to limit the authority of the Public Service Commission which creates monopolies and price fixing and creates unaffordable utilities in all areas including internet services for West Virginians.

FOOD: LOWER INPUT COSTS FOR FARMERS

Farmers are being crushed by the heavy regulations the state and federal government have placed on food and other agricultural products. Even farmer's markets are regulated and restricted. Erika's Farmer Freedom proposal reduces input costs for West Virginia farmers by:

- Exempting farm-to-table and small businesses from nearly every federal and state agricultural food law
- Creating cheap fertilizer using waste heat from electricity production and methane digestion to synthesize Nitrogen fertilizer for crop growers
- Lowering fuel costs by lowering the overall cost of energy

By lowering input costs and obstacles for farmers and producers, producing clean and cheap energy, and protecting and sustaining our water resources, we can improve our environment, our economy, and our quality of life.

A healthy environment means healthy West Virginiaers. We can protect our environment by:

- Demanding corporations are held accountable for environmental crimes
- Prohibiting any liability caps for individuals and corporations proven responsible for environmental disasters
- Requiring penalty payments allocated to victims directly impacted by pollution, environmental degradation, and cleanup

We can improve our environment and our economy by:

- Adopting modern solutions to disaster cleanups, including bio-remediation and a reduction in our dependence on lengthy and antiquated federal "Superfund" hearings
- Making it easier to deploy and use renewable energy, including innovative technologies available for renewable resource use
- Removing restrictions on the hemp industry and encouraging the production of hemp-based bioplastics -helping to fill a long-term environmental and economic need

WORKER CO-OPS THAT WORK

Erika believes in supporting both the worker and the community. Worker Co-Ops provide an avenue for workers to reclaim their dignity, nurture their entrepreneurial spirit, and build stronger communities.

Using existing resources and targeted budgeted allocation, we can provide funding options for qualified new Worker Co-Ops that allow workers to pool seed money together with 5 or more individuals. These funding options would be offered by streamlining payments to individuals like unemployment claims or other approved claims of state payments by making an upfront payment an option rather than the traditional payments over time. By agreeing to use any money the state owes you to fund a new Co-Op, this one-time payment would be treated as a non-taxable grant.

How would this work? If someone loses a job due to a business closure and is eligible for unemployment benefits, once a qualified business plan is provided, West Virginia will make an upfront payment of the entire 26-week eligibility claim -for the purpose of providing start-up money for a worker Co-Op with at least 4 other individuals. Any payments received by the worker for their claim, prior to engaging in this program would be deducted from the eligible upfront payment.

Worker Co-Ops can be established in any sector, including, but not limited to:

- Services- house cleaning, day labor, restaurants, taxis, childcare
- Retail – grocery stores, bakeries, bookstores, bike shops
- Health Care – nursing, home health care, clinics, bodywork
- Skilled Trades – printing, plumbing, woodworking, contracting
- Professional and Administrative -including business and marketing services of all kinds
- Manufacturing and engineering – machine parts, fabricating
- Technology – web hosting, networking, voice and data systems
- Education – charter schools, teacher/student/parent-run schools
- Media and the Arts – artisans, galleries, performers, publishers

A Worker Co-Op presenting a qualified business plan can apply and receive a state of West Virginia-backed loan, issued by a community bank or credit union, for any amount up to the total advanced payments the collective group would be receiving from their state claim. The loan program can only be offered through small community banks and credit unions, and must be located in the same county as the Co-Op. This is an important aspect of this program to keep local, local, and to foster community engagement.

Through this new Worker Co-Op initiative, we can build up our communities and enrich the lives of West Virginiaers -all by using the resources and state obligations that already exist.

BUSINESS MATTERS

“Government is taking the time to make it as hard as possible to have that small business.” – Erika Kolenich
“Small business regulations and taxes can be transformed into a positive influence on entrepreneurship with one word: simplification.” – Erika Kolenich

SAVING MAIN STREET

West Virginia small businesses are abused. West Virginia must take steps to be friendly to both small business and hiring.

- 1) One of our top priorities is to lower the cost of healthcare which will help keep small businesses' employment expenses down. They will be able to improve the economy through increased hiring and also have greater potential to grow and thrive alongside larger businesses and corporations.
- 2) Worker's compensation laws must be overhauled. While it is critical that these protections for workers not be diminished in any way, we are introducing a plan that integrates elements of worker's compensation programs from around the country in order to lower the costs associated with this program. We will also allow a high-deductible worker's compensation plan which allows the employer to pay out of pocket until their deductible is reached. Any business choosing this option must still provide proof of their ability to pay. We will make it impossible for an employer to neglect their accident and injury compensation responsibilities.
- 3) We must quit placing so many restrictions on new and developing industries including vape shops, hemp / marijuana businesses and cryptocurrency and instead allow them to innovate and flourish.
- 4). To encourage small businesses to help with rehabilitation of felons after they've been released from prison, employers will receive payroll tax waivers for these individuals during the first two years of their employment. The returns to taxpayers are two fold because we are encouraging economic growth for this population of individuals, as well as reducing the likelihood of them returning to prison (recidivism).
- 5) Many of the occupational licenses required by the government do very little to actually improve the quality or safety of the work being performed. Any licensing requirements for goods and services people would generally be comfortable asking someone they know to provide or perform should be repealed. This will make it easier for small businesses to hire capable people, which will in turn make it easier for these individuals to climb out of poverty without having to pay simply to feed their family.

TAX REFORM

“Before county and local governments are able to determine how their tax dollars are best spent, Charleston and D.C. have already spent them by issuing their own mandates without the necessary funding to implement them.” – Erika Kolenich

“We have massive amounts of overspending at the state level that must be cut.” – Erika Kolenich

UNFUNDED FEDERAL MANDATES

Local taxes: The basis of our increased tax burden falls on unfunded federal mandates, which are often detrimental for counties and other more local municipalities to meet with dwindling funds.

- 1) The necessary funds to meet these demands are dwindling because 1/3 is on Medicaid and the remaining number of taxpayers are dropping off as people leave West Virginia in droves. The best way for the remaining taxpayers to implement change is to vote.
- 2) Failure to remove these mandates leaves local governments with no choice but to continually raise property taxes, without the discretion of their constituents, in order to meet demands made by bureaucrats who don't even live there. Property taxes must only be raised with the permission of the voters.
- 3) Cap the amount of money permitted to go back to law enforcement from various avenues, including speeding tickets and other fines. Law enforcement should not be incentivized to punish its citizens more in the interest of raising funds. Police need to return to enforcing safety and supporting the rights of the people, and not feeling as though they are responsible for bridging the financial gaps created through unfunded mandates.

OVERSPENDING FOR STATE OVERREACH

1) We can reduce the cost of Medicaid by reducing healthcare costs and expenditures. Opioid overdoses cost West Virginia state billions of dollars. By taking the simple steps necessary to prevent opioid overdoses we would save money. In order to increase overall employment and wages, we must eliminate poverty traps and make West Virginia more friendly towards small business and hiring. Increasing these economic indicators will help alleviate some of the state's poverty troubles, enabling more people to no longer require Medicaid.

2) We will end the subsidies currently given to major corporations that move in, wreck local and small businesses and leave once their tax savings program ends. By creating an environment conducive to business, small firms and entrepreneurs will once again organically move into West Virginia and remain for the long term instead of simply responding to special favors or interests relative to the state and local government.

REFORMING AND REDUCING RESIDENTIAL AND AGRICULTURAL PROPERTY TAXES

As your next Governor, one of my top priorities will be to address property taxes in West Virginia, specifically focusing on single-family residences. While I recognize that completely abolishing property taxes may be challenging, I am committed to working collaboratively with members of the West Virginia Legislature to reform the residential property tax system for Mountaineer residences and family farms.

Here are the key steps I propose:

1. **Residential Property Tax Cap:** I will advocate for an amendment to the state's Constitution that establishes a true cap on all residential and privately-owned agricultural property taxes. Specifically, this cap would limit property taxes to 1% of the purchase price of the property or the assessed value, whichever is lower. This measure aims to provide relief to homeowners while ensuring a fair and predictable tax burden.
2. Additionally, the property tax on all residential, long-term care, and agricultural land would sunset after you paid a total of 0.5% of the purchase price or the assessed value, whichever is lower, for 7 years, allowing homeowners and family farmers stability and predictability, after which no additional property taxes would be due.
3. All residential, long-term care, and agricultural land, currently capped at 1% or 2%, would be capped at 1% of the purchase price of the property or the assessed value, whichever is lower. All other commercial property, currently capped at 3%, would be capped at 2% of the purchase price of the property or the assessed value, whichever is lower.
4. Property acquired through inheritance would not be subject to property tax. Only property acquired by a real estate sale transaction.
5. If you sell your property prior to owning the property for 7 years, you would not owe the remaining property tax on that property when it is sold. The new owners would start over with their 7 years of property taxes.

Asset Forfeiture Reform: I firmly believe that no Mountaineer should lose their home due to an inability to pay property taxes. To address this concern, I will propose an amendment to the state's Constitution that abolishes asset forfeiture related to property taxes. This ensures that homeowners are not unfairly penalized or face the risk of losing their homes if they fall behind on payment of property taxes.

By pursuing these reforms, we can create a more equitable and sustainable property tax system that benefits all Mountaineers. Let's work together to build a stronger West Virginia!

ABOLISHING THE STATE PERSONAL INCOME TAX

As your next Governor, I am committed to collaborating closely with members of the West Virginia Legislature to comprehensively examine and address the issue of personal income tax in West Virginia. My goal is to strategically evaluate the impact of such a change on our state's economy, revenue, and citizens. Currently, West Virginia imposes an income tax that ranges from 2.36% to 5.12%. However, I recognize that nine states have successfully opted not to tax personal income, and I believe West Virginia should join their ranks. These states include Alaska, Florida, Nevada, New Hampshire, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Washington, and Wyoming.

To achieve this, we will:

- Conduct a thorough analysis: We will assess the potential benefits and challenges associated with eliminating the personal income tax. This includes evaluating its impact on state revenue, economic growth, and individual households.
- Engage stakeholders: I will actively involve citizens, businesses, and experts in this critical decision-making process. Their insights will guide our approach and ensure transparency.
- Explore alternative revenue sources: While abolishing the personal income tax, we will explore other avenues to maintain essential services and infrastructure funding.
- Learn from successful models: We will study the experiences of the nine states that have already chosen this path. Their best practices and lessons learned will inform our strategy.
- Audit State Agencies: Currently, there is a 70% opening of state jobs. Others have suggested that these roles need to be filled. While it is apparent that some positions may be critical to state government function, it is also apparent that many of these positions are not essential to state operation given that these roles remain unfilled. In order to balance the budget while cutting the income tax, we will assess the necessity of these roles and determine which positions can be removed without impacting essential government operations.

By pursuing this goal, we aim to make West Virginia the tenth state to free its residents from personal income tax burdens. Let's work together to create a tax system that fosters economic prosperity and supports the well-being of all Mountaineers!

STOPPING LEGALIZED ROBBERY - THE TAXPAYER PROTECTION PLEDGE

As your next Governor, I wholeheartedly commit to opposing and vetoing any and all attempts to raise taxes in West Virginia. My unwavering stance aligns with the Americans for Tax Reform (ATR) Taxpayer Protection Pledge. This pledge, championed by ATR, calls upon candidates for both federal and state offices to publicly declare their commitment to resisting tax increases.

The ATR believes in a tax system that is simpler, flatter, more transparent, and ultimately lower than the current rates. They firmly assert that minimizing the government's power to tax is essential. As part of this commitment:

1. I will **oppose any and all efforts** aimed at increasing tax rates for individuals and businesses.
2. I will also **stand against any net reduction or elimination of deductions and credits**, unless such changes are matched dollar for dollar by further reductions in tax rates.

By adhering to this pledge, I am dedicated to ensuring that Mountaineer citizens' hard-earned money remains in their pockets. For more information about the Americans for Tax Reform, visit their website at www.atr.org. Together, we can foster responsible fiscal policies and economic prosperity for all."

Stopping the Growth of Government - Freezing the State Budget

As your next Governor of the State of West Virginia, I am committed to prudent fiscal management and ensuring the well-being of our citizens. Therefore, I propose the following measures to safeguard our state's financial stability:

1. **Budget Freeze Proposal:** I will formally request the West Virginia Legislature to enact a four-year freeze on the State budget, commencing with the budget session in January 2025. During this period, I advocate for a rigorous halt to any new spending initiatives and firmly oppose any tax increases.
2. **Justification:**
 - **Stability and Predictability:** By maintaining a stable budget framework, we provide certainty to our residents, businesses, and public institutions. Predictable financial conditions foster economic growth and attract investments.
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 - **Long-Term Vision:** Our goal is to ensure that West Virginia remains financially resilient over the next four years. By avoiding unnecessary budget expansions, we can allocate resources strategically, focusing on critical priorities such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure.
3. **Veto Authority:** I pledge to use my veto power to block any attempts to raise the state budget or introduce new taxes during this crucial period. It is essential that we maintain a balanced approach, considering both the immediate needs and the long-term sustainability of our state's finances.

In summary, let us chart a prudent course—one that balances responsible governance with the welfare of our citizens. Together, we can build a stronger, more resilient West Virginia for generations to come.

REDUCING STATE AGENCY SPENDING BY 10% ANNUALLY

As your next Governor of the State of West Virginia, I recognize the critical importance of fiscal responsibility, especially in challenging times.

Justification for Annual Executive Orders on Spending Reduction:

1. **Sustainable Finances:** By annually mandating state agencies to reduce their spending by 10%, we ensure that our financial house remains in order. This disciplined approach prevents unnecessary bloat and promotes long-term sustainability.
2. **Building Resilience:** By consistently trimming expenditures, we create a resilient financial ecosystem that can weather economic fluctuations, emergencies, and other contingencies.
3. **Efficiency and Accountability:** The Executive Orders hold each agency accountable for their spending. By basing the reduction on the previous year's actual expenditures, we encourage efficiency, innovation, and responsible resource allocation.
4. **Strategic Prioritization:** Our commitment to reducing spending does not compromise essential services. Instead, it compels us to prioritize critical areas such as education, healthcare, infrastructure, and public safety. We allocate resources where they matter most.

In summary, these annual Executive Orders reflect our commitment to prudent stewardship. We pave the way for a fiscally sound West Virginia—one that serves its citizens effectively while maintaining financial health.

Economic Development Vision Statement

As a Libertarian candidate for West Virginia Governor, my vision for economic development is rooted in the principles of freedom, individual liberty, and minimal government intervention. I believe in creating a thriving economy by reducing the tax burden, fostering a competitive educational system, and protecting property rights.

Employment and Wages: I envision a job market driven by small businesses and entrepreneurs who are unencumbered by excessive taxes and regulations. By eliminating state income tax and reducing other taxes, we can increase the take-home pay of Mountaineers, allowing them to invest more in their families and communities.

Population and Talent Attraction/Retention: West Virginia must become a beacon of opportunity. By advocating for universal school choice, we encourage educational excellence and innovation, making our state attractive to families and top talent. A tax-friendly environment will also retain our homegrown talent and attract new residents seeking economic freedom.

Land Use for Employment and Housing Growth: I oppose the use of eminent domain for private gain and believe in the sanctity of property rights. Land use should be determined by the market, not government

planners. This approach will naturally lead to a balance of employment opportunities and housing growth that reflects the needs and desires of the community.

Infrastructure & Utilities: I support infrastructure projects that respect property rights and are truly necessary for the public good. Investments in roads, broadband, and utilities should be made with a focus on efficiency and cost-effectiveness, avoiding unnecessary debt and taxation.

Quality of Place and Quality of Life: The best way to enhance the quality of place and life is to empower individuals to make choices for themselves. A government that stays out of the way allows communities to flourish organically, reflecting the unique values and needs of its residents.

In contrast to the current path, which often relies on heavy taxation and government planning, my approach emphasizes personal responsibility, market-driven solutions, and a government that protects individual rights rather than dictates personal choices. This vision will lead to a more prosperous, free, and vibrant West Virginia for all.

SAFEGUARDING PROPERTY RIGHTS AND REFORMING WEST VIRGINIA'S SYSTEM

Introduction: As your next Governor, I am committed to upholding individual liberties and ensuring that Mountaineers' property rights are protected. Let's delve into the Libertarian justification for our proposed reforms:

1. Abolishing Asset Forfeiture:
 - **Libertarian Principle:** At the core of my philosophy lies the belief that government power should be limited. Asset forfeiture, as it stands, violates this principle by allowing the state to seize property without due process.
 - **Innocent Until Proven Guilty:** Asset forfeiture often occurs even before an individual is convicted of a crime. This undermines the fundamental tenet of our legal system—the presumption of innocence.
 - **Restoring Property Rights:** By abolishing asset forfeiture, we restore property rights. Your hard-earned assets should not be subject to arbitrary confiscation by the state.
2. Criminal Justice Reform:
 - **Overreach and Disproportionality:** Our criminal justice system has become bloated and punitive. Non-violent offenses should not result in life-altering consequences.
 - **Focus on Rehabilitation:** Rather than perpetuating a cycle of punishment, let's emphasize rehabilitation. Drug addiction, for instance, should be treated as a health issue, not solely a criminal one.
 - **Reducing Prison Populations:** By reevaluating sentencing guidelines and promoting alternatives to incarceration, we can reduce overcrowded prisons and allocate resources more effectively.
3. Property Tax Reform:
 - **Libertarian Stance:** Property taxes disproportionately burden homeowners and businesses. They infringe upon property rights and hinder economic growth.
 - **Local Control and Accountability:** Empower local communities to decide their tax policies. Decentralization allows for tailored solutions that reflect the unique needs of each locality.
4. Transparency and Accountability:
 - **Sunset Provisions:** Advocate for sunset provisions in legislation. This ensures that laws are periodically reviewed and justified. If a law no longer serves its purpose, it should expire.
 - **Public Engagement:** Engage citizens in the policymaking process. Town halls, open forums, and public consultations foster transparency and accountability.
5. West Virginia as a Beacon of Liberty:
 - **Lead by Example:** Our state can be a model for others. By championing property rights, criminal justice reform, and tax changes, we demonstrate that liberty and prosperity go hand in hand.
 - **Empowering Individuals:** Our reforms empower Mountaineers to thrive, innovate, and build a better future.

Conclusion: Let's dismantle barriers, protect property rights, and create a fairer, more just West Virginia. Together, we can ensure that the government never takes your property involuntarily—because freedom and property ownership are inseparable.

III. YOUR RIGHTS

YOU DO YOU

No matter how you choose to use your right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—YOU DO YOU!

Let's embrace the diversity of West Virginia by honoring and respecting each individual's right to be who they want to be; love who they want to love; love how they want to love; worship how they want to worship; work how they want to work; learn how they want to learn; go where they want to go; and live how they want to live.

How you choose to live your life is your business. Who you choose to love is your business. What you choose to put in your body is your business.

Your own health and wellbeing is also your business—and nobody else's.

When it comes to your personal health and medical decisions, informed consent is an inalienable human right. Medical treatment should never be mandated or coerced – whether it's a procedure, a medication or a vaccine. How you choose to treat, heal, or protect yourself and your family should always be your decision.

It is unacceptable to use threats to personal health information privacy, discrimination, and the restriction of access to public services and spaces to coerce any medical procedure or treatment.

Any restrictions based on a requirement for “vaccine passports” or any other proof of medical “compliance” is not acceptable. Vaccine requirements that target specific populations based on ethnicity or race, even if positioned as correcting disparities, are discriminatory and should be immediately repealed.

ON LGBTQ+ ISSUES

Erika believes in freedom of association, and also recognizes the need for measures that ensure marginalized groups are protected. No one should face discrimination because of who they love.

When an individual's actions have no impact on anyone besides themselves, nobody else has the right to assert dominion over that person's identity or lifestyle.

We must embrace and celebrate the diversity of West Virginia state by honoring and respecting each individual's right to be who they want to be, to love who they want to love, to love how they want to love, and to live how they want to live.

No matter how you choose to use your right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness-YOU DO YOU!

SECOND AMENDMENT RIGHTS

“It is imperative that in the state of West Virginia, the second amendment can never become the second suggestion.”

– Erika Kolenich

REFORMED CARRY LAWS

These three points ensure that law abiding citizens can be responsible for their own safety, while still combating criminal behavior and acts of violence.

- 1) Capitol carry. The West Virginia Capitol Complex belongs to the people of West Virginia. I will advocate for the removal of the restriction from carrying a firearm on the grounds outside of the Capitol building, and, ultimately, permit qualified individuals to carry firearms inside the Capitol building – as is done in several other states.
- 2) Online renewal of concealed handgun licenses. I will advocate for the ability to renew concealed handgun licenses to be done online.
- 3) Enabling the carrying of concealed weapons by K-12 school personnel who are able to pass a certification test.
- 4) If an individual legally obtains and owns a firearm they may transport it anywhere in the state of West Virginia. This includes reciprocity for out of state travelers.
- 5) If a firearm is used to stop a crime, regardless of the local laws, the individual can not be prosecuted for the gun crime.
- 6) Everyone has a personal right and responsibility to protect their families, communities and businesses, this includes members of the LGBTQ and minority communities whose second amendment rights are threatened.

IV: FAMILY ISSUES

SUPPORTING WOMEN AND FAMILIES: CHILDCARE CONCERNS

One of the most difficult obstacles for parents, especially single parents, is navigating how their children are cared for while accommodating their work schedule. In addition to the cost of care being incredibly high, there is great concern regarding the availability of quality care. We will facilitate the creation of child gardens which are non-profit organizations that provide childcare. In this scenario, the non-profit will not be bound by nearly as many expensive requirements and regulations that current traditional childcare facilities are bound by. Of course, traditional childcare options will still be available for those who prefer it.

This arrangement works especially well for lower-income families and / or those in which parent(s) only work part time or have a non-typical schedule. On an off day, the parent could volunteer to help watch the other parents' children at the child garden and while being able to bring their own kids along. This allows parents to spend time with their own children while also helping meet the care needs of other parents in their communities. These low costs, and, in many cases, free child gardens will make going to work more affordable for women and offer them greater flexibility in pursuing the career they have chosen. Long career pauses that have often hindered career prospects in the long-run will no longer be necessary. Additionally, women will have the freedom to return to work when they are ready.

WOMEN'S BODILY AUTONOMY

The judgment to have an abortion is not the responsibility of the state or its leadership. Instead, she will ensure that alternatives to abortion are more readily available by guaranteeing easy and affordable access to birth control. Women will no longer have to go to a doctor to get birth control. It will be available over-the-counter. If women want insurance to cover the medicine, they will be able to receive a prescription from any pharmacist, following a brief evaluation.

The barriers to gaining access to birth control, including making an appointment and the costs that may be associated with the appointment, will be eliminated. Under this plan, the women of West Virginia will have increased control over their reproductive health and greater flexibility in family planning.

Erika will also ensure that other conception-related options, like adoption and surrogacy, are more accessible and affordable for the women and families who wish to utilize them. Additionally, critical education and information regarding those options will be readily available. With Erika as governor of West Virginia, there will be fewer abortions as a result of the increased focus on non-abortion options. Most importantly, there will be zero involvement on the part of the government in making such decisions.

CHILD CARE TAX CREDITS

While it is my hope to eliminate the personal income tax while any personal income tax is in place, all West Virginia families who incur child care costs shall be provided a dollar for dollar tax deduction for the same on state tax obligation.

V. HEALTHCARE AND MEDICAL FREEDOM

All West Virginians should have the right to make their own medical decisions free in force or coercion from the government.

CONSUMER DRIVEN HEALTHCARE REFORM

Arguments revolving around “who pays” for healthcare have left the government in an unending gridlock. One important neglected assertion is that healthcare reform and health insurance reform are two separate matters. Due to that fact, our repair process revolves around reforming healthcare into a more consumer driven industry.

HEALTHCARE

To reflect a transition into a healthcare marketplace that depends upon consumers, as governor, Erika would take these necessary actions:

- 1) Require all providers to have transparent pricing that is simple and easy to understand.
- 2) Provide a website resource to help West Virginians find the best and cheapest solutions for their healthcare, including price comparisons between providers.
- 3) Repeal Certificates of Need (CON)- CONs are essentially permission slips that healthcare professionals, who are already properly licensed, must obtain to provide healthcare to consumers. In theory, this piece of paper “proves” there is a need for their practice. In reality, this is a pointless barrier to entering the healthcare field that has zero positive trade offs such as increased quality or reduced cost.

MEDICAID AND STATE-FUNDED HEALTH PLANS

Conversion of Medicaid into an HCDA (Healthcare Debit Account) would give greater flexibility to patients as it will allow them to use it to see virtually any doctor. If the recipient's personal savings account runs out, then they would be able to use traditional Medicaid as a backup option. The HCDA will roll over to an individual or company HSA (Healthcare Savings Account) when the individual no longer requires Medicaid. This will also save money because recipients will be more encouraged to care about the cost associated with medical care choices.

Patients would be more likely to use preventative care with a visit to a regular doctor, clinic or urgent care in lieu of expensive, last resort ER trips. A health market like this would also facilitate the development of low-cost, cash-only clinics and practices which would grant even greater freedom in patients’ provider choices as well as help alleviate the incredibly high patient load ERs are currently struggling with. Two necessary measures to achieving these goals include:

- 1) A minor, but necessary increase in copays which must be paid before using the HCDA funds, however, we will maintain \$0 copays for things like vaccines and birth control since these are measures that help keep the overall cost of healthcare down.

- 2) Waived copays for destitute people or those who are otherwise incapable of paying
- 3) State healthcare plans be converted to HCDAs or traditional HSAs with an insurance backend so they still have the same coverage as now

LICENSURE

We must address the overwhelming shortage of medical personnel which is driving up costs, wait times, and simultaneously degrading care. In order to do so, as Governor, Erika would do the following:

- 1) Allow all medical school graduates to be licensed as physician's assistants until the remaining requirements, such as residency, have been met to become a doctor.
- 2) End college course requirements for medical school which will enable doctors to finish school with less debt and have an easier time starting their own practice or clinic.
- 3) The same should be done for nurses and class capacity should be increased to accommodate rising demand to pursue the opportunity.
- 4) Residency requirements should be capped at 1 year regardless of who accredits them. End the exclusion of professionally competent healthcare providers and workers and expand acceptance of residency training to graduates of all officially recognized medical programs.
- 5) Empower nurse practitioners to do more.
- 6) Allow more market competition for the healthcare monopolies that exist in West Virginia which currently limit employment opportunities, competition in pricing and hold down the quality in care and provide our citizens with fewer options in providers.
- 7) Reduce training hours needed for counselors and other healthcare providers to the lowest of any bordering state.

VI: CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

In West Virginia, the criminal justice system is rife with numerous issues and requires significant overhaul. In addition to the high rates of recidivism, innocent people are being sent to jail simply because they cannot afford bail. Lawsuits are common and incredibly expensive. All of these issues contribute to overworked correctional officers who have a limited collective voice when it comes to addressing criminal justice reform.

BAIL REFORM

To address the problems that have risen out of a troubled bail system, Erika will:

- 1) Mandate that a minimum of 4 methods of bail payment be made available by the courts, including the option to pay by debit or credit card.
- 2) Reduce bail amounts for low level non-violent offenders.
- 3) Provide low level non-violent offenders with GPS enabled ankle bracelets in lieu of jail.

PRISON REFORM

Erika believes in creating CRUs (Community Reform Units) to help reduce recidivism, rehabilitate inmates, and give them a second chance at life. These CRUs will be operated by a combination of correctional officers and volunteers, including former inmates who are productive members of society. These CRUs are modeled after a Massachusetts initiative referred to as the HUMV program, which reduced recidivism rates from around 75% to around 5%. Input from corrections officers, former inmates, and current inmates will be essential making this objective clearly a team effort. Inmates will be screened to ensure that those with psychopathic tendencies, who present the lowest chances for successful completion, are not brought into the program. Upon completion, qualified inmates will be granted an early release. Over time, CRUs will generate savings for taxpayers as recidivism rates plummet and less people need to be imprisoned. The savings will be used to pay for both de-escalation training for guards and the hiring of new guards. The CRUs will also work alongside the newly created Office of Pardon in determining which prisoners are eligible for pardon or commutation of their sentence.

Correctional officers are overworked and understaffed which amplifies the incredibly stressful environment they work within. This is not conducive to proper treatment of those in state custody and it is very detrimental to the well-being of the corrections officers who have to experience these conditions. We will ensure that correctional officers get their contracts in a timely manner and will work hard to improve their overall working conditions. Some of this improvement will stem from decreased inmate populations which will result from legalization of marijuana/hemp and pardoning marijuana and SAFE Act offenders.

Incidences of wrong doing on the part of corrections officers and prisoners alike present a special problem in providing evidence for the prosecution of crimes committed behind prison walls. Greater consideration must be given to the placement and addition of cameras in prisons so that witness testimony is not so paramount to investigations. This necessarily reduces the impact of false accusations brought forth by inmates and offers a higher degree of protection for corrections officers. Inmates will also be protected from false allegations that correctional officers might make against them. Officers will be able to rely more upon surveillance to aid in the resolution of disputes between prisoners instead of eyewitness statements in which minor mistakes may lead to possibly losing their jobs. Ultimately, such measures will save the state a lot on the wasted funding commonly sunk into defending prison lawsuits.

DRUGS, CANNABIS AND HEMP

“It is time for West Virginia state to be liberated from the lost ‘war on drugs’.”

“Cannabis is a way of growing our state. It’s a way of making people free, growing jobs, and increasing our tax base without increasing taxes.” – Erika Kolenich

ADDRESSING THE FAILED WAR ON DRUGS

The epidemic of substance abuse has been on a rising trajectory for quite some time. Our first step in reducing this trend is to reduce, and one day eliminate, the practice of prosecution and imprisonment for non-violent drug crimes. By treating addiction as a health concern rather than a criminal matter, we address the root of the problem and reduce the growing rates of recidivism and crime.

- 1) We will promote drug education that is wholly rooted in fact, and created in combination with other sensible policy programs including Drug Policy Alliance, Students for Sensible Drug Policy, and Families for Sensible Drug Policy.
- 2) We will establish overdose protection sites (OPS) and other low-threshold facilities that will ensure the public has access to the resources necessary to fight addiction, and circumvent the crime and other problems that arise from substance abuse.
- 3) We will lower priority for law enforcement programs and initiatives focused on continuation of arrest or prosecution of non-violent drug related crimes. Individuals would instead be redirected to options for treatment, which may include the previously mentioned OPS programs.

Advancing Cannabis Reform in West Virginia Through Decriminalization and Legalization

Introduction: As your next Governor, I will be committed to promoting individual freedom, compassionate healthcare, and sensible drug policies. Let’s explore the reasons behind our push for cannabis reform:

1. Decriminalization for Non-Violent Offenses:

- Justice: Our criminal justice system should prioritize violent crimes, not non-violent drug offenses. Individuals convicted of marijuana-related offenses should not face harsh sentences.
- Immediate Commutation: Those currently incarcerated for non-violent cannabis offenses deserve a second chance. I pledge to commute their sentences immediately and work toward expunging their convictions.
- Restoring Lives: Expungement allows individuals to rebuild their lives, find employment, and contribute positively to society. It’s a step toward justice and redemption.

2. Consistency:

- Level Playing Field: If beer, wine, and liquor are legal for adult recreational consumption, it's only fair that all forms of cannabis receive the same treatment.
- Inconsistencies in Prohibition: Prohibition of cannabis has disproportionately affected marginalized communities. Legalization ensures consistency in our laws.

3. Economic Opportunities and Tax Revenue:

- Job Creation: A regulated cannabis industry can create jobs—from cultivation to retail. This bolsters our economy and provides employment opportunities.
- Tax Revenue: Legalization generates tax revenue that can fund essential services. Let's allocate these funds wisely, benefiting education, healthcare, and infrastructure.

4. West Virginia as a Beacon of Liberty:

- Lead by Example: By embracing cannabis reform, West Virginia becomes a beacon of liberty and rational policy. We inspire other states to follow suit.
- Personal Responsibility: Adults should have the freedom to make choices about their own bodies. Responsible cannabis use is a matter of personal responsibility, not government mandate.

Conclusion: Let's prioritize compassion, justice, and common sense. Legalizing and decriminalizing cannabis aligns with our values. Together, we can build a better West Virginia—one where individual rights are respected, and healing options abound.

The time to legalize cannabis farming is now. West Virginia should have just as much opportunity to reap this economic reward as any other state in the U.S.

- 1) Legalization of cannabis at a recreational level is necessary, if for no other reason than we are wasting too much of the taxpayers' money on prosecuting and housing non-violent drug offenders. Nearly half of the drug-related arrests across the U.S. stem from cannabis and, of that portion, almost 90% were due to simple-possession.
- 2) Growing, processing and distributing both marijuana should be not regulated any more than other agricultural crops.
- 3) Funding and resources should be available to companies wanting to research and develop this crop.

VII: CPS and FOSTER CARE REFORM

I will advocate for the following changes:

1. Require that upon the reported fatality of a child whom there was a prior CPS referral made or an active case or investigation that an external analysis be done to identify whether CPS failed to meet any standards. The findings of any such violations of standards by CPS shall be released to the public upon request and shall not be confidential
2. Require that CPS provide the West Virginia State Legislature with a full report following the death of any child upon which there was a prior CPS referral or which there was an active CPS investigation. Require that non-confidential portions, such as any identified failures to meet standards by CPS be released to the public upon request.
3. Children removed are required to be placed in kinship care immediately, or at any time kinship care is identified, provided that the kinship placement does not have a criminal record, is able to physically care for the child, expresses a desire to have the child, is able to financially provide for the child (with or without the financial assistance a foster family may receive) and has a bed solely for the child in their home, and has not had any prior involvement with CPS.
4. CPS is required to consistently search for kinship care from the time a child is removed until the time of adoption.
5. Statutory limitations on improvement period shall be voided if the parent has an expert who offers an opinion that the parent is making substantial progress toward recovery.
6. The granting of improvement periods can not be conditioned upon admitting to abuse, neglect or allegations in a petition as the same is a violation of due process.
7. Parents and Guardians who currently have children and have no criminal history, no prior history of CPS involvement and have a private bedroom available for a child can foster the child without the necessity of undergoing a home study or meeting housing regulations.
8. Foster care parents who are approved and certified can use trusted friends and family members, who do not have criminal records, as child care providers as they would for their own children.