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By Mannix Porterfield
Register-Herald Reporter (<http://www.register-herald.com>)

BECKLEY — In the boom-and-bust history of coal mining, the fuels were extracted, jobs came and went, and when hard times arrived, West Virginia had little to show for it all.

Mindful of that, an analyst for the Center for Budget and Policy tried Tuesday to enlist the support of the Raleigh County Commission for a pair of failed Senate bills that would devote some Marcellus shale tax proceeds into a 20-year account, created for future development.

Put simply, Paul Miller says he doesn't want to see West Virginia repeat the same mistakes of the previous century.

Miller alluded to SB182 and SB352, similar legislation proposed last winter that would take one-fourth of all taxes generated above the benchmark of \$65 million in Marcellus gas extraction taxes and put that in escrow.

For the next two decades, that fund couldn't be raided by the Legislature, but instead would be used to diversify the economy.

"All we're trying to do is make West Virginia a better business climate," Miller said of the non-partisan, non-profit Center for Budget and Policy in Charleston.

And this certainly isn't a new concept, Miller told the commission, pointing out that Alaska has built up a whopping \$40 billion since creating its fund back in 1976, while Wyoming has amassed \$5.5 billion, and the idea also is being employed in North Dakota and other western states.

"A lot of western states are similar to West Virginia in the sense their economy is predicated on natural resources," Miller said.

Miller revived some grim statistics about West Virginia — 49th and 50th in major health and well-being indicators.

“When it comes to creating revenue, West Virginia really fell behind,” he said.

“We don’t have a lot of ability to generate tax revenue. We have a low number of people in the workforce. That means fewer people who are paying taxes. We have seen the boom and bust cycles of West Virginia’s economy. West Virginia is inexorably tied to the mineral resource extractions.”

Based on the abundance of resources, Miller said West Virginia arguably should be one of the wealthier places in the nation.

“There’s a sort of disconnect between the amount of wealth that one would have liked to have seen, and the actual prosperity that West Virginians are sharing in,” he said.

With the pending boom in Marcellus exploration, he said, “There is an opportunity for policymakers to basically not make the same mistake we made in the last century, which is not to basically find a way to capitalize on the wealth that is in our ground.”

The commission took no action on Miller’s invitation to endorse the future trust fund.

In other matters, the commission:

— Appointed Dwight Reggi to the Bradley Public Service Board.

— Opened three bids to provide a scanner in the assessor’s office. The proposals came from Charleston Blueprint Inc., of Charleston, for \$17,743; Archive Index Systems Inc., Bellevue, Wash., \$17,5164; and PeopleDocs Inc., Harpers Ferry, \$14,690. No immediate action was taken.

— Learned that no one submitted bids for the installation of a roof atop the Campbell Building, which houses the prosecuting attorney’s office.

— Approved the sale of two tracts of land owned by Continental Casket Co. with Beckley attorney A. David Abrams handling the sale. One portion is on Mount Tabor Road, sold to Duane Sellards for \$45,000, the other at Harper Park, which went to Phillips Machine Co. for \$65,000.

— Approved a drawdown of \$3,257.98 for the emergency shelter.

— E-mail: mannix@register-herald.com

The Register-Herald, Beckley, West Virginia 801 N. Kanawha St., P.O. Box 2398, Beckley, WV, 25802