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## Report paints bleak picture for W.Va. job seekers

By Paul J. Nyden

Read the report: <http://www.wvpolicy.org>

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- The ability to find jobs -- and the wages and benefits those jobs pay -- continue to pose problems for many people throughout the state of West Virginia.

On Saturday, the West Virginia Center on Budget & Policy released the latest version of its annual study, "The State of Working West Virginia 2012." The report was written by Sean O'Leary and Ted Boettner.

Today, more than half of the Mountain State's 753,900 non-farm jobs are in three sectors: government; education and health services; and trade, transportation and utilities, according to the report.

The public sector alone employs one out of every five non-farm employees.

If West Virginia's state budget gets cut, the report warns, the public sector "could face a decline in employment."

Many job gains made during 2011 have been erased this year, pushing employment levels down to 3,200 fewer jobs than people had before the recession began in December 2007.

West Virginia's population has grown by 3.1 percent since the recession began. That would require another 23,800 jobs to reach pre-recession employment rates.

In recent decades, job quality has declined in terms of benefits given to employees:

\* In 2010, 53 percent of all West Virginia employees had employer-covered health insurance policies, down from 73 percent in 1979.

\* Today, only 45.9 percent of all West Virginia working people get pension benefits from their employers, down from 57 percent in 1979.

\* Median wages, adjusted for inflation, declined from 2010 to 2011. Today, they are \$15.02 an hour, compared to the national average of \$16.06 an hour.

\* The median is a statistic exactly in the middle of any list of numbers. In this case, half of all wages would be above the median and half would be below.

West Virginia's labor force participation rate -- the share of residents over 16 who are working or actively seeking work -- is 54.3 percent, the lowest among all 50 states. The national participation rate is 64.1 percent.

As workers over 55 have been reluctant to retire in today's difficult economy, workers between 16 and 24 are finding it harder and harder to find jobs.

Those young workers make up less than 15 percent of the workforce, yet account for one-third of all unemployed workers.

Today, 23.2 percent of West Virginia's workers are 55 or older, a level topped in only six other states.

These trends, the Center on Budget & Policy study predicts, are likely to spark major demographic shifts in the near future.

"Our state is projected to lose residents below the age of 65, both in terms of numbers and percentage of the population, while state residents above that age will dramatically increase," especially residents who are 75 or older.

Education levels are also lower here. Less than 24 percent of all West Virginia workers hold a bachelor's degree, or higher, compared to 32 percent nationally.

Average median wages vary widely in different occupations, according to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Last year, median annual wages in West Virginia were: \$76,576 for coal miners and natural resource workers, \$51,729 for manufacturing workers, \$47,016 for construction workers, \$37,418 for teachers and health workers, and \$15,585 for leisure and hospitality workers.

Today, women in West Virginia still make only 78 percent of what men earn, but that is still an increase from only 57 percent back in 1981.

The racial and ethnic composition of Mountain State workers is dramatically different from national statistics:

\* In 2011, 94.1 percent of West Virginia's workforce was white, compared to 67.3 percent nationally.

\* Last year, 3.5 percent of the state's workforce was African-American, compared to 11.1 percent nationally.

\* Less than 1 percent of Mountain State workers were Hispanic, compared to 14.9 percent nationally.

And in 2011, 22 percent of West Virginia's black workers were without jobs, compared to 7.5 percent of all white workers.

Coal employment has increased over the past decade, the report states, although the current downturn in coal jobs is likely to continue, particularly in Southern West Virginia.

Employment increased partly because coal productivity has dropped in recent years, partly because of the decline in the availability of thicker coal seams, which are easier to mine.

In the near future, job increases are likely to occur in West Virginia's northern counties with major reserves of natural gas in deep underground Marcellus Shale deposits.

The new report praises the coal industry as one of the state's best.

"Jobs in the coal mining industry provide above average wages, good benefits and are more unionized than other private industry sectors.

"Jobs in coal mining also provide an avenue for workers without a college degree to maintain a living wage with good benefits." the report states.

The average wage for coal-mine workers was \$85,053 in 2011, compared to \$38,565 for all West Virginia workers.

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I, and I know of at least 4 other qualified professionals who would be willing to take West Virginia's Division of Culture and History "commissioner" Randall Reid-Smith's job for HALF of what he is getting paid.

Any 5 of us would do three times over, what he has accomplished or YOUR MONEY BACK.

Whoops! I'm disqualified because he has forever banned me from ever applying for another State job. Can he really legally do that?

How can Governor Tomblin pass this up, it is great deal!

Let's save the TAXPAYERS some money.  
We will also not carry "comissoners badges" in our wallets. That will save the state 70 dollars too.

Posted at: September 02, 2012 12:33:23 am

Posted By: lilpete391

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The WV Good Ol Boy Network.....don't work!

Posted at: September 02, 2012 6:06:40 am

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*Education levels are also lower here. Less than 24 percent of all West Virginia workers hold a bachelor's degree, or higher, compared to 32 percent nationally.*

Now we know why so many in this state listen to FOX News and want to vote for Romney...

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