

## *IN THE NEWS*

### **Virginia should be the 'opportunity capital' of the nation**

Ed Gillespie

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In Virginia, we are blessed with tremendous assets: vast natural resources, fertile lands, our port, our great colleges and universities, our natural beauty, our historic landmarks, but there's no question our most valuable asset is our people.

When I visit college campuses, like Virginia Tech, I am inspired by the young people I meet. I am excited by the bright, compassionate, hardworking Hokies I have met. You have already accomplished a great deal, and a bright future lies ahead of you.

Virginia is well-known for our world-class public and private colleges and universities, but unfortunately, an education like the one you are pursuing remains out of reach for too many Virginians.

Upon graduation, it's too difficult to find a good-paying job here in Virginia. For three straight years, more people have moved out of the commonwealth than in. Many of those people moving out of Virginia have graduated from our excellent colleges and universities, but are unable to find a good job here.

I want to change that, and I believe this plan will make necessary fundamental changes to our higher education system.

Our education system should produce the well-prepared workers businesses need to grow. We need a modern education system to meet the workforce needs of today and the future. While Virginia has a world-class secondary education system, it is not without serious challenges.

I put forward a plan to forge three types of strategic partnerships related to higher education. The first would bring together leaders in the business community with educators. They will work together to ensure curriculums align with the needs of the business community. This partnership would also create more internships, apprenticeships and work-study programs to ensure graduates are ready to enter the workforce. I will work every day to ensure your degree holds measurable economic value in the workforce of tomorrow.

The second partnership would encourage the state government in Richmond to work with our public colleges, universities and community colleges to make higher education more accessible and affordable. You know better than anyone: the cost of higher education is too high.

The reality remains that in order to live independently, make a good living and provide for their families, most Virginians will need to complete an educational or training program beyond high school. And for too many Virginians, that remains out of reach because of the exorbitant cost.

My parents didn't go to college, but they insisted we do, and so I worked my way through college. I waited tables, tended bar, parked cars on Capitol Hill — whatever it took. I know how difficult it is to balance classes, classwork, a job to pay your tuition and extracurricular activities to bolster your resume.

As governor, I will work to make sure no Virginian is left behind because of the cost of higher education. With the public colleges and universities, we will establish agreed-upon performance objectives and financial support will correspond to those metrics. I will encourage our public institutions of higher learning to increase financial aid and work-study opportunities and establish forgivable loan plans that are tied to post graduation employment. We must also promote affordable alternatives, including online learning opportunities, community college transfer programs, collaborative high school and community college, sometimes known as dual enrollment programs, and advanced placement options.

The third partnership would ensure students and parents have choices and the information they need to make an informed decision on what school to attend, what degree or credential programs to pursue, what courses to take, how best to pay for college or other postsecondary training and, perhaps most important, how to make sure a good job and a happy life are fruits of that investment.

As the new school year begins, I wish you the best. I promise you this: if I am elected governor of the commonwealth we love, I will work tirelessly to improve our higher education system and ensure there are opportunities for you to stay here after graduation and find a job that allows you to find your path here in Virginia.