



Eastern-in-the-News



FIRST LADY TOMBLIN'S FEB 10 VISIT TO EASTERN WILL PROMOTE COLLEGE COMPLETION

Moorefield — Jan. 31 — In her role as West Virginia's 35th First Lady, Joanne Jaeger Tomblin is taking on many new challenges and responsibilities. And as she moves her home to Charleston and into the Governor's mansion, she's carrying her life's professional mission with her. A long time leader in WV higher education, the 11-year president of Southern WV Community and Technical College is now piloting the entire state into the forefront of a national call to educational action.

"Across the country and here at home, we face the growing challenges of college affordability and graduating ready-to-work students," Tomblin noted in recent press release.

Her thoughts mesh exactly with those of US Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, who last month pointed to "the clear national need for more college-educated workers who can successfully compete in the global economy." In fact, the nation's falling college completion rate is so grave a problem, Duncan suggested in a January 3rd Washington Post op-ed, that it puts "our economic and national security at risk."

To underscore the importance of college completion, the First Lady has undertaken a statewide tour of West Virginia's community and technical colleges, to challenge each college president to commit to the 'College Completion Challenge.' This initiative, developed by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) and the Association of Community College Trustees, aims to increase student completion rates nationwide, and commits the partner organizations to student success.

College Mission

"This call to action is a direct expression of our college mission," noted Chuck Terrell, president of Eastern WV Community and Technical College, "and we salute the First Lady's personal involvement with the initiative."

Tomblin will visit Eastern February 10 to meet with President Terrell and to ask him to sign the commitment, which includes a pledge to emphasize both increased access to college and increased student success.

Spurred on by President Barack Obama's goal of "of having the highest college graduation rate of any nation in the world" by the end of the decade, West Virginia's First Lady recognized that the effort to achieve that aspiration will require active cooperation on several levels. "It is going to take all of the West Virginia public and private colleges, as well as the K-12 system," she told a Beckley audience last month, "to join the college completion initiative for West Virginia to be successful."

Eastern's Terrell agreed. "The earlier our young men and women focus on college the better. One excellent way to increase college completion is for students to take college credits in their high school years," he said. "That way, they reduce the number of semesters needed to earn their diplomas, and they cut their tuition costs considerably at the same time. And Eastern has offered Potomac Highlands students that opportunity ever since we opened our doors."

Through the college's Early Entrance and Dual Credit options, as well as through the state's College Tech Prep and EDGE programs, Terrell noted, high school students can earn several semesters worth of college credit by the time they graduate high school.

Saved \$9-Thousand

"My first college class was an online course in Keyboarding my freshman year at high school," said Aaron Freeman, who graduated Moorefield High School last June. "I knew that students before me had gone through the same thing, and they were getting classes done while they were still in high school. And I thought that was something I could do and it would help me out in the long run."

At Eastern, Freeman took College Algebra during his junior year in high school, and then "two 100-level English courses, and a 100-level History" his senior year. Altogether, it saved him an entire semester, and close to \$9-thousand in tuition. And when he arrived at college as an undergraduate, "I was already a sophomore — I'm really glad I could do it," he said.

The classes he took at Eastern while in high school presented "the same grade of difficulty as any other college course," he recalled. That experience made him "feel like I was really prepared for college work, and now I'm flying through my courses." In his first semester of college after high school, the Yellow Jacket grad earned a 3.7 GPA while taking six classes (16 credit-hours).



Chuck Terrell, right, President of Eastern WV Community and Technical College, congratulates Moorefield's Aaron Freeman on his successful completion of his first semester as a Liberty University undergraduate. Because Freeman, who graduated Moorefield High School last June, took several college courses while still in high school through Eastern's Early Entrance and Dual Credit programs, he saved some \$9-thousand in tuition, and enters next semester as a college sophomore

Freeman earned his early college credits with a combination of Dual Credit and Early Entrance classes, but through the College Tech Prep and EDGE programs, especially, Eastern's outreach for college completion begins even earlier than high school, according to Grover Duling, former Dean for Career Studies and Workforce Education at the college, and currently Coordinator of the Potomac Highlands College Tech Prep Consortium.

"If you don't take advantage of the educational opportunities in America," he cautioned a gathering of area eighth-grade students last month, "you're really missing the boat."

8th Graders' Goal

A featured speaker at Keyser Middle School's 14th annual Eighth Grade Parent Dinner January 6, Duling said, "It's right at this level that they need to start thinking about what they want in a college, and how college will prepare them for the jobs they'll need and the lives they'll lead in the years and decades ahead."

To his audience of Keyser eighth-graders and their parents he pointed out, "It doesn't necessarily dictate in today's society that you need a four-year degree. 70 to 80-percent of the technical jobs of the future will not require a four-year degree. So you need to be thinking about a goal and a plan. It can change, but you've got to have one, because if you don't have one, you're not going to work towards something.

"And those goals," he advised, "will require education past high school. They'll require industry-recognized credentials like an RN, or an ASE certification for an automotive technician, or a CDL license to drive a truck, or whatever else you might get into.

"You're in charge of what the rest of your life is about," he emphasized. "So you and your parents need to decide what's best for you, what your aptitude is, who you are, and what you want to be."

Multiplying those individual student goals by the thousands, and looking at them as they affect the entire state, last month First Lady Tomblin noted, "West Virginia's future economy will be strong only because of a well-prepared, educated workforce, and increasing the ranks of those with a college degree or certification is the best way to reach that goal.

Led The World

"Of course, I believe the importance of community colleges attracting business and retaining business is very critical to West Virginia," she acknowledged, "and while I don't believe it is the sole answer to the problems our state faces, I do believe it is a very big part of the solution.

"The United States once led the world in the number of degrees awarded to individuals," she pointed out, "particularly between the ages of 25 and 35 years old. Today, the U.S. ranks 12th among all the industrialized nations.

"The growing gap between the United States and other countries," she warned, "threatens to undermine the American economy and our global competitiveness."

Serving the residents of Grant, Hampshire, Hardy, Mineral, Pendleton and Tucker counties, and fully accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, Eastern West Virginia Community and Technical College is a comprehensive and equal opportunity community and technical college bringing the resources and assets of Education That Works to the families, communities and employers of the Potomac Highlands.