

DELIVERED VIA EMAIL

March 13, 2025

West Virginia House of Delegates
Committee on Education

Dear Chairman and Members:

As a university president for almost 45 years, I know that universities are stronger when students, faculty, staff, administrators, and governing boards are all engaged and invested in the outcome. It is never easy to reach unanimous consent, but compromise is built when all sides have a place and a purpose in decision-making. That is why I write to share my thoughts about HB 3279.

I applaud the inclusion of a representative from agriculture or forestry. Through the Davis College and Extension Service, our land-grant mission is defined by the hardworking men and women in those industries who sustain us through food and farms and who keep our wonderful forest resources healthy and bountiful.

It is also a welcome sign to see the proposal add two new members, which will expand the viewpoints of an already well-rounded Board of Governors.

It is my belief, however, that removing the voting authority of student, faculty, and staff representatives, eliminating the seat for WVU Institute of Technology, and prohibiting non-residents to serve as chair are serious mistakes.

Students, faculty, and staff having a vote on our Board of Governors creates an incentive for engagement in the decision-making process that would otherwise be token. Even when we disagree, I respect their voices and have found countless instances where their opinions have shaped policy for the better.

WVU Institute of Technology is the front door to WVU for Southern West Virginia. We must keep it strong, and diminishing its authority on the Board of Governors weakens its position. In fact, I would suggest that instead of making this change, you as our state's leaders, keep it intact and include WVU Potomac State College in addition. That will ensure the Board of Governors is more representative of the campuses under its direction.

Finally, as a West Virginian by choice, I have always found that our country roads bring us home in different ways. Not all of us have the fortune to live in West Virginia.

Many of us leave for other opportunities, serve overseas defending our nation, or depart to care for loved ones living elsewhere. But we all find ways to serve West Virginia. We have current and former board members, alumni throughout the United States or across the world, and native West Virginians living in other places who would be unable to give back should this bill restrict non-residents from serving as chairs.

This provision would restrict many West Virginians and WVU alums from helping lead WVU in its land-grant mission to give back to the State. Is that the kind of policy we want?

You, as legislators and leaders of West Virginia, have my sincere appreciation and respect for what you do. I know many of you personally, and before my tenure at West Virginia University finishes in July, I hope to engage with the rest of you.

I ask you to reconsider taking voting authority away from students, faculty, and staff, and I ask you to provide representation for WVU Institute of Technology and WVU Potomac State College and allow our alumni and other West Virginians outside the Mountain State the opportunity to serve as chair, if chosen by their peers, on our Board of Governors.

Your friend,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "E. Gordon Gee". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

E. Gordon Gee