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Report: WVU, WVU Medicine have \$14.3 billion impact on state

By BEN CONLEY
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MORGANTOWN – WVU on Monday released the findings of a comprehensive analysis of the combined economic impact of WVU and WVU Health System on the state of West Virginia and beyond.

The bottom line – that WVU is the state's most consequential economic asset – likely comes as a surprise to very few.

It's the degree to which the state's flagship land-grant institution and largest integrated health system



Michael T. Benson



Albert Wright Jr.

power West Virginia's fiscal engine that stand out.

Looking at fiscal year 2024, consulting firm Tripp Umbach found that, taken

together, WVU and WVU Health System generated some \$14.3 billion in economic impact statewide, which equates to 17% of

the state's gross domestic product.

The entities contributed approximately \$890 million in state and local taxes, which equals a return of \$2.61 for every dollar of the \$340.9 million in state investment that year.

"West Virginia University and WVU Medicine play an important role in West Virginia's economy, while also helping educate the workforce of our future," Gov. Patrick Morrisey said. "Their combined \$14 billion economic impact reflects strong educational opportunities, advanced

health care, and thousands of good-paying jobs that support communities across the state. Alongside our energy sector, manufacturers, small businesses and entrepreneurs, these institutions are part of the broader foundation that helps keep West Virginia moving forward."

The numbers cited above, which are added up and broken down in a variety of ways across the 50-plus page report, include direct spending by WVU and WVU Health System (under the WVU Medicine brand) as well as indirect or induced spending by

their employees, patients and visitors, plus downstream impacts from vendors, suppliers and household spending.

All told, the Flying WV logo supports more than 84,000 – or one in nine – jobs in West Virginia, either directly or indirectly. WVU Health System is the state's largest private employer with 26,452 direct employees.

"The combined strength of West Virginia's flagship, land-grant University and the state's largest integrated health system form a

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Eye-catching icicles Come in from the cold



Rich DeMary of Rivesville adds color to the icicles on US Route 19 approaching the city. The owner of DeMary's Market in Rivesville waits for the ice to freeze then throws color dye mixed with water to make the picturesque scene.

Fairmont's Union Mission makes room

BY JIM BISSETT
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FAIRMONT – The Union Mission was a hot ticket on a 17-degree afternoon Tuesday.

"We had 27 people come in last night to stay," said Jeff Benedict, the clergyman who oversees operations there. "I just looked in the dining room and I counted 12 people. We've been letting people stay there, too."

For nearly 90 years, the facility, which sits near the entrance of the Jefferson Street Bridge overlooking the B&O rail yard, has been opening its doors to those in need of a meal or a bed or both.

That's been even more

critical during these most recent nights gauged with the frost of Winter Storm Fern – which blew through the region over the weekend with a coating of snow and a blast of Arctic chill that forecasters say may not move out until the second week of February, if then.

And in the immediate, the area remained under a cold weather advisory for the day.

Temperatures that evening were expected to drop to around 4 degrees – with called wind chills of 15 below.

"Yeah, that's definitely cold," said Benedict, who is affectionately known as "Pastor Jeff" in the community.

"We're here and we're open. We're always open, 365 days a year, no matter the weather. We were there

See COME, A2

First responders grateful residents heeded storm warnings

By BEN CONLEY
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MORGANTOWN – While the imaginations of many Monongalia County residents likely wandered off to warmer locales during the recent winter storm, their cars, by and large, stayed at home.

And for that, the county's first responders are grateful.

"Winter Storm Fern brought the snow, but you brought the cooperation. Our deputies responded to only two accidents and two motorist assists – numbers

we'd be happy with in the middle of summer," the Monongalia County Sheriff's Office posted to social media Monday evening. "By keeping the roads clear, you enabled our deputies to focus on protective patrols and allowed road crews to work efficiently. Thank you for helping us keep Mon County safe!"

MECCA 911 Deputy Director Brad Wilson said it was clear by the volume of calls that people were hunkering down and heeding the call to stay off the road.

"It was actually quieter than normal for a weekend," he said Tuesday morning. "We've had 11 vehicle accidents since Saturday. Three of them had injuries, but it seemed like they were all minor. There were 14 calls for motorist assists – which are probably cars that just got hung up somewhere – two reports of wires down and three reported structure fires that turned out to be furnace issues."

While Westover Police Chief Scott Carl noted there were two or three minor incidents of cars

sliding into a ditch or embankment, there were zero reported accidents in Westover.

Across the bridge in Morgantown, Police Chief Eric Powell said the department responded to 151 calls for service between midnight Saturday and 11 p.m. Monday.

"During this period, we investigated four motor vehicle accidents, made two DUI arrests, and assisted four motorists," Powell said. "Overall, call volume, particularly traffic-related

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A city of Westover worker uses a snow blower to clear sidewalks while keeping bundled up against the cold Tuesday.



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REPORT

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unified academic, research, and clinical enterprise with benefits far beyond our classrooms and clinics," WVU President Michael Benson said in the Monday press release. "As I travel across the state and country, it is clear where the 'Flying WV' is placed, it brings a shared sense of pride, purpose and reassurance. WVU stands for a quality education, trusted health care, jobs, community and hope for a better future. And we are just getting started."

Nationally, WVU and WVU Health System support more than 149,000 jobs and contribute \$21.6 billion to the U.S. economy, including \$1 billion in tax revenue.

"WVU and WVU Hospitals continue to

be leaders in our state, delivering world-class care and driving economic growth in West Virginia. This report reinforces what we already knew, and that is that WVU and WVU Hospitals are improving the wellbeing of our communities, while simultaneously serving as engines of innovation, opportunity and job creation," Senator Shelley Moore Capito said.

According to Tripp Umbach, the main Morgantown campus generated \$3 billion in statewide economic activity in FY 2024, including \$509.5 million in direct spending and \$2.5 billion in indirect and induced impacts through university-related spending by employees, students and vendors. The Morgantown campus supports 26,880 jobs statewide, including 5,635 direct

university jobs.

Over the same 12-month span, WVU Medicine produced \$5.4 billion in total economic impact in the Morgantown area, including \$334.4 million in state and local tax revenues.

Monongalia County Commission President Tom Bloom said the entities, their employees and students are "a key to the success and the future of our county."

"WVU's commitment to our businesses and our community only enhances our programs. The public-private partnership has allowed our community to build, finance and develop projects that would not have been possible," he said. "I also look to their enormous impact on our community."

Whether WVU employees are working on local projects with nonprofit organizations or vol-

unteering as a coach or being involved in organizations like Rotary or Pantry Plus More, they add to the quality of life in Mon County, which is immeasurable and invaluable."

WVU Athletics generates roughly \$1 of every \$23 that makes up West Virginia's \$9.1 billion tourism industry.

In FY 2024, WVU Athletics pushed an estimated \$390 million in total economic impact through direct spending and indirect and induced efforts from fans, media and vendors across the state.

Whether it's spent on food, drinks, merchandise or lodging, a significant portion of those sales are occurring in Monongalia County.

"We have more visitors in North Central West Virginia, coming in and out of Monongalia County than any other place in the state," Visit Mountaineer

Country CVB President and CEO Susan Riddle said. "WVU is the largest traffic driver. On a regular basis, we are sending [hotel] room nights up and down the I-79 corridor. And frankly, it's in Pennsylvania. It's also into western Maryland."

All that said, both Bloom and Riddle pointed out there are challenges that come with being the home of the state's "900-pound gorilla."

Some of those challenges are tied to infrastructure. Some are tied to perception.

Delegate Joe Statler summed it up during a December legislative session with Morgantown City Council.

"When we bring something up about Monongalia County where we're in Charleston, we get the same reaction. We are the county that's got the golden egg. We have everything that we need

and could possibly use. They can't understand—how dare you even come to us to look for anything else," Statler said.

Bloom expanded on that sentiment in response to Monday's report.

"Many legislators believe that WVU is the answer to all our problems. They may not comprehend that WVU has its priorities, and the local governments and residents may have other needs. Because of this, some legislators treat us differently, and many local citizens believe that we do not receive the amount of funding we should get to continue our economic growth," he said.

"Every employee of WVU is a tax-paying citizen, and they, and the other residents of Mon County, deserve the benefits that all the residents in the other parts of the state are receiving."

FIRST

Cont. from A1

incidents, was significantly lower than what we typically see on a normal weekend. This suggests, and we are happy to see, that many residents heeded warnings, exercised caution, and stayed off the roads during the storm, which greatly contributed to community safety."

In that same timeframe, the Morgantown Fire Department responded to a total of 15 calls, including nine fire alarms, two gas odor/carbon monoxide calls, and four additional service calls.

"We are grateful to share that we saw no motor vehicle accidents during

this period," MFD Chief Gary Freshour said. "From our perspective, our response calls show that residents took the weather warnings seriously and stayed indoors. We appreciate everyone's caution and cooperation over the weekend."

Tyler Savage, quality assurance and improvement specialist for Mon EMS, said the agency was activated four times for vehicle crashes and six times for falls following the arrival of Fern's ice and snow.

"Our top three reasons for 911 being activated from Saturday to Monday were medical in nature," Savage explained,

explaining those reasons were general illness, difficulty breathing, and psychiatric emergencies.

While community caution lessened the load on first responders, it was decidedly not an unusually slow weekend for road crews.

Morgantown Director of Engineering and Public Works Damien Davis said the city's plow operators worked around the clock through the weekend and planned to staff a final night shift Tuesday night before returning to normal operations Wednesday.

"Our snowplow crews were hard at work before and throughout the winter storm. We are extremely

proud of the city's response to this weather event, especially given the challenging road conditions created by a year of ice and snow," Davis said,

explaining the city always appreciates the community's patience during winter weather events.

But patience with those responding in and to winter weather, and patience with winter weather itself are entirely different things.

"Let's hope not," Wilson said when asked about snow in the forecast. "I'll be honest with you, if I have to shovel one more inch of snow, I may pack up, retire and move to Florida."

COME

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original warming shelter."

For the locations of other warming shelters across the region, there's West Virginia 211.

That's a free service managed by the United Way which tells people where to turn in times of uncertainty, such as unprecedented spates of weather.

To find a warming shelter in your locale, dial 211 or text your ZIP code to 898-211.

Meanwhile, forecasters are watching to see what might happen with another

weather pattern gathering itself over the Gulf.

That could mean more snow this weekend for north-central West Virginia, AccuWeather meteorologist Paul Pastelok said.

"Could," he stressed. He tracks such systems and their potential outcomes from AccuWeather's home base in State College, Pennsylvania.

"How fast the storm strengths will be a determining factor," he said, "and whether or not it moves up the East Coast."

U.K.'s Starmer heads to China seeking a thaw in relations, risking a rift with Trump

LONDON (AP) — U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer is heading to China, seeking a thaw in relations with Beijing at a time of strained ties with the United States.

He's hoping for an economic boost to Britain, but risks the wrath of China hawks at home — and of U.S. President Donald Trump, who's already heaping tariffs and criticism on America's closest allies.

Starmer is due to meet China's President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang

and Shanghai that starts Wednesday, the first by a U.K. leader since 2018. He is expected to be accompanied by Business Secretary Peter Kyle and dozens of corporate chiefs as Britain seeks Chinese technology and investment, alongside greater access to the world's second-largest economy for U.K. financial services, cars and Scotch whisky.

The key word stressed by both sides is pragmatism. As Trump roils the world order, both London and Beijing are looking for a more stable

trade and cooperation on big issues like climate change.

Starmer told his Cabinet on Tuesday before flying to Beijing that Britain had veered from "the golden age to the ice age" in relations with China, but he would follow "a strategic and consistent strategy."

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jakun said the visit is an opportunity to enhance political trust and deepen "pragmatic cooperation" amid "the current complex and volatile international situation."

FROM GOLDEN ERA TO BIG CHILL

Kerry Brown, director of the Lau China Institute at King's College London, said the trip comes as dramatic shifts in geopolitics create new opportunities for U.K.-Chinese relations.

But he said "Starmer is going to be talking to a very skeptical audience."

"Britain has not been very consistent in its relations with China. We have been very hot and cold," Brown said.

The relationship has

soured since the short-lived "golden era" proclaimed in 2015 by Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron, who took Xi to a traditional English pub during a state visit. Beijing's crackdown on civil liberties in Hong Kong, China's support for Russia in the Ukraine war and growing concern about espionage and economic interference have widened the gap between London and Beijing.

Cameron's Conservative successors barred Chinese investment in sensitive telecoms infrastructure and squeezed China out of investment in new U.K. nuclear power plants.

Starmer's center-left Labour Party government carried out a review of relations with Beijing after it was elected 18 months ago. It says it will protect U.K. national security from Chinese espionage and interference while keeping up diplomatic dialogue and economic cooperation with the Asian superpower.

Both Britain's economy, the world's sixth largest, and Starmer's popularity could use a boost.

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