Top Stories

U.S. Growth of 3.2% Tops Forecasts - a Full Percent Higher Than Expected

Bloomberg - U.S. economic growth accelerated by more than expected in the first quarter on a big boost from inventories and trade that offset a slowdown in consumer spending, bolstering hopes that growth is stabilizing after its recent soft patch. Gross domestic product expanded at a 3.2 percent annualized rate in the January-March period, according to Commerce Department data Friday that topped all forecasts in a Bloomberg survey calling for 2.3 percent growth. That followed a 2.2 percent advance in the prior three months.  

Jobless rates drop in all 55 West Virginia counties

WV News - Unemployment rates dropped in all 55 of West Virginia's counties in March. WorkForce West Virginia says Jefferson County's seasonally unadjusted unemployment rate of 3.2 percent was the lowest in the state, followed by Berkeley County at 3.8 percent and Jackson and Monongalia counties at 3.9 percent.
Agenda Announced - 2019 Environmental & Energy Conference!

The agenda for the West Virginia Chamber's 2019 Environmental and Energy Conference is now available! This year's conference will take place on Wednesday, May 15th at the Charleston Marriott Town Center.

This year's program is packed with the latest and most important information your business needs to comply with state and federal environmental regulations. We are also excited that WV Department of Environmental Protection Secretary Austin Caperton will join us to talk about regulatory efforts at the state level. To view the full agenda, please click here. Among the subjects that will be covered are:

- An update from WVDEP Secretary Austin Caperton
- Human Health Water Quality Criteria and Nationwide Permits
- An Update on the Waters of the United States
- 401 Water Quality Litigation
- WVDEP Air Program Update
- Engineering Innovation in West Virginia
- Chemical Industry Development
- NPDES General Permit Appeals

This conference is always a sell out, and space fills up quickly, so register now and guarantee your spot!

CLE credit is pending in WV, OH, KY and PA
Rebecca McPhail and Steve Roberts: Be Warned West Virginia Businesses - Your Land Could Be Taken

The Spirit of Jefferson

As leaders of the West Virginia business community, every business in the state should be deeply concerned about an extraordinary legal action being driven by the Jefferson County Board of Education to condemn the private property of Rockwool Group, a global manufacturer of building insulation who is constructing a new facility in the county.

If this legal maneuver succeeds it will have a chilling impact on current and future business development and destroy the ability of the state to attract new employers.

On April 12, the BOE filed a petition in State court to take immediate possession of Rockwool’s private property in order to construct facilities for students with special needs. In its lawsuit, the Board of Education ignores that Rockwool obtained all required environmental permits from the DEP (air, water, land); all required site plan approvals from the City of Ranson to ensure its use complied to City law; all building permits, and is within all zoning uses applicable to its site.

The U.S. Chamber wants to disentangle its brand from the GOP and hopes to rebuild the center

The Washington Post - The largest and most powerful corporate lobbying group in Washington is changing the way it evaluates lawmakers for the first time in 40 years, launching a $250 million capital campaign to remodel its headquarters and even rethinking its approach to regulation. Tom Donohue, the Chamber's longtime president and chief executive,
compares it to making substitutions during a basketball game. "It's very unfortunate that the far right has gone very far right, and the far left has gone very far left. If you think about this, there is a hole in the middle," he said. "So what we're doing - and this is critical - is adjusting and responding to the new politics."  

West Virginia News

DOJ unit focused on political hot potatoes leads probe of Governor Justice's properties

WV MetroNews - A subpoena requesting information about Gov. Jim Justice's private properties did not come from federal prosecutors in West Virginia. Instead, the subpoena is addressed from the U.S. Department of Justice's Public Integrity Section, a designation that may reflect the investigation is high-profile and sensitive. The Public Integrity Section's own description of its role says it "overssees the federal effort to combat corruption through the prosecution of elected and appointed public officials at all levels of government."  

Applications now open for WV's 'last-dollar-in' community college program

Charleston Gazette-Mail - West Virginia's new, free community college tuition program, West Virginia Invests, is now open for applications. The state Community and Technical College System has unveiled a website, wvinvests.org, where students may apply. Senate Bill 1, which created the program, said the certificates and degrees that students may receive free tuition for will be limited to those that "satisfy a workforce need as determined by the Department of Commerce." Click "Find a Program" at the top of wvinvests.org to see a list of the state's public community colleges, and then click on a college to see which programs made the eligibility cut.  

Carmichael: Agreement on some special session items but not others

WV MetroNews - Gov. Jim Justice and legislative leaders have reached agreement on some topics expected to be discussed in the resumption of the special legislative session on education reform. Justice met Wednesday with Senate President Mitch Carmichael and
House of Delegates Speaker Roger Hanshaw. Carmichael talked about the meeting during a Thursday appearance on MetroNews "Talkline." Carmichael said the special session won't resume until there's at least some agreement among a majority of lawmakers on some of the same issues. Continue...

West Virginia recruiting financial institutions to handle marijuana revenue

The Register-Herald - The West Virginia State Treasurer's Office is searching for a financial institution, such as a credit union, that wants to provide banking services for the state's medical marijuana program. West Virginia passed a law to allow for medical marijuana in the state in 2017. The state's medical marijuana program was scheduled to begin in July, but has been running behind schedule. Officials at the State Treasurer's Office has said no banks will agree to handle the revenue, noting that U.S. Attorney Mike Stuart frequently makes anti-marijuana legalization public comments. Continue...

Jennifer Garner Graces the Cover of PEOPLE's 2019 Beautiful Issue

MSN - From balancing her career as one of Hollywood's leading ladies with her business pursuits - including cofounding Once Upon a Farm organic cold-pressed baby food - to her role as an artist ambassador to Save the Children, West Virginia native Jennifer Garner is more than deserving to grace the cover of this year's The Beautiful Issue. From balancing her career as one of Hollywood's leading ladies with her business pursuits - including cofounding Once Upon a Farm organic cold-pressed baby food - to her role as an artist ambassador to Save the Children, Jennifer Garner is more than deserving to grace the cover of this year's The Beautiful Issue. Continue...

Blankenship sues Trump Jr. claiming he was part of 'weaponized defamation'

West Virginia Record - Don Blankenship has filed a lawsuit against Donald Trump Jr. claiming the president's son was part of a conspiracy to keep him from being elected to the U.S. Senate last year. In his complaint filed April 25 in Mingo Circuit Court, the former Massey Energy CEO says Trump Jr. published a tweet to his 3.5 million followers on May 3, 2018, calling Blankenship a felon. "Donald Trump Jr. tweeted that Mr. Blankenship was a
'felon' after meeting with, and as part of a scheme with, NRSC (National Republican Senatorial Committee) leaders seeking to prevent Mr. Blankenship's victory in the primary," the complaint states. "Moreover, defendant's defamatory statement was made in conjunction with reference to the mine disaster and thus, had the additional effect, through inference, implication, innuendo and/or insinuation of further defaming Mr. Blankenship by falsely attributing to him responsibility for murder." Continue...

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**Kanawha school system plans to cut about 50 jobs**

**Charleston Gazette-Mail** - Kanawha County Schools plans to cut about 50 jobs for next school year, mostly for elementary teachers, in response to continued student decreases. That figure is calculated from letters, received through an open records request, that show the orders to cut or add positions. The school system sent these orders to principals in February. Principals respond to these letters with suggestions for how the cuts should be made at their individual schools. The school system declined to provide these responses, claiming an exemption from the state's Freedom of Information Act. Continue...

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**National News**

**Analysis: Charter Schools Yield 53% Greater Return on Investment Than Traditional Public Schools**

**The 74 Million** - Charter schools are the object of intense national debate. They shouldn't be. The data show that public charters are a good investment. In five studies that we've conducted during the past several years, we've compared traditional schools and charter schools in a diverse roster of U.S. cities where a substantial portion of families are choosing charters. We've examined how much funding each sector receives and how much learning each produces. The facts are quite clear: Continue...

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**Ivy League Democrats and State School Republicans**

**Medium** - Democrats have an Ivy League problem. When compared with Republicans, Democratic presidential campaigns much more narrowly draw their top campaign talent in important areas from a handful of elite and mostly private universities. This matters because
those Democrats working to elect presidents often have little in common with the electorate itself. Continue...

The giants at the heart of the opioid crisis

The New York Times - There are the Sacklers, the family that controls Purdue Pharma, the maker of OxyContin. There are the doctors who ran pill mills, and the rogue pharmacists who churned out opioid orders by the thousands. But the daunting financial muscle that has driven the spread of prescription opioids in the United States comes from the distributors - companies that act as middlemen, trucking medications of all kinds from vast warehouses to hospitals, clinics and drugstores. The industry's giants, Cardinal Health, McKesson and AmerisourceBergen, are all among the 15 largest American companies by revenue. Together, they distribute more than 90 percent of the nation's drug and medical supplies. Continue...

Editorials / Op-Eds

Hoppy Kercheval: Manchin on Governor's race: 'I'm thinking seriously and solidly about it.'

WV MetroNews

Last January, I wrote that U.S. Senator Joe Manchin was once again considering running for Governor of West Virginina. The column, subsequent reporting and interviews given by the Democrat fueled speculation that Manchin was willing to give up a plum Senate seat if he could successfully return to the Governor's mansion. It's been almost four months since that story hit and Manchin still has not made up his mind. However, it is evident that his very public interest in the 2020 Governor's race is neither a passing fancy nor just a way to needle Jim Justice, a former political ally. Continue...

Hoppy Kercheval: West Virginia needs immigrants
The debate over immigration in this country is now centered on issues of border security, sanctuary cities, Central American caravans and asylum. These are hot button topics, but the arguments have drowned out the fact that this country needs immigrants. The Wall Street Journal reported last week that a growing economy combined with an aging population and a lull in the birthrate have driven up the demand for immigrants in the workforce. "The result is a country that is becoming increasingly dependent on immigrants to fill jobs and fund programs like Social Security and Medicare, economists said."  

Continue...