

Education just part of economic answer COMMENTARY

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Let almost everybody tell it, education is the answer to West Virginia's economic problem. It's the prescription for jobs and all else that spells prosperity and a way out of dead last in nearly every state ranking on the good life.

Yes, education is the way and the key. Politicians say it. Analysts say it. And consultants are paid to say it.

But for all that, I see like others that education alone is not the answer. It's only part of the answer, as the politician or consultant will admit when pressed to explain.

A natural partner of education is investment capital to grow jobs and tax money through the development and maintenance of business and industry.

Taxes may be unpleasant and unwelcome, but experience says they are here to stay and for good reasons. First and foremost, they support public education, which the glib would make a be-all and end-all.

As for educators themselves, the single prescription for economic improvement and social betterment finds few if any advocates in their ranks. They know better than to put the cart before the horse.

Plainly, it takes more than horse sense to support education and make it work. It takes money, too, as taxpayers know.

Gov. Bob Wise's lottery plan aims to help. And lottery depends in a great measure on people with jobs and money to buy tickets.

But unlike playing the lottery or the stock market, for that matter, capital investment players take prudent risk in financial enterprises to bear the fruits of goods and services. Along with a profit on the investment, the successful enterprise yields jobs and taxes.

The investment may come by way of Wall Street or Main Street. In either case, it's the investor's money to grow or wither nowadays in the weather of war.

Suicide terrorists destroyed the twin towers of the World Trade Center, killed thousands and silenced the stock market. But the dastardly attack failed to break the bank of the American spirit.

It shines in a new \$10 million investment in Wheeling that promises more than 200 jobs paying an average salary of about \$37,000 a year.

They are support jobs in the international law firm of Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe.

In downtown Wheeling, the Global Operations Center suggests the sort of paperwork clearinghouse once mentioned for New York lawyers by former West Virginia Supreme Court Justice **Richard Neely**.

He spoke of the possibility of a new niche for the Mountain State in the Information Age geared to high technology for handling and processing legal paperwork. The range covers support services for other professions and businesses.

Fair to say that prospects rely on investment capital to produce jobs and taxes for education and all else essential to the growth of West Virginia.

Peeks is a former Gazette business/labor editor.