

Harvard West Virginia Trek 2019

Trip Report



Trip participants in front of the state capitol in Charleston, WV, with Secretary of State Mac Warner (center) and staff member Mike Queen (left)

From February 22-24, 2019, eighteen graduate students from the Harvard Kennedy School and Harvard Business School traveled to West Virginia to learn more about the state and its residents. The trip was inspired by programming at the HKS Center for Public Leadership, which encourages joint degree students to explore cross-sector solutions to the world's pressing problems, and generously funded by the Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Business and Government.

During three days of intensive meetings and activities, the students learned about prospects for the coal and natural gas industry, strategies for combating the opioids crisis, plans for rural broadband expansion, and the state's tourism and innovation strategies.

Trip highlights included:

- Discussions on economic development strategy with WV Secretary of State Max Warner, WV Secretary of Commerce Ed Gaunch, WV State Chamber of Commerce President Steve Roberts, and representatives from the U.S. Small Business Administration;
- Observing sessions in the WV House of Delegates and State Senate;
- Discussions on local leadership amidst the opioid crisis with Mayor Amy Goodwin of Charleston and Mayor Steve Williams of Huntington;
- Reception at the Governor's Mansion with U.S. Representative Carol Miller and Generation WV, a young professionals network;
- Case study presentation on WV development prospects from UWV MBA students;
- Conversation and tour of former mountaintop surface mine with Rupie Phillips, Friends of Coal representative and former State Delegate;
- Meeting with Steven Smith, Harvard College Alumnus and Democratic Gubernatorial candidate; and
- Mountain Bluegrass concert in Fayetteville, WV.



Trip participants join proprietor Keith Gamble (center left), Friends of Coal representative Rupie Phillips (center), and Dave Gilpin (center right) of the WV Secretary of State's office for a spirited discussion on the future of coal at Keith's Bar and Grille in Man, WV



Trip participants visit the Williamson Chamber of Commerce, whose building is built of coal.

For many in the group, the ability to put real names, faces, and stories against the news headlines was the greatest result of the trip. While the analytical tools we learn in the HKS classrooms will guide us well in our future pursuits, they are no substitute for authentic relationships. Students called “the incredible generosity of [West Virginians’] time” both humbling and rewarding, as it “helped us get a fuller experience.”

Several cited Mayor Williams’ claim that “WV isn’t the epicenter of the problem, but the epicenter of the solution” as another powerful takeaway and a symbol of hope amidst adversity: “They are probably having to think much more thoughtfully to achieve very distinct goals.” One trip participant mentioned that the bluegrass concert, a last-minute addition to the itinerary, “did more than one would expect to hit home the intricacies of feeling (wistfulness, bittersweetness [sic] at once was, celebration of state and community)” at play.

Back at Harvard, trip participants are excited to contribute to the state’s progress in a variety of ways. Anticipated follow-up includes:

- Visit to Cambridge from representatives of West Virginia State Government and West Virginia University’s Chamber College of Business
- Potential student-to-student partnership to design the state-commissioned West Virginia Economic Development Plan alongside MBA students from West Virginia University

- Coordinating with WV Tourism Commissioner Chelsea Ruby to share ideas for growth in international markets; consulting with the Hatfield McCoy Trail on their out-of-state marketing plan
- Providing feedback on Mac Warner's cybersecurity presentation from our D3P participants, and making introductions to additional experts in social media
- Drafting an OpEd for future publication in the *Kennedy School Review* and/or online
- Receiving multiple proposals from WV for HKS Policy Analysis Exercise topics
- Incorporating Monty Warner's presentation on history and political thought into class discussion during 2019 spring course *Enlightenment Political Theory*

Thank you to all who made this trip possible!



Students Matthew Shackelford, Neil Howell, and Harshini Jayaram in Charleston, WV