



At his final and mostly self-congratulatory State of the State address this past January, Governor Jim Justice painted a rosy picture of West Virginia and observed that “the view from the top is breathtaking.” As I said then and will repeat now, it is the views from everywhere else in the Mountain State with which those seeking elected office should be concerned.

It turns out that when you look beyond the Governor’s inflated surplus numbers and carefully staged photo-ops handing out taxpayer money, those views reveal some serious problems—from the misspending of federal FEMA and COVID dollars, to the crisis in our state prisons, to our teacher shortages, to a broken foster care system. And as we learn more about the tragic and avoidable death of a 14-year-old Boone County teen, we see that the Governor’s hands-off approach to governing can have deadly consequences.

Thanks to some intrepid media reporting, we have learned this week that the Governor and his Chief of Staff seem far more focused on covering up alleged failures by Child Protective Services (CPS) than they had been in making sure that agency had the requisite funding and staffing to do its job in the first place. The Chief of Staff even went so far as to blame a member of the media for doing her job and declaring her television news network “banned” from the State Capitol.

The notion that protecting one’s own image and skirting public accountability would trump critical information regarding the death of a child is despicable. It shows the lengths that the Governor and his team will go to to deceive the people of West Virginia.

Similarly, even members of the Governor’s own party in the Legislature have been stonewalled trying to get answers to questions regarding CPS as well as the horrific death of a nonverbal patient in a state-run hospital. Just last Fall, after reports of failures in the state’s oversight of foster care, Delegate Amy Summers (R-Taylor) noted a consistent lack of transparency in the Justice Administration, saying:

*We’re seeing some issues that it looks like the government is protecting itself rather than improving the services it provides. ...the Governor and the executive branch have to be leaders in changing that.*

Senator Eric Tarr (R- Putnam) added the following:

*He’s about to be in his eighth year up there. The people who have needed [the governor’s leadership] the most have been harmed or neglected—harmed so much that they ended up in death cases, rape cases and harm cases.*

This lack of respect for the actual process of governing—as well as the important role played by the media and legislative branch as checks on that process—is deeply troubling. West Virginians deserve better. Governor Justice’s chronic absenteeism and refusal to do his job should disqualify him from serving in the United States Senate. We need a Senator who will show up every day and do the work. Someone who understands that the views from the top are no substitute for rolling up one’s sleeves and taking on our state’s problems head on at the ground level.