

Research program passes for MU, WVU

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CHARLESTON -- A higher education research program that is expected to attract dollars and faculty to West Virginia's two research universities, generate new businesses and create thousands of jobs passed the Legislature on Saturday night.

If both universities can obtain private donations to match \$50 million in state surplus money that Gov. Joe Manchin has requested for the program, it will ensure years of funding for science-based research, supporters said.

"This is the economic stimulus package for the state of West Virginia," Marshall University President Stephen Kopp said. "It's not just a one-year injection of funding. It will be felt for a long time."

Manchin introduced the program, called "Bucks for Jobs," during his State of the State address in January. Only minor changes were made to the proposal as it made its way through the legislative process.

The "Bucks for Jobs" model is based on a similar program in Kentucky dubbed "Bucks for Brains." Research at the universities of Kentucky and Louisville has resulted in more than 60 new companies since the program began 10 years ago.

The program will allocate \$35 million to West Virginia and \$15 million to Marshall University, provided both schools can match the funds with private donations within five years.

If one university doesn't reach its prescribed private match, its state dollars could go to the other university. But the other university still must match the state's money with private funds.

The beauty of the program, Kopp said, is that the state and private investment will never be spent. Instead, the schools will use the interest earned from the endowments to hire professors in their core research fields.

At Marshall, Kopp envisions using his school's funding to start the Marshall Institute for Interdisciplinary Research, a non-profit subsidiary of the university which would be devoted solely to scientific research.

The institute would start out by hiring nine researchers who would be expected to generate half of their income from grants or contracts within five years.

The research will be focused in areas where Marshall already shows strong potential, such as



(AP Photo/Bob Bird)

West Virginia Gov. Joe Manchin, right facing camera, speaks with state Senator Karen Facemyer at the State Capitol on the final day of the regular legislative session in Charleston, W.Va., Saturday, March 8, 2008. The regular session ends at midnight.

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biotechnology, nanotechnology and genomics, Kopp said.

Marshall University's Center for Business and Economic Research projects that Marshall's participation alone in Bucks for Jobs could generate 1,100 jobs and \$25 million in tax revenue during the first 10 years. The state could see 3,400 jobs and \$138 million in taxes during the second decade.

Kopp said those projections are bolstered by a recent WVU study that shows bioscience already is a \$7.2 billion industry in the state.

"This is the platform we are going to build on," he said. "But with MIIR, we will be taking it to an entirely different level."

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