



Gee makes several stops while in Martinsburg

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WVU President Gordon Gee holds baby Aubree at the Berkeley Medical Center NICU on Thursday.

Journal photo by Toni Milbourne

MARTINSBURG — West Virginia University's outgoing president, Gordon Gee, traveled to Martinsburg Thursday, where he spent time addressing the Martinsburg Rotary Club, touring Berkeley Medical Center and connecting with folks at The Venue by Brix27.

When attending the Rotary Club's weekly luncheon, Gee was introduced by local attorney Rick Pill, who also serves chairman of the university's board of governors.

"Some people are visionaries, some are implementers," Pill said. "President Gee is both. He had—or has—a great vision, and he gets a lot of things done."



Pill went on to elaborate a bit on different arenas within the university to which Gee has dedicated time and expertise. Those included the university's land grant mission, the athletic department, shrinking enrollment and medical services.

Pill explained that shrinking enrollment is a concern nationwide, especially after the pandemic, and said that Gee addressed the issue head on by looking at programs that needed to be expanded, such as nursing, and at others that had, perhaps, run their course.

On the medical side of the university, Gee has been the leader in expanding the West Virginia University Medicine reach across the state, taking the system from three hospitals to 26.

"Many of the small hospitals in the state would not be open today without WVU," Pill said, as he introduced Gee to the group of Rotarians gathered.

Gee, who had been at WVU as president previously, has served 11 years this time. He has also served as president at other higher education locations, including Vanderbilt, Brown, Colorado and Ohio State.

"I have two weeks left," Gee said, as he laughingly shared that now he will have to get a real job.

He told a quick story that his father had asked him when he was going to leave the university and get that real job, to which Gee said he responded, "Dad, I'm the president of the university."

Gee told the Rotary group that there were four things he chose to focus on during his tenure, which he believes the incoming president will continue. Those four things included education, health care, prosperity and purpose. Education, he said, doesn't mean just at the university but rather pre-K through life. As far as health care, the fact that the WVU Medicine network has increased by more than 20 facilities speaks for itself.

When speaking of prosperity, Gee referred to jobs and the need to create jobs within the Mountain State to allow the next generation to remain here.



"The most tragic thing we've exported is our young people," Gee said. "Now, we are creating jobs."

Purpose was Gee's final thing, and he explained that everyone needs purpose. He referenced that today's youth are lonely and in his words, disconnected.

"We have created a society of disconnection and disengagement," he said, describing young people constantly on devices rather than actually speaking to each other.

"We are so divided, because we don't talk to each other," he added, saying that at WVU, the goal continues to be to have students graduate with a higher purpose.

Following the Rotary luncheon, Gee headed off for a tour of Berkeley Medical Center, where he was met by group after group of staffers holding welcoming bow tie signs. Thoroughly enjoying himself, Gee asked nearly each individual their name and background before moving on to look at such new additions to the hospital as a bi-plane angiography machine, a specialized imaging system used to visualize blood vessels in real time.

"That's a hell of a machine," Gee told hospital officials during the tour.

Moving to the next phase of the guided visit was a stop in labor and delivery and the hospital's NICU center. Each of the infants in the hospital donned onesies with a bow tie and had signage announcing that they met President Gee today.

Gee was able to meet with one couple, Laura de Armas and Jesse Thorpe, and even hold their newborn, Jessie de Armas Thorpe. He also greeted their other children, Isabella and Johnny, during the visit. Moving on to the NICU, Gee donned a hospital gown and held baby Aubree, a preemie.

"I feel very special to get to hold them," Gee said. "This is the first visit I've had where I got to hold babies."

Staffers at the hospital then whisked Gee down a hallway to enjoy an ice cream social and words of appreciation for his support of the hospital system during his tenure. Turning the tables back, away from himself, Gee told all those gathered that the university is people intensive and led by many great people.

"But," he said, "the bright shining star in West Virginia is all of you."



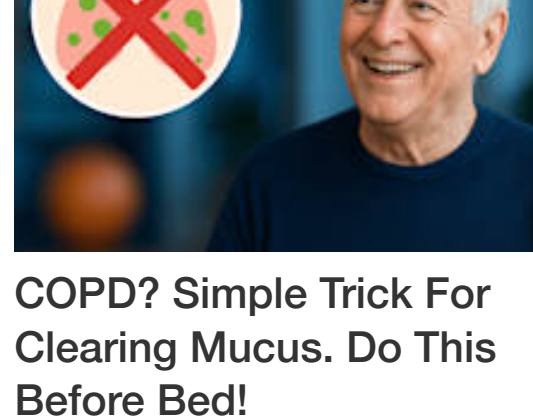
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