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# WVU leading regional consortium in effort to secure \$160M federal energy award, new president says (Newly Minted)

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Michael Benson, president, West Virginia University.  
WVU PHOTO/MATT SUNDAY

By **Jordyn Hronec** – Associate Editor, Pittsburgh Business Times  
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Story Highlights

- Michael T. Benson became West Virginia University president in July.
- WVU is working toward a \$160 million National Science Foundation award.
- University approved two athletics projects to generate revenue for fans.

As we ring in the start of 2026, the Business Times is looking ahead at what's to come for the region's business landscape. But in order to look forward, it's necessary to look back – specifically, at some key announcements and leadership changes that were made in 2025. In this installment of *Newly Minted*, we asked many of the region's new top executives about their thoughts and perspectives on challenges, as well as potential opportunities they see for growth as we head into the new year and beyond. Profiles of all 28 new leaders – who either stepped into their roles in 2025 or who were announced to be stepping into their roles in early 2026 – will be available in the Jan. 2, 2026, issue of the Business Times and will be rolling out online in the coming weeks.

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SAVE MY SPOT

When Michael T. Benson began serving as president of Morgantown-based West Virginia University in July 2025, it marked the fifth higher education presidency of his career. He was named to the role following an extensive search, having most recently served as president of Coastal Carolina University. He has spent over 30 years working and teaching in higher education, and serves as a professor of history at WVU as well.

**What sets this role at WVU apart from where you've led before?** WVU is truly West Virginia's university. The entire Mountain State is tied to its university, a fact that has become clear on my statewide "Welcome Hour Tour" that will take me to all 55 counties by next summer. West Virginians are hard-working, proud, loyal, self-effacing, welcoming people, and it's an honor to lead their land-grant, flagship, R1 research institution with its comprehensive academic Health Sciences Center and broad clinical care reach through WVU Medicine.

**How are you strategizing to navigate the ever-changing world of collegiate athletics?** Our goal is to be a regular contender among our peers, both inside and outside of the Big 12 Conference. The WVU Board of Governors, with my full support, recently provided initial approval to two projects in the WVU Athletics Master Plan – the first phase of the Milan Puskar Stadium West Tower Project and the Hope Coliseum Premium Seating Project. Both projects are important next steps for WVU Athletics in terms of generating revenue and serving our fans.

**Where are the greatest areas of opportunity for growth?** The WVU Strategic Compass that we developed by gathering input during my first months as president ... includes five priorities – education, discovery, health, service and experiences – with foundational areas to accelerate institutional success in people and culture, finance, core infrastructure and institutional reputation. We are currently focused on the National Science Foundation Regional Innovation Engines award. The Resilient Energy Technology and Infrastructure Consortium, which is led by a team at WVU in collaboration with CMU, Pitt and over 60 regional partners, is a finalist for the \$160 million award. If chosen, this funding is projected to generate 21,000 jobs, 150 startups and more than \$1 billion in economic growth for the entire region by innovating and implementing critical technologies for industrial grid resilience and energy efficiency. Winners will be announced in early 2026.

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