NEW RIVER PREPARED WITH PROJECTS FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE FUNDING PROPOSED BY OBAMA

[BECKLEY, WV] On Tuesday, July 14, President Obama proposed legislation that would authorize the investment of $12 billion to expand the capacity of the nation's community college system. New River Community and Technical College President Ted D. Spring said that the American Graduation Initiative is a resounding confirmation of the effectiveness of community colleges nationwide to positively impact the economy.

“Similar to many community colleges around the country, New River has experienced a large influx of new students during the extended economic downturn,” Spring said. “We are at or near maximum capacity on all of our campuses, while at the same time we are adding new
programs to help workers obtain skills for employment. Proposed funding through this legislation would make a tremendous difference in our ability to address the unmet needs in our service area.”

“Two years ago the college developed a 10-year Facilities Master Plan to expand instructional space to meet current and projected enrollment growth, accommodate new technical and allied health programs and upgrade our technology,” Spring said.

The college was prepared to launch the first phase of the plan, which included construction of Phase I, a new main campus in Beckley and renovation of a building on the Greenbrier Valley Campus for its new Fine Arts program, when the financial crisis began. Because of the economic downturn, funds appropriated for these projects were delayed, and the anticipated capital campaign envisioned by the college was postponed.

In response to a request from the Governor’s Office and in response to potential stimulus funds, New River submitted a list of capital improvement projects to the West Virginia Council for Community and Technical College Education that could be “shovel ready” within three months. These projects had already been outlined in the approved Facilities Master Plan. The proposed new federal legislation includes $2.5 billion to leverage $10 billion in funding for renovation and construction on community college campuses.

The master plan also includes an addition to the existing building on the Nicholas County Campus in Summersville; construction of a Technology Center on the Nicholas County Campus; construction of a new building for the Mercer County Campus; and construction of a Technology Center on the Greenbrier Valley Campus.

“Currently the college leases space in Beckley and in Mercer County,” Spring commented. “As a result, we spend a disproportionate amount of our budget leasing space. Additionally, none of our current facilities are suited to offer the technical programs needed in order to prepare students for high paying jobs in industry, business and manufacturing.”

The funds from President Obama’s proposed legislation will be expended as loan guarantees or seed money for capital campaigns, with priority given to “green jobs”, nursing and building trades. Spring believes that New River is in an excellent position to qualify for funding.

“New River has a rapidly growing practical nursing program, and will launch new programs in green building technology, weatherization technology and environmental sciences in August,” he said.

He added that this fall, “New River will begin its Mechatronics Program featuring courses in industrial systems technology. Mechatronics is being offered at the Mercer County Technical
Education Center in Princeton through an agreement with the Mercer County Board of Education.

Although the proposed legislation must now be passed by Congress, the House Education and Labor Committee could begin the process as early as next week. Spring is optimistic that the legislation can be a tremendous boost for New River and community colleges around the country that are struggling to serve a growing student population with fewer and fewer dollars.

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