

## **Jim Justice slams House GOP; Greenbrier owner angry over blockage of \$1M in tax dollars for PGA event**

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The Greenbrier resort owner Jim Justice sharply criticized West Virginia House Republicans on Friday, saying they should be ashamed for blocking a \$1 million appropriation to The Greenbrier Classic PGA golf tournament in July.

"It was the biggest economic impact to ever hit the state, and the state wasn't even in the game," Justice told state leaders at the West Virginia Chamber of Commerce's Business Summit in White Sulphur Springs.

Justice, who purchased The Greenbrier in May 2009, said he spent \$8.3 million of his personal wealth on the golf tournament, and the PGA Tour suggested the state allocate \$8 million to \$10 million.

During a July special session, Gov. Joe Manchin asked legislators to authorize the state Department of Commerce to release \$1 million from a \$2.8 million economic development appropriation the Legislature approved during the general session earlier this year.

Republican House members blocked the \$1 million supplemental budget appropriation, which was intended to help pay for tournament advertising and prize money.

Justice said he immediately called Manchin - who still intended to distribute the money to The Greenbrier at a later date - after learning what happened.

"I called the governor, and I said, 'Forget it. I don't need it,'" Justice recalled Friday.

Justice, a registered Republican, said he later called House Minority Leader Tim Armstead, R-Kanawha, and told him to deliver a message to the Republican legislative caucus: "Shame on you."

Armstead said Friday that he and fellow House Republicans stand by their decision.

"The Greenbrier Classic was a very successful event through private-sector investment," Armstead said. "Mr. Justice proved that private investment works in West Virginia. Putting another \$1 million into the event wouldn't have made it any more successful."

Delegate Mitch Carmichael, R-Jackson, said the state should spend economic development money on water and sewer projects and other infrastructure improvements.

"This is golf," Carmichael said. "Sometimes even millionaires don't get their way."

Justice said the House Republicans' actions were an example of why West Virginia finishes 50th in the nation in so many state-by-state rankings.

Not so, Carmichael responded.

"The reason we're 50th is because we tax our people and spend the money in inefficient ways - the best example of that would have been giving The Greenbrier a million dollars," Carmichael said.

The Greenbrier Classic was much more than a golf tournament, Justice said. The event's statewide economic impact exceeded "hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars," he said.

"It would be like saying, 'I'd like to bring the Olympics to Charleston,' and someone saying, 'We don't want to fund a track meet.'"

Justice said an independent study of The Greenbrier Classic's economic impact would be completed by the end of month. The PGA Tour has estimated that the event brought in \$250 million to the region.

The 178,800 people who attended the event spent more than \$17.5 million on food, lodging, entertainment and merchandise at The Greenbrier and other area businesses, Justice said. That spending generated \$1.1 million in sales tax for the state, he said.

What's more, nearly 200 million people in 220 countries watched the tournament on CBS and the Golf Channel, Justice said. The event showcased West Virginia, he said.

"Is there anybody in this room who could possibly say The Greenbrier Classic wasn't the greatest public relations and economic impact that has ever happened in West Virginia?" Justice asked state politicians and business leaders who attended his speech Friday morning.

Justice said he was less concerned about the \$1 million snub than the shortsightedness of West Virginia's politicians.

He said he recently told a state legislator that he was "sick and tired" of West Virginia being 50th in numerous rankings. The lawmaker - whom Justice declined to name - responded that West Virginia was ranked No. 1 in the nation for at least one thing: railroad safety.

"Where do you go from there?" Justice said. "I'm talking to a moron - an absolute moron."

Justice said Republican legislators' failure to understand the importance of The Greenbrier Classic to the state's economy ultimately "hurts the little guy in the end."

"There are people who need jobs," Justice said. "There are people really hurting."

Armstead said West Virginia has many economic challenges, including an unemployment fund projected to go bankrupt by the end of the year. Lawmakers also have refused to give raises to state employees and teachers in recent years, citing budget cuts.

"Considering where we are now, we thought it was not a prudent use of taxpayer money to give \$1 million to a private resort, one of the most luxurious resorts in the country," Armstead said. "Working West Virginians are struggling right now."

In 2004, state legislators were criticized after they voted unanimously to give \$750,000 in state funds to the PGA Nationwide Tour golf tournament at the Pete Dye Golf Club in Bridgeport. The Nationwide Tour is for professional golfers trying to make the tour and compete in events such as The Greenbrier Classic. The state appropriation paid for the event's \$600,000 purse and for advertising on the Golf Channel.

"There were different economic conditions at the time," said Armstead, explaining why he voted to fund that event but not The Greenbrier's tournament, "and we've learned a lot since then about what works and what doesn't."

Justice was not a scheduled speaker at the Chamber's annual conference. He said he decided to speak in hopes that business leaders and politicians would understand the importance of The Greenbrier and its PGA tournament to the state's economy.

Justice said he initially asked Manchin to allocate \$10 million for The Greenbrier golf tournament, but reduced the request to \$1 million after several corporate sponsors signed on.

"I only asked [state officials] to put in money so they could say they were involved," he said. "The money doesn't mean anything."

House Republicans blocked the Greenbrier funding during a July special session to figure out how to fill the seat of the late Sen. Robert C. Byrd, D-W.Va.

Manchin asked lawmakers to authorize a supplemental budget appropriation that included the resort's \$1 million, but Republicans indicated they wouldn't suspend House rules and allow the governor's appropriation to speed through the House unless the golf tournament funding was removed. Democrats, who didn't want to spend another day in Charleston, consented, took out the \$1 million for The Greenbrier Classic and passed the supplemental budget bill.

Justice said he wouldn't have criticized House Republicans if they had admitted they'd made a mistake by blocking the \$1 million appropriation.

"Instead, not only did they do it, they flaunted it," Justice said after his blistering speech Friday. "This wasn't a slap at Jim Justice or a slap at The Greenbrier. It's the same old crap, the same old partisan politics, and I can't take that."

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