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Markell: Education key to pulling out of down economy

By *IRA PORTER*
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In one of a series of meetings focusing on the state of Delaware's economy, Gov. Jack Markell addressed 150 residents in New Castle County on Monday night, saying education and creating jobs were essential for moving into the future.

The meeting, hosted by Speaker of the House Robert Gilligan, D-Sherwood Park, and Sen. David Sokola, D-Newark, focussed on economic development. Markell took questions from audience members gathered at Brandywine Springs Elementary School who wanted to talk about health care, immigration, taxes and their impact on small businesses.

Markell said creating jobs in Delaware, shrinking government expenses and increasing education were key in taking the First State forward. He said Delaware could be successful but said creating jobs is essential and jobs can lead to a better future for Delaware.

"We have got to convince companies that Delaware is going to be more responsive, more supportive and more nimble than any other state. When we do that, we win," said Markell, who shared stories of traveling throughout the state and meeting with business owners who have relocated to Delaware.

Markell also shared some of what he said will be in his next budget proposal. He said the state could do more with the property it owns and spoke of renegotiating some leases while terminating others. Real estate owned by Delaware is not being used to full capacity, he said. Taking advantage of that land would be one way the state could operate more efficiently, Markell told audience members.

On the topic of education, Markell said it is the single most important element to sustaining a healthy economy in Delaware and said his administration has supported initiatives such as giving teachers and administrators more say in how they can best reach students and administering different tests that track student progress throughout the year.

"I think this went OK," said Stephen Castiglione, of New Castle, who owns Woodland Services, a disaster service company. Castiglione said he didn't agree with Markell on some topics, saying more needs to be done about illegal immigration. He disagreed with higher taxes for those making more than \$60,000 annually. But he said the meeting was productive.

"I think that a lot of politicians have been in those positions for many years, and they don't know what it's like to run a business or live in certain communities," he said.

Angi MacLaren of Marshallton said she, too, hopes to see similar gatherings, where community members can talk to one another about their concerns.

"More people should come to these meetings, but they don't. And now things are in jeopardy like health care, the country is becoming a more socialist country and they are taking our rights away," MacLaren said. "I really appreciated [Markell] speaking," she said.