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## **Tomblin will not preside over Senate during governor stint (<http://www.register-herald.com/todaysfrontpage/x603549511/Tomblin-will-not-preside-over-Senate-during-governor-stint>)**

**By Lawrence Messina**  
**Associated Press (<http://www.ap.org>)**

CHARLESTON — Senate President Earl Ray Tomblin said Monday he will put aside his legislative duties once he takes over from Gov. Joe Manchin as West Virginia's chief executive.

Tomblin told a standing-room crowd in the governor's Capitol reception room that he will remain in the Senate and seek a new two-year term as its leader next month. But he also said he won't preside over or vote in that chamber upon becoming acting governor, and will not draw his legislative salary.

The Logan County Democrat also would not rule out calling for an election for governor before November 2012, when the office is already on the ballot. Legislative lawyers have concluded that relevant state law won't allow for an earlier vote, absent action by lawmakers.

Tomblin, 58, said he wants to hear from West Virginians on the matter, though he is also weighing the potential cost and legal issues.

"For me, it comes down to what the people want," Tomblin said.

The state constitution will make the longtime lawmaker acting governor once Manchin's U.S. Senate win is certified. The election canvass began Monday. Officials hope to certify results by noon Friday.

But Tomblin's House counterpart, a Democrat, and the state GOP were among those who continued to call for a pre-2011 election. House Speaker Rick Thompson also faulted Tomblin's decision to remain Senate president while he's acting governor.

"The way he outlined it, he'll be an acting governor for a long term, and so there will not be a senator from (his) district for a long term," said Thompson, of Wayne County. "It looks like he will make this a long-term agenda. I don't believe the constitution anticipates that."

Thompson said he'll run for governor whenever there's an election. Saying he'll do the same, Tomblin stood by his decision to keep his Senate seat and post.

"West Virginia cannot afford a caretaker governor," Tomblin told The Associated Press. "I think the constituents in my district are pleased that I will be acting governor. I don't think they will feel slighted in any way."

Toward that end, Tomblin said he plans to pursue an active agenda as acting governor and propose

his own budget during the regular legislative session that begins in January.

"I will be working hard at it every day," he said.

Tomblin described his approach to government finances as conservative and akin to Manchin's, with whom he served in the state Senate. Manchin's fiscal policies during his term-and-a-half as governor have won him high approval ratings and praise from such groups as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the Cato Institute.

Applauding Manchin's election victory at Monday's press conference, Tomblin embraced his fellow Democrat's focus on tackling debts, improving the state's credit rating and keeping West Virginia steady amid a deep recession.

"I'm ready to get to work," Tomblin said. "We must all focus on putting West Virginia first."

He vowed to carry on with efforts to improve struggling schools and champion its coal industry. Tomblin hails from the southern coalfields, and would be the first chief executive from that region since the late 1960s.

"Coal is a huge part of West Virginia," he said. "We must continue to support its important role in the energy needs of our nation."

Tomblin gave a nod to balancing those needs with environmental concerns. He expressed support, as Manchin has, for research into ways to burn coal more cleanly and for encouraging such renewable sources as wind and solar power.

After naming several senior staffers last week, Tomblin told AP he expected that some of Manchin's cabinet secretaries and agency chiefs will stay even while others will leave. He hoped to detail those changes within days.

He promised a "clear and organized" transition at the news conference packed with top Manchin administration officials, lobbyists, lawmakers and media.

Sen. Joe Minard, D-Harrison, is the Senate's president pro tempore. Senate Minority Leader Mike Hall said Tomblin's decision to hand over the chamber's reins is "probably the only thing he could do."

"The issue will be, how many people will we hear from that will want an election? I predict it will be a great number," said Hall, R-Putnam. "My sense is the public probably wants an election, even though I know there are complications in terms of the timing of it."

West Virginia's governor is paid \$150,000 annually. While Tomblin's legislative salary is \$20,000, he also receives \$150 per-day payments during sessions or while attending legislative business.

Tomblin has represented Logan County in the Legislature since 1974. He became Senate president in 1995 and since 2003 has held that post longer than anyone in state history.

Manchin, 63, won a special election for the roughly two years left in the term of the late Sen. Robert C. Byrd, who died in June. At Manchin's request, the Legislature set up that special vote amid uncertainty over the state's succession process for that office.

As the constitution bars a third consecutive term for Manchin, Tomblin said he considered running for

governor before Byrd's death.

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