WVU AND MARSHALL RECRUIT FIRST TWO EMINENT SCHOLARS

CHARLESTON, W.Va. - Gov. Joe Manchin today announced that West Virginia University (WVU) and Marshall University have landed world-class cancer and gene repair researchers as their first hires through the state’s Eminent Scholars Recruitment and Enhancement initiative.

Dr. J. Michael Ruppert will join the Mary Babb Randolph Cancer Center at WVU to fill the newly created Jo and Ben Statler Eminent Scholar and Chair in Breast Cancer Research, and Dr. Eric Kmiec will be the first director and lead research scientist of the Marshall University Institute for Interdisciplinary Research.

The state funded the $10 million Eminent Scholars initiative last year to help attract nationally recognized researchers to the two institutions. The goal of the program is to build university research programs, ultimately leading to business spin-offs, new patents and high-tech jobs at all skill and education levels. Ruppert and Kmiec are the first of 11 researchers to be hired.

“The fact that we were able to attract two of the country’s finest scientists to work in labs at our research universities is evidence the Eminent Scholars program and similar initiatives can have an economic development impact,” said the governor. “Scientists like Dr. Ruppert and Dr. Kmiec, who bring their labs to West Virginia, will help give us a competitive edge in the new economy and spur long-term job creation across the state.”

Dr. Brian Noland, chancellor of the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission, added, “These developments are precisely what we envisioned when the Eminent Scholars initiative was created last year. By recruiting these and other top-flight scientists to West Virginia, higher education will contribute even more to our state’s economy through student training, discoveries and development of high-tech industries.”

Ruppert is a top cancer researcher who focuses his efforts on breast cancer tumor suppressor genes and transcription factors. He is professor of medicine at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) and co-director of the Program in Cancer Cell Biology of the UAB Comprehensive Cancer Center.

“West Virginia University very much appreciates the Eminent Scholars Recruitment and Enhancement initiative, which allows us to recruit premier scientists to our health care center and support their research,” said WVU President C. Peter Magrath. “Dr. Michael Ruppert—one of the
top cancer scientists in his field—is here in Morgantown because of this initiative. His work will likely lead to future breakthroughs in patient care and recovery.”

Widely recognized as a pioneer of gene repair, Kmiec is professor of biology at the University of Delaware and director of applied genomics at the Delaware Biotechnology Institute. He is co-founder and chief scientific officer of a biotechnology company called OrphageniX Inc.

“If you look at Dr. Kmiec’s experience in applied research leading to research-based economic development, he has been very successful,” said Marshall President Stephen J. Kopp. “He is a grant-funded scientist who has the ability to build a successful team, leading to discoveries that are patentable and communicably viable.”

The Eminent Scholars program required each university to raise $5 million in private donations to receive an equal amount from the state, resulting in a net investment of $20 million in the state’s research enterprise. This year, the state committed an additional $50 million to scientific research through the creation of the “Bucks for Brains” research trust fund.

###