

Dec. 7, 2006

At Issue: Kentucky Economic Development Secretary Gene Strong's Resignation

Letter To The Editor:

Gov. Ernie Fletcher will be hard-pressed to find someone as successful at promoting and growing the Kentucky manufacturing industry as departing Secretary of Economic Development Gene Strong. He leaves a 15-year legacy as a policy-maker that added thousands of manufacturing jobs, particularly in the automotive sector, and led to manufacturing's \$29 billion contribution to the state gross product.

Mr. Strong's successor will find a much more hostile competitive environment for Kentucky manufacturers in 2007 than Sec. Strong faced in 1991. Competition from other states and low-wage nations such as China, India and Mexico are threatening us, and it will take a continuing team effort to meet the challenges of economic development in Kentucky.

Because Kentucky's entire economy depends heavily on manufacturing, which represents 20 percent of our state gross product, Gov. Fletcher's decision on who will succeed Mr. Strong is critically important. Like Secretary Strong, the new Cabinet Secretary must be a global strategist and recognize the delicate balance between free trade and protecting Kentucky manufacturing jobs.

Mr. Strong's successor must also be a good listener to assist Kentucky manufacturers who are out there every day slugging it out and competing to win in the global marketplace. Government policymakers, elected officials, economic experts, educators and other key stakeholders need to ensure that Kentucky manufacturing not only survives, but thrives, in the years ahead.

Secretary Strong has improved Kentucky's prosperity by helping build the manufacturing foundation on which we now stand. For that, Kentucky manufacturers say, "Thank you, Secretary Strong. We will miss you and wish you well."

Sincerely,

Andrew C. Meko
President and CEO
Kentucky Association of Manufacturers
Louisville