



VIEW*S* & VISIONS

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West Virginia, Land of Opportunity

Keith Burdette, Secretary
West Virginia Department of Commerce

Keith Burdette is Secretary for the West Virginia Department of Commerce and Executive Director of the West Virginia Development Office.

Mr. Burdette began his career in public service in the West Virginia House of Delegates, where he served two terms. In 1982, he was elected to the West Virginia State Senate. In 1989, Mr. Burdette was elected the 42nd President of the State Senate at the age of 34, the youngest Senate President in the state's history.

Upon leaving the legislature in 1994, Mr. Burdette formed a government relations and consulting business.

Three days after the 2000 West Virginia gubernatorial election, Governor-Elect Bob Wise asked him to join the new administration, where Mr. Burdette served for three years as Director of Policy and Legislative Relations. After leaving the administration in 2003, Mr. Burdette formed the Burdette Group consulting firm.

In November 2004, The Area Roundtable hired Mr. Burdette to manage and operate The Area Roundtable and the Wood County Development Authority. He serves as President of The Area Roundtable, which is the umbrella organization for all development activities in Wood County, including the work of the Wood County Development Authority and the Parkersburg-Wood County Development Corporation.

I just might be the luckiest guy in West Virginia.

For the past three years, I've had the honor of working alongside West Virginia Governor Earl Ray Tomblin to bring new jobs and investments to the Mountain State. I get to spend my time helping businesses from around the country and around the globe discover what those of us who live here already know: there is simply no place better than West Virginia to live, work and do business. I can't think of a better job than telling the world what makes West Virginia great.

Thanks to the hard work and foresight of our state's policy makers, businesses – large and small – are flocking to West Virginia. In the past decade, the state has gained more than \$22 billion in new business investments. Today, West Virginia hosts operations of Amazon.com, Alleward Sogefi, Bayer, DuPont, Toyota, Hino,



Workers at the Hino Motors plant in Williamstown, West Virginia help to craft one of the thousands of trucks that roll off the assembly line each year. Photos courtesy of the West Virginia Department of Commerce.

Lockheed Martin, Pratt & Whitney, Macy's, Gestamp and other global business leaders.

As the list of big-name companies continues to grow, so has our international presence. International companies now provide nearly 30,000 West Virginians with good-paying jobs. The State has development offices in three countries, and our international recruitment efforts continue to expand.

In November 2013, we announced that another global giant is making plans to locate in West Virginia. The Odebrecht Organization, a Brazilian conglomerate whose businesses range from construction, to defense, to petrochemicals, announced a Parkersburg, West Virginia location as its site of choice for an enormous new ethane cracker plant. The proposed plant will establish West Virginia as a hub, not just for natural gas production, but also for the more sophisticated business of transforming natural gas into consumer and industrial goods.

The future is bright. We're perfectly positioned for even more growth. In recent years, our state's business climate has been transformed to a degree that is nothing short of revolutionary. We've slashed the business taxes that once put us at a disadvantage to neighboring states. Since we privatized our workers' compensation system, workers' compensation premiums have plummeted, allowing businesses to free up cash for higher wages and new investments in their operations. Thanks to those and other pro-growth policies, West Virginia now stands out as a leading place to locate new business operations.

Other advantages abound. Businesses that choose West Virginia report that our workforce is our secret weapon. To put it simply, West



NGK Spark Plugs, Sissonville, West Virginia, is a subsidiary of the Japan-based manufacturer by the same name. The company is the world's leader in the production of spark plugs and oxygen sensors.



Wheeling-Nisshin, located in Follansbee, West Virginia, is one of the largest hot-dip coating mills and makes products used in the automotive, appliance, building and construction industries.

Virginians know how to work. We are renowned, and justly so, for our work ethic. We show up for work every single day. We're loyal, we're flexible, we bring well-honed skills to our jobs, and we never stop learning. In addition, we do whatever it takes to get the job done. To most West Virginians, those values are so deeply ingrained that we never think twice about them. But to employers, these characteristics add up to a workforce that can compete with any in the world.

Thanks to our abundance of natural resources, our energy costs are among the lowest in the country – and they're likely to stay that way for years to come. Our low cost of living, low crime rate and friendly people make West Virginia a wonderful place to relocate and to raise a family. And our millions of acres of unspoiled wilderness provide recreational opportunities that are unparalleled in the eastern United States.

To businesses thinking of locating here, we offer a level of service that is difficult to match. Part of that stems from our state's deep-rooted tradition of hospitality. Part of

it comes from our passionate commitment to bringing new jobs to West Virginia. Whatever the reason, one employer after another has been overwhelmed by our willingness to go the extra mile to bring them to the Mountain State. We help with everything from site selection, to financing, to the complicated logistics of getting a new operation off the ground. When executives move here to run their companies' West Virginia operations, we help them get settled in their new communities, introducing them to local schools, restaurants and entertainment. In a pinch, we've even been known to handle babysitting – whatever it takes to make West Virginia feel like home for those who choose to do business here.

It is selling points like these that make my job such a pleasure. More importantly, this convergence of strengths is moving our state into the big leagues when it comes to business recruitment. The more the world learns about the West Virginia advantage, the closer we get to our ultimate goal: good-paying, stable jobs for all West Virginians, for decades to come. ♪