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JANUARY 2020

Ensuring Our Children and Grandchildren Have a Future in West Virginia



Ed Gaunch

West Virginia Department of Commerce

In December 2018, Ed Gaunch was appointed by West Virginia Governor Jim Justice to serve as the Cabinet Secretary of the West Virginia Department of Commerce. His prior career in the insurance industry spanned three decades and included 28 years at the Carson Agency in Charleston, West Virginia, where he served as President and Chief Executive Officer for several years.

For years, West Virginia has continued to build the foundation of economic diversity in our great state. This past year, I traveled throughout our state conducting a series of listening tours with local businesses.

I spent this time speaking with, learning from and listening to business owners in West Virginia about the challenges they face and the tools they need to be successful. I am happy to report I see opportunity and diversity building all around us. I've seen first-hand how a variety of businesses are operating, expanding and developing new opportunities here. I have the utmost respect for the hard work, commitment and innovation I observed during my visits to our West Virginia businesses. The opportunity provided to me was one I am very grateful for.

The success I witnessed is supported by the forward-thinking path laid out by West Virginia Governor Jim Justice's administration and the collaboration occurring between local, state and federal stakeholders. Those stakeholders have worked together to make West Virginia a better place for us all to work, live and play. And, the hard work of those West Virginians who own and operate businesses here is a sight to see.

One example, West Virginia's aerospace and defense sector recorded some lofty achievements at home and abroad. In 2018, products and parts for the aerospace industry reported export growth at 17.8 percent over the previous year.

Another example, the technology industry continues to find West Virginia the perfect place to locate, expand and innovate. Multiple global and industry-leading technology companies have announced expansions and new operations in the Mountain State the past few years.

Agriculture continues to be an area of opportunity for West Virginia. Governor Justice called for the reactivation of the long-dormant West Virginia Agriculture Advisory Board. The Board's findings identify new opportunities in multiple agricultural sectors, including sheep, honey, wine grapes, wineries, maple sap, lavender and ginseng. Recommended actions include connecting



Photo Caption 1 Secretary Gaunch tours the ND Paper mill in Fairmont, West Virginia.

producers to market opportunities, creating infrastructure, such as cooperatives, and improving access to underused land.

And, of course, we will benefit greatly from the impact of innovative developments our state is uniquely positioned to experience in the energy sector, which will also lead to a revival of the chemical industry in West Virginia.

Our loyal, hard-working workforce is always mentioned by employers as a reason to operate a business here. West Virginia is committed to help students gain access to additional training and skill enhancements through the West Virginia Invests program. Grants through this program are available to ensure the skills and talents employers are seeking are instilled in our future workforce.

Lastly, investment in infrastructure, from roads and bridges to broadband, continues to pave the way forward as we work together to move West Virginia into the future.

West Virginia's diverse future is great. The changes many have long talked about — and worked hard for — are now occurring. I'm optimistic. I choose to be here. And, I see a future where our children and grandchildren will choose to be here as well. **W**



Photo Caption 2 Secretary Gauch visits the Wincore Windows manufacturing facility in Parkersburg, West Virginia

Photo Caption 3 As part of his "listening tour," Secretary Gauch meets with a representative from Roane General Hospital in Spencer, West Virginia.

Photo Caption 4 Secretary Gauch tours the Armacell plant in Spencer, West Virginia. The international company produces a variety of industrial insulations.