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From: Kurt Knaus [kurt@cj-llc.com]
Sent: Thursday, October 15, 2009 3:26 PM
To: IRRC
Subject: Comments on High School Graduation Standards

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2009 OCT 15 PM 3: 57

INDEPENDENT REGULATORY
COMMISSION

As the Independent Regulatory Review Commission prepares to hold a public hearing on the proposed high school graduation standards, we would like to submit remarks for consideration as part of IRRC's public input component.

The following comments are by Michael Peck, Director of External Relations for Gamesa USA. Gamesa currently employs 900 workers nationwide, including 800 in Pennsylvania, where the company has a blades manufacturing plant in Ebensburg, Cambria County, and a nacelles manufacturing plant in Fairless Hills, Bucks County. To date, the company has invested more than \$200 million in Pennsylvania.

His comments about the graduation standards follow:

Gamesa is a global corporation, one of the world's largest wind energy producers, on the cutting edge of our energy future. We are based in Spain, but several years ago expanded to the United States. The competition among states was keen, with Gamesa being in the vanguard of renewable energy, a segment of the economy with great growth potential. The company was immediately promising to bring hundreds of manufacturing jobs to build wind turbines, and looking to locate our North American headquarters.

One big reason Gamesa chose Pennsylvania is the state's skilled work force. We need workers with top-notch skills and knowledge for a wide variety of positions, and we need people able to get up to speed quickly. We found that in Pennsylvania. However, we must also be able to count on this world-class work force in the future as well. Growing our company and continuing to produce the best wind energy products in the world means constantly upgrading what we do. For that to happen, the knowledge and skills of our employees must constantly be kept up to date.

This is true not just for Gamesa, but for all companies in Pennsylvania, including many on which we rely for supplies, and to be our customers. Our success is tied in part to how well other companies in the state are doing.

Therefore, we congratulate the State Board of Education and several other key legislators and education groups for reaching an agreement on a plan to implement a set of academically rigorous statewide graduation requirements. The plan includes measuring student proficiency in key areas such as math, English and reading with meaningful end-of-course exams. These end-of-course exams, with mandated remedial help and the opportunity for retesting for students who fail any subject area, will help make sure students coming out of all Pennsylvania high schools have the knowledge and skills to succeed in college or today's high-tech work force.

Gamesa supports this well-thought-out compromise. We share concerns expressed by much of the state's business community about the quality of the state's future work force. Two of three business leaders said in a recent statewide poll they see applicants for entry-level jobs who do not possess the skills and knowledge needed to do those jobs. Eighty percent of these business leaders support a set of statewide requirements for high school graduation in Pennsylvania, along with a rigorous set of end-of-course exams to confirm students receiving diplomas are ready for college or the 21st-century work force.

This poll comes on the heels of a Pennsylvania Department of Education study that found one in three high school graduates enrolling in our State System of Higher Education universities or state community colleges must take at least one remedial course. This slows down the education process, and costs taxpayers and families \$26 million a year. Another Department of Education study finds two of five students who fail to score proficient in at least one major subject area on the 11th grade PSSA exams still graduate, with no evidence they've ever achieved the knowledge they need.

Penn State University found that only 18 of the state's 500 school districts have acceptable assessment systems in place to measure whether students have the knowledge and skills they should have when they graduate.

Gamesa's very presence in Pennsylvania is testimony to the global nature of today's work force. We are pleased to be helping to build Pennsylvania's and the nation's clean energy future. But, that future depends on workers who are capable of competing with the best around the world. As with our company earlier this decade, other businesses can choose to locate or expand in many places. If we are to encourage other companies to locate and expand in Pennsylvania, we must support the statewide graduation requirements proposal, and oppose any attempts to thwart this measure. The future of our students, our businesses, our communities, and our state's economic well-being depend on it.

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