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Opinion

Manufacturing advocate holds big promise locally

09/02/2003

When President Bush visited Ohio yesterday to make a Labor Day speech in Richfield, he brought some potentially good news for this industrialized area, hit hard by the recession. Bush announced the creation of a Cabinet-level post, the Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Manufacturing.

Ohio Sen. George Voinovich, who had advocated such action, praised Bush's announcement, saying the new post "will give manufacturers and manufacturing workers a Washington insider on their side."

The new assistant secretary would be an advocate for the interests and expansion of manufacturing and would review policies that could hurt the manufacturing sector, according to Voinovich.

That description has appeal in a state like Ohio, which is shedding jobs. More than a million Ohioans work in the manufacturing sector. But manufacturing has accounted for two-thirds of the 185,000 jobs Ohio has lost over the previous three years. Only New York and California lost more jobs than Ohio in the same period, according to Policy Matters, an Ohio think-tank.

In Lorain County, manufacturing accounts for 28 percent of all workers and remains the largest single segment of the county's work force, though it has decreased greatly in recent decades.

Growth in good-paying jobs will be a barometer of how well the new post serves the needs of Ohioans, especially in the Lorain County area.

Another key test of Bush's commitment to manufacturing will come this month. The president will be deciding whether or not to continue his controversial tariffs on certain imported steel products. Those tariffs were imposed to help the reeling domestic steel industry regroup in its fight against less-expensive, subsidized foreign competition. But Bush is under pressure to end the tariffs half-way through their planned three-year term. Tariff critics contend they push up costs for other goods. We'd want an assistant secretary for manufacturing to be pushing hard for renewal of the steel tariffs.


Creating the new post to advocate for manufacturing sounds promising. We just hope whoever fills that post lives up to its potential for helping the average worker. Otherwise, yesterday's announcement will be little more than early re-election campaign posturing.



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