

Richmond Times-Dispatch

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Letters to the Editor

Virginia needs aggressive trade authority

Editor, Times-Dispatch:

Regarding the Op/Ed column, "Economic development in Virginia," by Brett Vassey and Barry DuVal in support of Steve Landes' bill to establish the Virginia International Trade Authority: In 1987, when Virginia exported a mere \$5.6 billion worth of goods, Gov. Gerald Baliles established the Department of World Trade. Unfortunately, the department was killed after Baliles left office. This was a most unfortunate political act. An independent trade authority is needed, period. Trade has always been buried, institutionally and educationally, in larger entities. When that happens, very little trade-focused work is done.

One argument against this new authority is that the current Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP) already has trade within its portfolio. This is not a good argument. As a former governor-appointed member of the Board of Directors of the VEDP, where I served for five years, I can say without the slightest hesitation that trade has always gotten a short shrift there. The VEDP simply has too many other issues to deal with. Frankly, most board members simply do not have a global outlook or significant global experience.

In fact, for each of my five years on the board, I pushed to establish an international committee. Not once was my proposal ever allowed to come up for a vote. This speaks volumes about the focus of the board and its leadership.

It's about time for Virginia to resurrect Baliles' idea. Virginia was founded by a trading company, and in the 21st century, there really is no alternative to global trade for ensuring economic development and prosperity. Virginia needs an independent and aggressive international trade authority to foster genuine public-private cooperation in export promotion and global trade.

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