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Secretary Newson Tours Generac Power Systems, Meets Students Enrolled in Second Chance Partners for Education Program

WAUKESHA – During a tour today of Generac Power Systems, Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD) Secretary Reggie Newson met high school students enrolled in the Second Chance Partners for Education program and urged other employers to follow Generac's example in training a new generation of skilled workers.

Secretary Newson cited the "Wisconsin Working" plan that Governor Walker highlighted in his televised State of the State address Wednesday evening before both chambers of the Legislature. A key feature of the plan is the College and Workforce Readiness Council, established by executive order with tasks such as reducing high school dropout rates and encouraging students to pursue demand occupations and careers in the trades.

"Wisconsin's manufacturing sector is vital to our economic future, and to keep manufacturing strong, we need to ensure a skilled workforce now and in the future," Secretary Newson said. "Governor Walker created the council with that in mind, to focus our resources on innovative approaches like the Second Chance partnership here at Generac. By bringing employers, school districts, workforce agencies and other organizations to the table, we will ensure our state's workforce has the skills that are in demand by job creators across our state."

In 2000, Generac formed partnerships with local school districts to offer an alternative education program to high school students at risk of dropping out. Currently, seven juniors and seven seniors are in training at the Generac Power Systems Education Center. In addition to core instruction in math, science, social studies and communications, they receive training in blueprint reading, computer aided design and manufacturing operations. With its Youth Apprenticeship program, DWD is also a partner in the effort.

In addition to training future generations of skilled workers, Secretary Newson said Governor Walker's "Wisconsin Working" plan calls on DWD to meet the current workforce needs of manufacturers and other employers. The plan directs DWD to do the following:

- Double the number of job fairs in 2012 by holding at least 100 veterans and community job fairs throughout the state.
- Expand re-employment services by hiring 14 additional DWD staff to help people receiving unemployment benefits return to work quicker.
- Strengthen its partnership with the new Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) in working with employers expanding operations in Wisconsin.