

Thompson says Kenney is correct, opponents wrong

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SPRINGFIELD — Gov. James Thompson said Wednesday his Department of Conservation Director David Kenney would remain in that job despite a call by a major environmental group last month for Kenney's resignation.

Thompson described the reasons cited by the Illinois Environmental Council in seeking a forced resignation of Kenney as being "on absurd grounds."

The governor said he went over the IEC objections with Kenney "point-by-point" and "I concluded he was right and they were wrong."

Thompson made the comments when answering a question at a press conference about criticism of another state department head.

The governor said he always listened to criticism of any member of his cabinet

but didn't necessarily always agree with it.

When the IEC, which represents approximately 40 environmental and conservation groups in the state with a combined membership of 25,000-30,000 persons, first called for Kenney's resignation Nov. 20, Thompson had no response at that time.

The IEC executive board, in a letter to the governor asking him to request Kenney's resignation, claimed Kenney was not the 100 percent advocate for conservation they said he should be. The IEC also specifically criticized the department's plan for timber cutting in state parks, and other matters.

Two Telegraph area residents are on the IEC executive board which voted to request Kenney's resignation. They are Ted Woodbury of Godfrey and Dick Worthen of Alton.

IEC Executive Director Sandra McAvoy, when informed of the governor's statements backing up Kenney, said the organization was "deeply disappointed in the governor's decision."

She continued, saying " - - but we are still hopeful our action will make the Department of Conservation more responsive to the needs of all Illinois citizens who are increasingly in favor of conservation and more open spaces.

She added: the IEC "will continue to work with the department toward these goals."

Kenney was a political science professor at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale prior to his appointment by Thompson to the conservation post. Kenney is the author of a leading textbook on Illinois state government but had not previously held any fulltime post.