

Governor welcomes Chinese trade delegation

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CODY- Calling Wyoming "America's best-kept secret as to being a good place to do business," Gov. Dave Freudenthal welcomed a group of visiting Chinese business and government leaders Monday, urging them to build relationships in the state.

Freudenthal visited China in April, focusing on trade opportunities in the energy and tourism sectors.

The delegation from the China Chamber of Commerce for Import and Export of Machinery and Electronic Products stopped in Wyoming this week before scheduled visits to San Francisco and New York.

"Wyoming has great development potential. However, many Chinese companies have no idea of the investment environment in Wyoming," said Dai Yunlou, a minister from the Chinese Embassy who specializes in trade issues.

Monday's meeting followed a weekend trip by the group to Yellowstone National Park, and gave Chinese manufacturing managers a chance to learn about Wyoming's goods and services and investment opportunities in the state.

Freudenthal said his recent visit to China left him "very impressed with the dynamic nature of the economy and the people."

"Wyoming is committed to becoming more active and more of a participant in the areas of international trade, particularly in regards to energy and travel and tourism," he said.

Wyoming exported \$20 million worth of products to China in 2007, mainly transportation equipment and chemical engineering products, said Yunlou.

The U.S. Commerce Department put America's trade deficit with China in April at \$20.2 billion, and the federal government has long pressured Chinese government officials and industry leaders to help close the politically sensitive trading gap.

Growing markets

As the standard of living in China rises, so do its imports of U.S. goods, which this year could reach as high as \$80 billion, according to U.S. government estimates.

Xu Mei Fang, general manager of a fitness equipment company, said Chinese firms buy a variety of goods from American manufacturers.

Her company imports the mesh surface used in large trampolines from a Los Angeles firm that has better manufacturing equipment, allowing it to make the materials in larger sizes, she said.

Fang's company manufactures goods sold in Wal-Mart stores, but she said it was difficult to do business with the world's largest retailer.

"Their price is too low and our cost is too high," she said.

Freudenthal said he learned during his visit to China that business there is centered more around building relationships than it is in the U.S.

"Here, it's just a matter of: 'What have you got, how many and what do you want for them?' " he said.

Freudenthal said Wyoming is in the early stages of building relationships with players in Chinese government and industry, and he expects those efforts to pay off later.

A new agreement between the U.S. and China making it easier to issue more tourist visas to Chinese visitors is likely to benefit Wyoming, he said.

Freudenthal tried out a few newly learned Chinese words and phrases, including "howdy" and "warm welcome," with a Chinese translator coaching him on the fine points of vocal inflection in pronouncing "cowboy."

Speaking the language

Kent Holiday, founder of a Ten Sleep company that teaches conversational English to students in South Korea, said English-language proficiency was a major stumbling block in expanding trade with Asia.

Eleutian Technology and the Wyoming Business Council have reached an agreement to have Wyoming teachers use video teleconferencing to teach English to students in the Incheon School District in South Korea, Holiday said.

With 480,000 students in Incheon and thousands more across South Korea, Holiday said he expects Eleutian to grow from employing 216 teachers now to 2,650 by 2010.

"We are very focused on the Korean market, but we are also very interested to open communications with you in regards to coming to China," he told the group.

Chinese children begin learning English in the first grade, said Wang Hong Bo, deputy director general for U.S. affairs for the Chinese Ministry of Commerce.

"It is extremely important as the world economy becomes more globalized," she said, adding that "it is a must in their personal and professional lives."

Bo said demand is growing for native English speakers who will live in China and teach, with some colleges beginning to use distance-learning technology like Eleutian's.

The Wyoming company has great potential in China, she said.

"Two years ago, when I met with the governor, I told him we would be the largest company in Wyoming someday," Holiday said. "Right now it's Wal-Mart, which at last count had 3,850 employees here. We will catch them."

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