MS Governor Chasing Jobs In CA

Emily Wagster Pettus, Associated Press

JACKSON, Miss. (AP) — Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour says he's spending several days in California "chasing jobs" and calling on companies that have investments in his home state.

Barbour told The Associated Press in a phone interview Tuesday from California that he had already visited executives from KiOR, which is building refineries in Mississippi to convert timber products to a crude oil substitute.

The governor said he's also meeting with executives from Stion, which will manufacture solar panels in Hattiesburg; Soladigm, which announced last year that it will make energy-efficient insulated glass in Olive Branch; and Chevron, which has extensive investments on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

Barbour said he's also meeting with companies that might consider investing in Mississippi, but he wouldn't name them.

"I'm trying to keep the deal flow going," said Barbour, a Republican whose second term as governor ends in January.

Sally Williams, spokeswoman for the Mississippi Development Authority, said in a separate interview Tuesday that KiOR broke ground May 12 for a facility in Columbus, and the company expects to begin production there by the second half of 2012. She said KiOR will build a second Mississippi plant in Newton and a third one at a site yet to be chosen in the southwestern part of the state.

KiOR is based in Pasadena, Texas, and receives financial backing from Khosla Ventures, an investment company based in Menlo Park, Calif. At Barbour's request, Mississippi lawmakers voted last year to give KiOR a $75 million loan.

Stion, based in San Jose, Calif., makes thin-film panels used on residential, industrial and commercial buildings. The company was founded in 2006 and already has a plant in California.

On Jan. 5, during the opening hours of their 2011 session, Mississippi lawmakers passed a $75 million bond bill to provide a loan to Stion to help the company convert an existing industrial building in Hattiesburg for its own use. The company will repay the loan, plus interest. MDA officials said the Stion plant could bring as many as 1,000 jobs to south Mississippi over the next six years, with an average salary of about $43,000.

Williams said Stion plans to begin production in Hattiesburg by the end of this year.

Soladigm is based in Milpitas, Calif. Barbour said last year that the state provided

the company with a $40 million loan through the Mississippi Industry Incentive Financing Revolving Fund, in addition to $4 million of incentives for Soladigm to convert another existing manufacturing facility for its operations.

Soladigm expects to begin production for external sales and deliveries in second quarter of 2012, Williams said.

Chevron, based in San Ramon, Calif., announced in January that it would invest $1.4 billion to expand its Pascagoula, Miss., refinery to make premium-based oil.

Barbour said he traveled to California after attending the National Governors Association meeting last week in Utah. He said that after he finishes his business meetings, he and his wife, Marsha, will vacation in California for a few days before returning to Mississippi next week.

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