

Chinese Companies Look To AR After Beebe Trip

Allen Reed, Associated Press

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (AP) — Gov. Mike Beebe said Wednesday that two Chinese companies are close to relocating to Arkansas following his trade mission to China.

The governor returned Monday from a 12-day trip aimed at promoting job growth in Arkansas and exports to China.

Beebe, during his Wednesday press conference, would not name the 11 companies he met with, but mentioned the types of jobs the companies would bring to Arkansas. He said one company is timber-related and interested in southern Arkansas. The other is retail-related and looking at the northwest corner of the state.

"Some we're very optimistic about," Beebe said. "... Some were way so preliminary that it's questionable as to if anything will happen anytime in the near future."

Beebe listed the types of businesses he met with; Alternative energy, automobile parts, IT/Telecommunications, consumer durable goods, consumer soft goods and heavy equipment. The governor traveled to three provinces and met with U.S. and Chinese government officials.

Increasing Arkansas exports primarily focused on retail giant Walmart and meat producer Tyson Foods, Beebe said.

The governor showed off for the press some Chinese words he picked up on the trip, such as Xie Xie, meaning thank you, and Hao, meaning good.

Arkansas opened an economic development office in China, the state's fourth-largest trading partner, in 2008. Arkansas exported more than \$336 million in goods to China in 2010.

The trip by bus, train and plane was funded by nearly \$100,000 in state funds and nearly \$30,000 in private funds. The state estimated airfare to cost \$25,000, hotel stays \$34,000, and miscellaneous costs such as meals and an interpreter to run \$40,000. China was Beebe's third international business trip. He previously visited Europe and Cuba in 2009.

France could be the next stop for the governor. Beebe said French officials want to host an Arkansas delegation for four or five days this summer to talk agriculture. He said the plans are preliminary.

More immediately, Beebe said, he has a vacation planned with golfing buddies in Arizona next week.

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