

## **Otter to lead businesses on trade mission to Peru, Mexico**

By RYAN STRUYK, Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter will lead a group of Idaho-based business leaders on a weeklong trade mission to Peru and Mexico next week.

The trip features businesses ranging from producers of milk and potatoes to makers of boat docks and skin care products, aiming to increase exports to Central and South America.

The business leaders will also attend receptions with U.S. Ambassador to Peru Brian A. Nichols next Tuesday and U.S. Ambassador E. Anthony Wayne to Mexico next Thursday.

"We want to expand trade," said Laura Johnson from the Department of Agriculture, which is partnering with the Department of Commerce to sponsor the trip. "We want to create sale opportunities for our companies. That's our number one reason," she said.

She explained that taking an international trip with a high-ranking government official often helps businesses make connections faster.

"Taking along a high government official enhances their credibility," explained Johnson. "It opens the door to higher level officials, and that really is key."

Brian Jeppsen, who works for the eastern Idaho-based Hess Pumice, says that his company already does a little business with South America, but wants to do more.

"We thought that it would be a good venue not only to open up trade for us, but also to rub shoulders with other business owners from Idaho that have the same objectives," he said.

Companies cover all their own travel fees for the trip, as well as hotels, interpreters and ground transportation. They also pay an additional \$2,200 registration fee to cover renting meeting room space and the receptions with ambassadors.

That money is supplemented by roughly \$35,000 in federal grants from the U.S. Small Business Administration, which covers about half of the trip's costs.

A small number of general fund dollars are used for staff travel, but are already included in the agencies' budgets. Three staff members from the state's Department of Commerce, three staff members from the Department of Agriculture and two state police officers for security plan to accompany Otter.

The first lady, Lori Otter, will also be attending, but at her own expense.

Trade missions from the governor's office stretch back to 1981, when then-Gov. John Evans led the state's first trade mission to Beijing and Hong Kong.

Otter most recently led a trip to Moscow and St. Petersburg, Russia in November 2013. He's also led missions to Argentina, Austria, Brazil, Chile, China, Costa Rica, Cuba, South Korea, Russia, Taiwan, the United Kingdom and Vietnam.

Otter spokesman Jon Hanian says that then-Gov. Cecil Andrus often used Otter for business relations because of his extended experience as president of Simplot International.

"He's been all over the world selling stuff and building plants," Hanian said. "He speaks the lingo. It's the relationships that you build and cultivate on these trips that really pay dividends."

Otter is scheduled to return to Idaho in time for the Legislature's special session on May 18, when lawmakers hope to remedy the state's noncompliance on child support rules.

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