

Sandoval to put 3-week trade mission to work

By Michelle Rindels, AP

CARSON CITY – Gov. Brian Sandoval and more than 60 business, government and education officials recently returned from a three-week trade mission to England, Ireland, Germany, Poland and Italy. The visit included meetings with dignitaries, tours of car factories and receptions bringing together Nevada and European tourism officials.

As a result of their visit, state officials vow to put some things in place:

Exchange programs

Sandoval signed three separate agreements calling for worker exchange programs between Nevada and German advanced manufacturing companies in Leipzig, the state of Saxony, and Saxony Anhalt. Steve Hill of the Governor's Office of Economic Development said experienced workers from German companies would spend a year working in similar Nevada companies and vice versa.

The participating companies would pay workers a salary, but Nevada might pay for their airfare to and from Germany.

Hill said he hopes to kick off the program by the end of this year at companies such as aircraft parts manufacturers and companies in the medical industry. He estimates it will start with about five participants and grow over time to facilitate an exchange of best practices between companies in the two countries.

"We also think it would help create a stronger bond between Nevada and Germany over time," Hill said. "If we were doing

this on a fairly regular basis with a few handfuls of people, you'd have a communication and a cultural connection. You'd end up with 100 people who had lived in Germany for a year."

Water management partnership

Managing scarce water resources was a key discussion topic during the trade mission, especially in Dublin, Ireland, which is home to IBM's Smarter Cities initiative.

Hill said IBM and the Water Center for Excellence – a Nevada entity that connects the state's water researchers with businesses that can use their expertise – are partnering to create an energy management service.

Water agencies are huge electricity consumers because they must use power to maintain pressure in their water lines and circulate the water to prevent stagnation. The partnership will explore more efficient ways to use energy, drawing on massive amounts of raw data about electricity use and water pressure collected by the Southern Nevada Water Authority.

Hill said the collaboration could lead to a commercial software and data analytics service that could help other water authorities optimize their electricity use.

If successful, the project could be lucrative for the water authority and bring royalties to the research institutions working on it. It's unclear when the software might be ready for market, Hill said.

Better workforce development

Sandoval praised the workforce training initiatives he saw in Germany and among automakers there.

He said the trip inspired him to move Nevada state Superintendent Dale Erquiaga into a newly created job as the governor's Chief Strategy Officer. Erquiaga's role will be implementing legislation passed in the spring and ensuring

that Nevada's K-12 education programs and workforce development efforts align to meet the needs of companies moving to the state.

"For a governor to take a state superintendent of schools directly into the office, that should send a very strong message about how much K-12 education and workforce development ... is a priority for me," Sandoval said.

More Polish connections

Trade mission attendees say they were impressed by Poland, which has become aggressive in developing its economy since the fall of Communism.

"Their appreciation and enthusiasm for capitalism and entrepreneurism is contagious," Hill said.

An agreement Sandoval signed clears the way for Poland to open a trade office at the University of Nevada, Reno's Innovation Center. The partnership aims to help Polish businesses break into the American market and vice versa.

"They feel they have a lot of companies in Poland that would want to move here, but it's hard for them to go in cold," Hill said.

The Polish American Chamber of Commerce also announced it will move its annual conference to Las Vegas from Chicago.

Another trade mission to Poland is in the works. The Governor's Office of Economic Development recently received a \$300,000 grant from the U.S. Small Business Administration that will use to help business representatives visit Poland in May 2016. There will be a trip to China in March 2016.