

“Governor hopes to build on trip’s connections”
06/05/2005

By: Jennifer Ginsberg
The Charleston Gazette

Nagoya, Japan – Gov. Joe Manchin said he intends to “kick it up a notch” when he returns to Charleston after last week’s trade mission in Japan. He has pitched the state and told Japanese executives time and time again, “West Virginia is open for business.” He’s personally invited executives to visit the Mountain State to discuss business, look over land and take in the state’s scenery. He’s even told businessmen they could jump off a bridge in West Virginia – referring to the New River Gorge Bridge activities during Bridge Day.

“Now, the follow-up is going to be the proof of the pudding,” he told delegation members during a wrap-up dinner Friday. “We’re going to follow up.” He said he’ll send executives thank you letters and also call them directly. Charleston lawyer Ellen Cappellanti said the group has to figure out a non intrusive way to keep West Virginia on the Japanese executives’ minds. She suggested adding them to The Greenbrier and Snowshoe Resort mailing lists and sending them West Virginia publications. “Let’s not lose the momentum,” she urged. Manchin also said he’d like to visit the state’s European office in Munich, Germany, and visit with other Japanese companies in New York City. While he didn’t announce any new jobs during the trip, Manchin said many of the executives he talked to were very interested in the state. He felt they would consider it when it came time to expand.

Patience and persistence has been the week’s theme. Japanese companies tend to have more long-term view of doing business and value relationships when making business decisions. Manchin and Sen. Jay Rockefeller, D-WV, stressed the importance of the Japanese/West Virginia partnership in every speech this week. “You can’t make them make a move. You’ve asked for a sale,” said Larry Puccio, Manchin’s chief of staff during a farewell meeting with Rockefeller on Thursday evening. “These people know our staff. Let them know we’re committed 100 percent.”

Mark Prince of J.P. Morgan suggested that West Virginia needs to try to be an early state to attract the new wave of robotics work that comes from research and development. Manchin and Rockefeller talked with Toyota executives and would like to see the company open a research and development facility in West Virginia for its hybrid and fuel cell technologies. Charleston lawyer Tom Heywood pointed out that nine years ago there weren’t as many Japanese companies in West Virginia as there are now. Seventeen companies now have West Virginia facilities.

Plus, the state didn’t have the marketing tools like a promotional video that showcases the state’s industry and recreation, he said. “Now, we’ve gained enough critical mass that we’re in a new phase of the relationship,” he said. “Now, it’s not just promises – we have results to prove it.”

