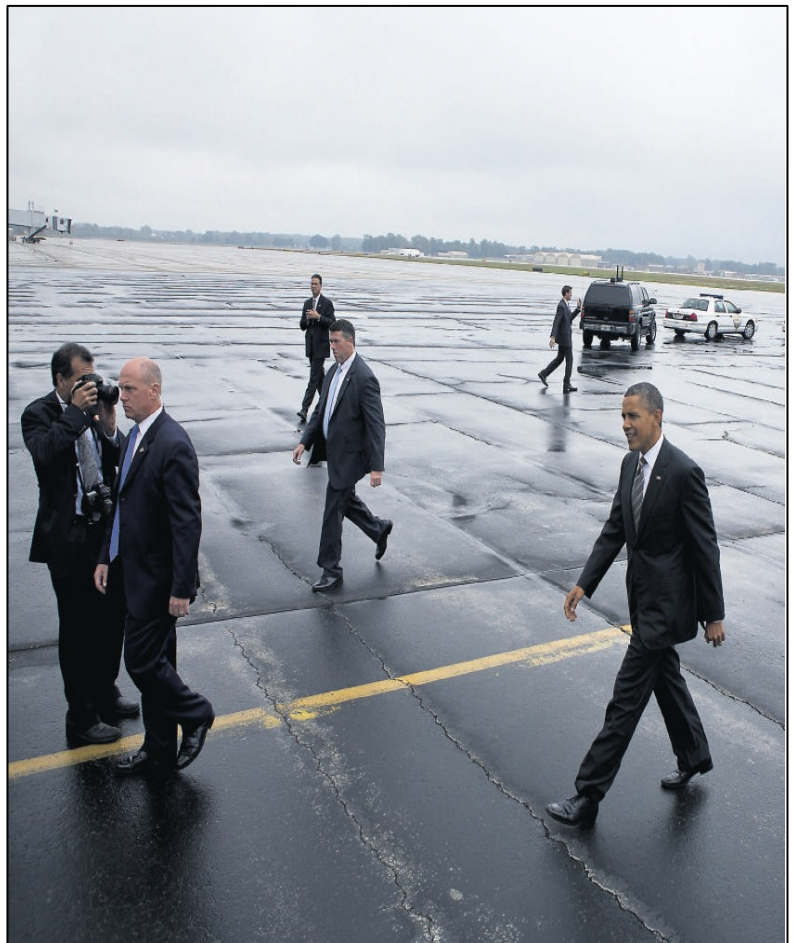


Ohio a suitor to China despite hard election rhetoric

By Louise With
October 2, 2012

While Barack Obama and Mitt Romney vie to scold the Chinese, yesterday a mayor in Ohio's Rust Belt targeted China investors

There is bustle in Toledo in Northwest Ohio. And it's not because of Barack Obama and Mitt Romney, who have diligently visited the important swing state the past few weeks. No, it's because of something many cities in the U.S. Midwestern rust belt only dream about: the wealthy Chinese are visiting. More than 100 Chinese business people and officials are in town to meet with local politicians, university and business leaders—and not only for themselves, but to look at the area and its potential. Some of them have met Toledo Mayor Michael Bell on one of his trips to China. Others have met the city's team, who travel around the Chinese provinces to sell Ohio. Now they are here, in order to see if there is support for sales talks: a skilled workforce, good transportation links and a large market within reach.



Recent acquisitions

Toledo already has experience with China. In 2011, Chinese investors bought a group of restaurants in the city along with another plot of land where they plan a housing and retail project. Additionally, a local business hotel with Chinese owners serve up home-style cuisine as risgrød and steamed buns for breakfast. Up in the ballroom, Mayor Bell and other city leaders openly make efforts to welcome the guests. They have all learned to say "ni hao" and "xie xie"—hello and thank you in Chinese. There hired interpreters who translate all and speak simultaneously, and before the speaking begins, the Chinese delegation leaders are presented and

hailed as sports heroes. Businessman Simon Guo, who has settled in Toledo and plays a central role in the city's China-offensive, calls several of the guests "good friend" and "brother". The Chinese translator thanks the manager of Youbo Pharmaceutical, calling Toledo's leaders "angels who protect us and help us invest ". It's all about "building relationships," says Mayor Michael Bell. "Wherever you are from, I think that most can share their brand, if you believe what they say. There are people from many cities and regions traveling to China to try their luck. However, if they do not understand that they need to make contacts, or do not take it seriously, they will never get anything out of it," he says. When Bell was mayor in 2010, he took over a budget that was on the "edge of disaster". "I got the call from Simon Guo, who was sitting with some Chinese business people at a local restaurant. I took down notes and listened to their ideas and thought: 'We are in deep crisis. Why not try?'"

Exceeds wildest imagination

Two years later, the mayor receives over 100 guests from China, surpassing his wildest imagination. Even if the results are still modest in dollar terms—approximately 10 million in investments—they have three factory projects in the pipeline, says Dean Monske, leader of Toledo's development organization, RPG. "This is just the beginning. The Chinese are still far behind compared to Europeans when it comes to investment in the United States. With over 100 potential investors in the city, we have a very good start," said Monske. In the hall is Mr. Fu Xingyong, raised in Beijing and visiting the United States for the first time. "My business includes those that are active in the sector. I think there are good opportunities here. I am very excited about what's ahead, and did not expect that all would be so cordial. I look forward to seeing more of the city and to forming an impression of whether the citizens of Toledo are just as intent on cooperation with China as their leaders. "