Northwest governors beat same path to Japan's door

By SCOTT WILSON
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OLYMPIA — Washington Gov. Booth Gardner isn't the only Northwest governor courting business with the Japanese this month.

Oregon Gov. Victor Atiyeh will be hot on his heels.

Gardner left Monday on a trade tour of Japan's key cities and factories. Oregon's delegation will be following much the same path.

The two governors will not meet.

Gardner, his wife Jean and most of his entourage of 35 will fly out of Osaka bound for South Korea Saturday — the same day that Atiyeh, his wife Dolores and about a dozen other Oregonians will arrive in Tokyo.

The Japanese who meet with the two whirlwind tours from the U.S. Northwest will hear much the same tune: We have a beautiful state whose rugged mountains and unspoiled coastline are just across the Pacific and would eagerly welcome new Japanese businesses.

P.S.: Pay no attention to that other delegation.

Gardner's party is one of three fishing for business in the Far East, with an agriculturally minded group having begun a Taiwan visit Sept.14 and a tourism mission already returned from Japan. A total of 72 public and private business boosters are involved.

Atiyeh is serving double-duty in Japan. First, he will spend a week leading three or four other governors around Japan on a National Governors Conference tour. Then, joined by his entourage, he will spend another week pushing Oregon as the best northwestern site for expansion-minded Japanese business.

The Oregonians will return to Salem Oct. 10.

Both delegations will spend time in Tokyo and Osaka, where each will speak with representatives of Japanese firms.

Both will also host meetings of their respective Japan clubs — private associations of Japan-based American business people who maintain ties with their home state.

Spokesmen from both governors' offices admit there's extremely intense competition between the neighboring states for new trade opportunities and new Japanese investment in the Northwest. The identities of many companies that either Gardner or Atiyeh will visit are wrapped in secrecy.

The competition in trade and investment missions is starkly contrasted by the partnership between Washington and Oregon in promoting tourism from the Far East. A joint tourism mission returned from Japan only last week.

Touting Washington and Oregon as "America's New West Coast Playground," a total of 20 tourism boosters from both states conducted a series of seminars and workshops to let Japanese travel agents know there is more to the U.S. than Honolulu and Las Vegas.

Clint Hyde, trade marketing director for the state Tourism Development Division, said the joint tourism mission was a big success.

But the tourism boosters don't call the Northwest by that geographical description, he said, because in Japanese minds that word conjures up the cold, windswept coast of northwest Japan.

Promoting the healthy, clean Washington-Oregon environment, the tourism mission tried to attract Japanese travelers to temptations of kayaking, hiking, hot-air ballooning, fishing, river rafting and especially wind-surfing, which Hyde said is quite the rage in Japan.

Washington has historically benefited more from Japanese tourism than Oregon, partially because four major airlines fly from Tokyo to Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, while only recently have plans been made for a Tokyo-Portland flight.

Still, the two states get only about 5 percent of America-bound Japanese tourists — about 90,000 in 1985 — with the vast majority opting for "sun and fun" tours to Hawaii or California, Hyde said.

The cooperation that marked the tourism efforts has no role in the trade and investment competition, however.

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