

Paul LePage plans trade trip to Brazil, Chile

The trade mission, similar to trips by Govs. King and Baldacci, will include Maine businesspeople.

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Gov. Paul LePage plans to lead a trade mission to Brazil and Chile this fall, the first visit by a Maine governor to South America since 1997.

Plans for the trip were firming up Monday and announced Tuesday by the Maine International Trade Center in Portland.

The trade mission, from Nov. 12-19, is being organized by the U.S. Department of Commerce along with the trade center.

Representatives of several small to midsize Maine companies are expected to accompany the governor on the mission. All expenses, including those incurred by LePage and his staff, will be paid for by participating businesses.

Past trade missions led by Govs. John Baldacci and Angus King have generated \$5 million to \$20 million in new sales for Maine companies, according to Janine Bisailon-Cary, the state's director of international trade and president of the trade center.

Bisailon-Cary said having a governor lead a mission enhances the visibility of both participating companies and the state.

"It puts Maine on the map," she said. "It's always a great experience for a sitting governor and it solidifies their knowledge of all that Maine businesses have to offer in the world market."

Bisailon-Cary said there is no question that Brazil offers extensive trade opportunities.

"Brazil is definitely a mammoth market," she said. "In the global marketplace, most experts would say that Brazil is a no-brainer because it has seen such great growth."

Brazil has the world's eighth-largest economy and fifth-largest population. Over the past decade, Brazil has solidified its position as South America's economic engine, with an annual gross domestic product of more than \$2 trillion.

Maine exported \$32.8 million in products – mostly pulp and paper – to Brazil in 2010.

The Chilean economy has grown rapidly as well – 5.3 percent in 2010 – and with the U.S. and Chile Free Trade Agreement in effect since 2003, American exports have expanded by 300 percent.

Trade opportunities in Chile include biopharma and medical equipment, mining products, furniture and consumer goods.

"Chileans value the quality and integrity of U.S.-made products, and with the free trade agreement and low U.S. dollar we have advantageous duty and exchange rates in place for the mission," Bisailon-Cary said.

Every year, the trade center tracks and analyzes global market trends for Maine businesses.

When the organization surveyed Maine businesses about which global markets they would like to explore, Brazil and Chile came out on top. The data was sent to the governor's office.

"We have received great interest in these developing markets from Maine's internationally active businesses," LePage said in a prepared statement. "I look forward to leading this mission to not only open up new markets, but to attract investment and jobs into our state."

Bisailon-Cary said at least 10 Maine businesses must commit to the mission for the trip to be feasible.

Only businesses that stand to benefit from trade with the two countries will be invited. She declined to identify potential participants, saying many companies are still finalizing plans.

The trade mission itinerary will include stopovers in Santiago, Chile, and in Sao Paulo, Brazil.

Maine businesses will visit private companies, meet with Chilean and Brazilian leaders, receive market briefings and be matched with potential business partners.

The cost for each company averages about \$6,900.

Past Maine trade missions, which have gone to such places as England, Korea, Japan, Ireland, Italy, France and Spain, have proven to be highly successful.

An energy trade mission to Spain and Germany a couple of years ago produced more than \$20 million in new sales for Maine companies, Bisailon-Cary said.

"That's all new money coming into the state and it opened new markets for Maine businesses," she said.