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Hello Global Detroit: China is calling

AJOONI SETHI | TUESDAY, DECEMBER 04, 2012



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"I would have liked to see the Great Wall," jokes Brian Connors, speaking of his recent trip to China with Governor Rick Snyder during last week's Global Detroit event. Call it "the Detroit-China Connection."

In seven days, Governor Snyder and his team visited five cities and held thirty-seven meetings.

"It was clear," Connors says to a diverse room of Metro Detroit global enthusiasts, "the focus of the trip was more and better jobs in Michigan." Connors, who lived for eight years in China building small businesses, currently serves as the Chinese International Business Development Manager for the State of Michigan. He is happy to have returned to an administration in his home state which understands and embraces the potential of globalization to revitalize Michigan's economy.

Governor Snyder's second trade mission in China since taking office in 2011 marked the opening of the Michigan China Center and engaged provinces beyond the usual economic hubs, Beijing and Shanghai. Governor Snyder's actions show resolve to build and sustain long-term relationships in China. The governor aims to transform Michigan into a destination for Chinese trade, investment, and tourism.

During last Tuesday's event, Connors noted that, though many Americans remain skeptical of trade relations with China, China's potential as a market for Michigan goods and services is simply too large to ignore. The population of 1.3 billion continues to grow and urbanize, creating increased demand for western goods, such as Michigan agriculture. To date, Michigan exports to China have doubled in

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such as Michigan agriculture. In fact, Michigan exports to China have doubled in the last three years alone.

As for the notion that engaging with China means "sending jobs overseas," Connors remarks that, while this may have been the case a decade ago, the trend has actually reversed.

"Now, they're not going to be making shoelaces in Michigan," Connor says, but Michigan offers the skilled and specialized talent that Chinese companies require to compete globally.

Terrence Willis, President of IC Datacom, has lived in Detroit his whole life and also participated in the Global Detroit event.

"There is absolutely nothing stopping us," Willis says, "There is no obstacle. And I know that might sound naïve, but I believe it. It's just a matter of changing the way people are seeing things, and the best way to do that is by taking that step yourself and showing them, creating something out of what others see as nothing. There's just so much here."

Willis believes that revitalizing Detroit's economy means transforming perspective, thinking creatively, and targeting messages about the opportunities in Detroit to the audiences who can fully tap into and mobilize Detroit's resources.

"We have a high unemployment rate," Connors comments on Chinese companies outsourcing to Detroit, "Which translates to business opportunity." And Governor Snyder wants to capitalize on that opportunity, slowly and steadily building relationships in China that will connect buyers and suppliers in both nations, bring in foreign investment, create more trade opportunities, and prepare our people and our products to be more globally competitive.

While acknowledging that China and the U.S. have a long and complicated history, Connor has found parties on both sides to welcome new partners and new opportunities that show promise to bring jobs and business, and says he "sees the possibility of winning in China."

Yet, Governor Snyder's initiatives alone cannot turn Michigan into a global competitor. Ultimately, that is why Global Detroit, and--Global Michigan, our statewide partner--seek to assist building global relationships right here in our own region.

Charles E. Thompson, who attended the event, stressed the importance of individuals taking responsibility to build supporting infrastructure in the state. "I want to bridge the gap between the black community and China," said Thompson, who has plans to take entrepreneurs from Metro Detroit on semi-regular trade missions to China.

At the event, Thompson connected with Earl DeShazor, a Michigan-based entrepreneur who also has interest in connecting Michigan and Chinese buyers and suppliers. Thompson, who has already traveled to China, says he will take DeShazor on his first trip. To that, DeShazor replies, "not if I take you first."

In order to recreate Michigan's and Detroit's economy, we must not only create opportunity but also creatively see opportunity, tapping into the potential of our neighbors both down the block and across the ocean.

"The whole pizza is better when it is more than just dough," says Willis.
"Revitalization is about accepting diversity."



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Global Detroit's Steve Tobocman closed the session with these comments. "We certainly know the impact of having our manufacturing base move abroad. But there are new opportunities, and by creating a welcoming environment and the global infrastructure that will allow those investments to thrive right here in Detroit, we can move each other forward."

To learn more about how opportunity exists on your block, go [here](#).

Ajooni Sethi manages communications for Global Detroit.

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