



Governor Riley To Lead Economic Mission To Israel

Alabama Governor Bob Riley will lead a delegation of Alabama business leaders on a trade mission to Israel, September 9-16, in an effort to foster economic development and trade. The mission is organized by the Alabama Development Office, the American-Israel Chamber of Commerce, the Birmingham Jewish Federation, and Tech Birmingham. The state's contingent will travel to Tel Aviv, Israel's commercial center, an industrial park in the city of Rosh Ha'ayin, and a business incubator site in Galilee. Israel's high-tech industries as well as its defense-related and security-related industries will be targeted for special attention.

"This is a great opportunity to create new jobs for Alabamians," Governor Riley said. "We'll promote Alabama and look for companies interested in opening new operations in our state and new trade opportunities for Alabama companies. Our message is that Alabama is open for business and can offer much to Israeli industries and high-tech companies."

"Israel is particularly strong in the defense and security industry sectors, and there are good opportunities to grow business partnerships, but our efforts won't focus exclusively in these areas. We'll also approach Israeli businesses that are on the leading edge in the life sciences, such as pharmaceuticals and medical device manufacturers," said Jim Tolbert, a Birmingham Jewish Federation volunteer leader, who is the chairman of the jobs mission.

There are strong ties that already exist between Alabama and Israel. In 1943, Alabama became the first state in the nation to pass a resolution supporting the right of Jewish people to an independent homeland. Currently, Alabama is one of 22 states that have cooperative trade agreements with Israel. The agreement was signed in 1997, and the following year Alabama's exports of manufactured goods to Israel increased a remarkable 306 percent. In 2004, Alabama exported \$26.7 million worth of goods to Israel, an increase of almost 48 percent over the previous year.

In addition, Alabama companies benefit from U.S. military contracts with Israel. Companies in Alabama received \$1.35 million in contracts in 2003, according to information from the American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise.

"Governor Riley's strong sales skills and extensive business background have proven effective in previous visits overseas," said Neal Wade, Director of the Alabama Development Office, referencing earlier trips made by the Governor to Germany and France that helped Alabama successfully recruit Kronospan and EADS. "We believe this mission will again deliver positive results for Alabama."

Fortune magazine recently reported that Israel's gross domestic product grew by 4.2 percent in 2004, double Europe's growth rate. "After a three-year slump brought on by the intifada and compounded by the bursting of the global tech bubble, Israel's economy is growing again, and its success has implications for both the U.S. and the entire Middle East," the magazine reported in its June issue.

Business and political leaders from throughout the state will accompany the Governor. ***If you are interested in participating, please contact Jim Tolbert at jet@vc.edu or 205.283.7416.***