

Prairie premiers talk trade

BY JAMES WOOD, THE STARPHOENIX JANUARY 31, 2009

Premier Brad Wall and his Prairie colleagues are heading to the United States to tout expanded trade with Western Canada just as the very concept appears to be coming under attack.

Wall will be in Chicago next Tuesday with Manitoba Premier Gary Doer. Alberta's Ed Stelmach will join the pair Wednesday through Friday in Houston.

While the visit was hatched at last year's western premiers meeting in Prince Albert, it is now taking place amid growing fear in Canada about a new tide of protectionism in the U.S. -- most notably an economic stimulus bill that passed the House of Representatives this week requiring infrastructure projects to use American steel.

"It's going to be very timely," Wall told reporters at the legislature.

"We need to go down with a message that says, 'Look, it was this kind of protectionism that precipitated the Great Depression. This is a march to insanity if the countries of the world start throwing up these kinds of barriers at a time such as this.' "

White House press secretary Robert Gibbs said Friday the provision in the bill would be reviewed by President Barack Obama's administration.

Wall said there will be no "sabre-rattling" on the part of the premiers.

Wall said he will mainly be talking about the benefits to the United States of Saskatchewan agriculture and energy exports, the latter likely to play a key role if the U.S. intends to end its dependence on Middle Eastern oil.

He said 35 states have increased their trade surplus with Canada since the advent of free trade with Canada and there appears to be a misperception that the issue of "outsourcing" American jobs is related to Canada.

On the premiers' agenda will be meetings with Chicago Mayor Richard Daley and Shell Oil president Marvin Odum, among others, as well as speaking engagements and interviews with journalists.

The trip was originally planned to include British Columbia Premier Gordon Campbell, but scheduling conflicts left him unable to attend.

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