

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

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Traveling to Promote Trade

Early last month I received a call from the governor's office with a request I could not refuse. Would I accompany a delegation on a mission to Europe? As a result, for ten days in May, I took part in a trade mission Germany and Switzerland led by Lieutenant Governor Jane Swift. A day at each end for transatlantic travel left eight days for meetings, receptions and sightseeing, and I'd like to share my impressions in the Byline while they are fresh.

In addition to the lieutenant governor and me, the official delegation consisted of a MassPort official, the director of the Mass. Office of International Trade and several support staff. Business delegates included the owner of an environmental company, an MIT official, at UMass professor and several other individuals. The focus of the trip was information technology, a strength of Bavaria and Basel, and a growing factor in Berlin.

Lieutenant Governor Swift repeated the mantra at every opportunity that Massachusetts is open for business, we want partners and we welcome their participation. She made news headlines in each city by signed cooperative agreements with the local economic and political leaders.

The other delegates focused on our own specialties, though my task was challenged by the lack of an easy translation of "state representative." After I saw the Berlin legislature identified as *abgerodnente*haus, it became much easier to establish my credential as an advocate for our Pioneer Valley economy.

The companies we met with are definitely working on an international scale, and we found that California was our strongest competitor for a United States presence. We stressed our relative proximity to Europe, and they acknowledged that they feel more kinship with the people of Massachusetts than Californians.

A repeating theme of meetings in Munich was the need for a direct air connection between Boston and Munich. Frankfurt is the closest, connecting city at this time, and we feel that commercial travel to Munich would benefit our state. The strong support from both designation points may convince Lufthansa to add such a flight next year.

Berlin was the mid-point of the trip, and it represents a unique investment situation. The unification of Germany is visibly in progress, and construction cranes define the city skyline, but the economy is definitely in transition from communism to capitalism. Nonetheless, all of the business delegates made successful contacts in the region.

Our visit to Basel, Switzerland, scheduled after an invitation to the lieutenant governor during Boston's Bio-2000, offered meetings with that city's pharmaceutical industry.

Each day contained an average of four appointments, but our hosts in each city made sure that we saw their historic castles and museums. We really needed little more than a walk through the ancient cities to appreciate their history, though I did take a little extra time to see the remains of the Berlin Wall.

A series of events illustrated the fact that we all share the same concerns. Switzerland was holding a referendum on accepting economic treaties with their neighbors in the European Union, and the arguments pro and con were similar to our debate on the China vote in Congress (The treaties were approved). Basel and Munich were both expanding their airports, but the neighbors objected to a lengthened runway just as Bostonians are fighting Logan's expansion.

In meeting after meeting, similarities between our two economies were noted. We share low unemployment and high costs, costs that are acceptable because of our skilled workforces. The business leaders whether from Massachusetts, Germany, or Switzerland

were reaching across borders to compete in this new century. And our state is positioned to excel in the world market.