China Promises Clean Energy Access

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BEIJING (AP) — U.S. Commerce Secretary John Bryson said Chinese officials promised foreign technology suppliers equal access to their booming clean energy industry in trade talks amid pressure to revive global growth.

Bryson said the officials told him Monday the country will invest $1.7 trillion over the next five years in clean energy and other emerging technologies. He said they pledged a "level playing field" for U.S. and other foreign suppliers.

Beijing is spending heavily to develop wind, solar and other clean energy, both to curb demand for imported oil and gas and to create profitable industries. But business groups complain it is improperly supporting Chinese technology suppliers in violation of free-trade pledges and trying to limit foreign access to promising fields.

Chinese officials said foreign producers of new energy vehicles will be eligible for subsidies on an equal basis with local rivals, the U.S. Trade Representative's office said in a statement. It said Beijing promised not to require them to help Chinese partners set up new brands or hand over technology — two conditions automakers worried might be imposed as a condition of being allowed to make or sell cars in China.

Access to China's markets for high-tech goods is especially sensitive for the United States and other Western economies that want technology exports to shore up

flagging economic growth and cut high unemployment.

"They intend to provide a fair and level playing field in those industries," Bryson said after the two-day meeting of the U.S.-Chinese Joint Committee on Commerce and Trade in the southwestern city of Chengdu.

The top Chinese envoy, Vice Premier Wang Qishan, "said there would be significant opportunities to Chinese and U.S. and other foreign companies," Bryson said.

That pledge also covers high-end equipment manufacturing, energy-saving and environmental technologies, biotechnology, information technology, alternative energy and advanced materials, according to the U.S. Trade Representative.

The U.S.-Chinese committee aims to defuse trade tensions by focusing on individual policy disputes. Previous meetings have produced pledges by Beijing to lower barriers to imports of American beef and to fight rampant Chinese software piracy.

This week's meeting came amid mounting demands by some American lawmakers for punitive tariffs on Chinese goods if Beijing fails to ease exchange-rate controls. They say China's yuan is kept undervalued, giving its exporters an unfair trade advantage and wiping out jobs in the United States.

Also Monday, the two governments announced agreements to improve cooperation on intellectual property, technology, energy, trade statistics and business relations.

Beijing promised to take more steps to combat rampant software piracy by promoting use of legal software by local governments and companies, the U.S. statement said. It said they would launch a joint effort next year to stop online sales of counterfeit goods.

Earlier Monday, Wang appealed to U.S. envoys for cooperation to revive the global economy, emphasizing shared goals instead of disputes over currency and other irritants.

"We are facing a very serious global economic crisis," Wang said. "Ensuring economic health is the responsibility of every nation. Unbalanced progress is better than balanced decline."

Leaders of the world's biggest and second-biggest economies have pledged to work together to shore up global growth but ties have been strained by complaints about China's exchange-rate controls and access to its markets. Beijing is uneasy about Washington's moves to expand its political and military presence in Asia.

Bryson warned earlier Monday that American lawmakers and businesspeople "are moving toward a more negative view" of U.S.-Chinese trade ties.

President Barack Obama pressed Premier Wen Jiabao, China's top economic official, over Beijing's currency controls in a meeting last week on the sidelines of an Asian economic regional gathering in Indonesia.

The U.S. trade deficit with China hit a monthly high of $29 billion in August and is on track to surpass last year's $273 billion, the highest ever recorded with a single country.

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