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Yeltsin visit to accent Northwest trade

By STUART GLASCOCK

SEATTLE, Sept 28 (UPI) – Russian President Boris Yeltsin’s visit to Seattle Thursday will mark the city as America’s gateway to Russia, Washington state trade and government officials said Wednesday.

Yeltsin will wrap up a four-day U.S. trip with a tour of The Boeing Co. and a speech urging Northwest businesses to invest in Russia.

This trip will reinforce that Seattle and Washington are America’s gateway to Russia, said Sam Kaplan, who is coordinating Yeltsin’s visit for the Trade Development Alliance of Greater Seattle.

Yeltsin is the first Russian head of state to visit Seattle. Washington state political leaders, who point out how trade-dependent the state is, have praised Yeltsin’s visit to woo Western capitalists.

“Russia is one of our closest foreign markets with tremendous potential for trade in fishing, timber and a host of other goods and services,” Seattle Mayor Norm Rice said.

Trade between the Pacific Northwest and Russia is growing faster than any other region of the United States, Rice said.

Yeltsin addressed the United Nations General Assembly Monday, suggesting it was time for a “serious and fruitful dialogue” on key issues with U.S. President Bill Clinton. The Russian president then spent Tuesday and Wednesday in talks with the administration about eliminating nuclear weapons and investing in Russia.

Yeltsin has said his country is developing a stable economic environment that will prove lucrative for investors.

During Yeltsin’s Northwest stopover, the U.S. government’s Overseas Private Investment Corp. is expected to announce about \$51 million support for three Seattle-based companies with ventures in the Russian Far East. Contracts are to be signed to help mining equipment maker NC International Co., All Alaskan Seafoods Inc. and Mic-Com Communications Inc., said Ruth Harking, president of OPIC.

The Port of Seattle’s trade with the republics of the former Soviet Union, mostly Russia, has grown from \$3.4 million to \$61.3 million during the past five years, port authorities said.

The top U.S. commodities exported to Russia in 1993 were industrial equipment, heavy machinery, beef, pork poultry, dairy products and metal products. The top imports were frozen fish, prepared food, clothes and minerals such as lead, nickel, tin and zinc.

The Seattle-Tacoma International Airport also has more air connections to Russia than any major airport on the east coast.

After his two-day summit with Clinton, Yeltsin will try to persuade Northwest businesses to set up operations in Russia. Analysts said it will be a tough sell to get them to jump into a chaotic and proven marketplace.

Yeltsin will not have much time for cutting deals. He is scheduled to tour The Boeing Co.’s Everett complex, where Boeing’s newest jetliner, the 777, is in production. He is scheduled to address a luncheon for about 1,000 business and political leaders and take a quick boat tour of the Seattle harbor before his flight home.