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Medvedev Gets Governator Backing

By The Moscow Times

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President Dmitry Medvedev meeting California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and former U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz in San Francisco on Tuesday. **Dmitry Astakhov**

President Dmitry Medvedev won Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's backing for his bid to build Russia's own Silicon Valley late Tuesday, saying he aims to create "powerful" ties with California companies.

"My goal is not just to see what it is like. This is not an excursion," Medvedev told Schwarzenegger in San Francisco. "I would like that as a result of this trip we start full-fledged relations that will lead to establishing powerful cooperation."

The Kremlin leader arrived in San Francisco on June 22 for a three-day visit that will include talks with U.S. President Barack Obama in Washington. Medvedev was scheduled to meet June 23 with executives from companies including Apple, Cisco Systems and Twitter.

Schwarzenegger said he would put together a trade mission of technology executives to travel to Moscow to help with the Skolkovo project "in any way possible."

The president in March asked oil and metals billionaire Viktor Vekselberg to oversee the creation of a Russian Silicon Valley in the Moscow suburb of Skolkovo, where tax breaks and other incentives will be offered to lure investment to spur innovation and production of high-technology products.

Vekselberg, whose assets include a stake in TNK-BP, said June 22 that Cisco would join Skolkovo and that Boeing would sign an accord to do the same on June 24. Cisco will establish a research and development center in Skolkovo to support innovative products, Vekselberg said.

Google chief executive Eric Schmidt agreed to join Skolkovo's board and will meet Medvedev's delegation during the California leg of the U.S. trip, Vekselberg said.

"We are working out formats of cooperation," Vekselberg said. "Signing won't happen as part of this visit, but I think it will in the future. The result of this visit will be the establishment of qualitatively new relations between Skolkovo and our partners."

After arriving, Vekselberg pledged funding to maintain a Californian park that Russia established as a Pacific Ocean trading post in the 19th century.

Vekselberg's Renova will donate at least $1 million a year to support Fort Ross, the billionaire said in San Francisco after signing an accord with Schwarzenegger on June 22.

Operating hours at Fort Ross have been slashed as California struggles to stem its record budget deficit. Fort Ross was established by the Russian-American Company, a commercial hunting and trading venture chartered by the tsarist government. Russians inhabited the fort from 1812 to 1841.

Viktor Vekselberg said he has "about $1 billion" invested in U.S. projects, including in Silicon Valley.

Vekselberg, via his Columbus Nova fund, also co-owns White Energy Holding, an ethanol producer with plants in Texas and Kansas, he said in an interview Tuesday. That investment "has been very difficult so far, given the financial crisis," said Vekselberg.

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