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## Chinese investments in an Idaho gold mine just one way the state hopes to revive its economy

**Can a charismatic Taiwanese businessman, the entrepreneurial son of Russian immigrants and a North End couple who own a ghost town help revive the state's economy? Butch Otter is counting on it.**

BY ROCKY BARKER - [rbarker@idahostatesman.com](mailto:rbarker@idahostatesman.com)

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Chinese businessmen and their families sat in the aisles and stood along the wall of a crowded Shanghai hotel conference room to hear Gov. Butch Otter invite them to move themselves and their money to Idaho.

These wealthy families had thrived in the economic reform that encouraged private investment and in 30 years turned China into the second-largest economy in the world.

Thanks to the efforts of a flamboyant Asian businessman, these families were being lured by the chance to invest in an Idaho gold mine that was once worked by Chinese miners - and by the opportunity to offer their children a new life in the United States.

"I admit the project is attractive," Lu Yue, a woman who attended a Beijing seminar, told the China Daily newspaper. "Gold is always precious. Times change, but it keeps its value."

By the end of Otter's whirlwind weeklong trade mission in June, 20 investors had signed on to invest a total of \$10 million that estimates say could create 200 jobs in Idaho. It was the first of what the state hopes will be a program that creates 1,200 jobs and brings \$60 million a year to Idaho.

If it succeeds, much of the credit will go to Otter and Taiwanese businessman Raymond Ku, who made millions helping wealthy Chinese leave Hong Kong in the 1980s and, through his company Westlink, helps people across Asia immigrate to various countries.

But even if the program funnels dollars - and jobs - into Idaho, not everyone is happy about it. Some worry about selling off Idaho's treasure to Chinese.

"I think we've got to have the American people, who are American citizens, have the first opportunity to develop a business and make the country stronger," said Idaho House Majority Caucus Chair Ken Roberts of Donnelly.

### A SPOTTY FEDERAL PROGRAM

The Idaho program is part of the EB-5 immigration investment program - the EB stands for "employment-based" - established in 1990 by Congress to encourage foreign investment.

The idea is that people who want to immigrate to the United States invest in "regional centers," which in turn invest in American business opportunities. The foreign investors have a shot at both profits and a green card.

It has produced mixed results.

Since the start, 95 regional centers have opened. Today only 19 are active and just 10 are what Idaho officials consider successful.

The program operated by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Agency has never reached its allowable limit of 3,000 investors and 10,000 permanent visas or green cards for people (and their families) who create at least 10 jobs.

Changes in the law have lowered the investment minimum from \$1 million to \$500,000 in poor areas - and allowed the investments to create jobs indirectly as well as directly.