
Cornyn, leaders tour new Martifer plant

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SAN ANGELO, Texas — A day after the White House told Martifer-Hirschfeld Energy Systems it will receive nearly \$3.5 million in tax credits as part of the federal stimulus act, U.S. Sen. John Cornyn and San Angelo community leaders partook in the first official tour of the massive wind-energy manufacturing plant.

Before the Saturday afternoon tour of the site, which already holds much of the machinery necessary to produce the turbine towers, Cornyn and city officials hailed the new business for its job creation and its part in producing clean, domestic energy.

Although the Texas senator voted against the stimulus bill that will aid in the plant's completion and operation, he said in an interview after the tour that he is a supporter of clean energy alternatives and voted against the overall stimulus bill because it was borrowed money.

"Having voted against the overall bill, I figure it's my job to make sure that, if it's going to pass, that Texas gets it fair share, and that's why I'm certainly supportive of the use of these tax credits to help job creation right here in West Texas," Cornyn said.

The plant is expected to hire 225 mostly local employees and produce 400 wind turbine towers a year by 2013. San Angelo's Hirschfeld Industries joined Portugal-based Martifer Energy Systems late last year to construct the \$40 million factory on Old Ballinger Highway. Plant Manager Paulo Rebelo said the plant is still set for a March completion and should begin its next round of hiring by February.

Richard Phillips, president of Hirschfeld Industries, says plans would have gone forward for the plant regardless of the stimulus funds.

"Our long-term plans were to get into this industry anyway," he said.

The tour showed the first half of the 170,000-square foot factory to be mostly complete. The vast inside, the length of more than five football fields, appears relatively empty even though it holds several machines able to cut, roll and weld large sheets of steel into the basic structure of the turbine towers. The towers themselves can run more than 100 feet high and weigh 150 to 300 tons. The detailed specifications of the towers will be dictated by each customer, Rebelo said during the tour.

Phil Neighbors, president of the San Angelo Chamber of Commerce, said the tax credits will complete the funds needed for railroad line repairs and construction of a railroad bridge so the steel and other large parts can be moved to and from the plant.

"This is the largest new manufacturing business in more than 20 years to choose to locate in San Angelo,"

Neighbors added.

Rebelo said the plant will strive to provide an enjoyable work atmosphere for its employees.

“The plant will be a great place to work,” Rebelo said. “We would like to have a very friendly environment for the people.”