Commerce: Boeing relationship opens doors for SC

BY MEG KINNARD
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COLUMBIA — South Carolina's relationship with aerospace giant Boeing Co. opened doors for the state at a recent international airshow outside London, according to state Commerce Department officials.

"We have access, and we can make appointments with decision-making level people in a variety of companies that, in the past, apparently we had to beg and plead to get an appointment with anyone," Deputy Commerce Secretary George Patrick told reporters during a conference call Thursday.

Patrick — a retired Air Force general — was part of a 28-member delegation that traveled earlier this month to the Farnborough Airshow outside London. Patrick and his boss, Commerce Secretary Bobby Hitt, wouldn't name specific companies that officials met with but did say Thursday the Boeing deal has made others in the aerospace industry look at South Carolina differently.

Boeing's $750 million assembly plant opened in North Charleston last year.

Company officials have said they hope to produce four 787s at the facility by the end of the year and eventually make about three-and-a-half planes a month.