States vie for Boeing's 787 assembly line

South Carolina, Washington each claim best reasons to land work

By Yvonne Wenger
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COLUMBIA — South Carolina is in a high-stakes competition with Washington to land a deal with airplane manufacturing giant Boeing Co. that could become the cornerstone for the aerospace industry on the East Coast, but officials here aren't saying a word.

Meanwhile, Washington Gov. Chris Gregoire is making a big public pitch for why Boeing would be foolish not to locate its second line for the highly in-demand 787 Dreamliner in her state.

"Commercial aerospace is in our blood," Gregoire, a two-term Democrat, wrote in a 32-page report, "The Business Case for Consolidating Boeing 787 Assembly in Washington" that was recently released.

"Washington is the highest quality location Boeing could possibly identify for siting additional 787 production," she continued. "Washington has a large, highly skilled and adaptable work force, an attractive business climate, stable and sustainable government, a robust and funded infrastructure improvement plan, a strong education system, and the highest quality of life of any competitor state."

South Carolina is trying to make its best argument — including the state's low union presence — in intense behind-the-scenes business recruitment efforts, but neither Gov. Mark Sanford's office nor the state Department of Commerce would comment.

Sanford, however, did confirm that South Carolina is doing its best to compete.

"At the end of the day, this is a business deal — and what we hope to do is make the case as to why it's in Boeing's commercial best interest to expand in North Charleston rather than Washington state," Sanford said in a statement Thursday. the negotiation process."

The company's decision is expected by year's end.

Boeing bought the former Vought Aircraft fuselage plant in late July and now operates a 787 fuselage factory near Charleston International Airport.

Production of the fast-selling, lightweight jet has been delayed, in part, by an eight-week strike last year at a Washington plant.

Last month, Boeing workers in North Charleston agreed to decertify the 2007 vote that made them union members.