

# Working partners

## America and China

### Unexpected co-operation, and investment, beside the Maumee river

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belt. The view from the offices of the mayor, Michael Bell, takes in a clutch of grey skyscrapers, a minor-league baseball field (home of the Toledo Mud Hens), grain silos, strangely empty streets and, in the distance, a petrol refinery. Yet the mayor has something new to show visitors. The skyscraper to his right, housing a business hotel, now belongs to Chinese investors. In 2011 another Chinese group spent \$2.15m on a restaurant complex beside the Maumee river, then a further \$3.8m on waterfront land euphemistically dubbed the “Marina District”, once home to a power station. Just out of view is the site of what regional development officials say will be, by year’s end, a new Chinese-owned metalworking plant worth tens of millions of dollars.

It is early days yet. But Mr Bell—a brawny former city fire chief who won office in 2009 as an independent—has a plan to revive his city of 290,000 people. Just as Japanese manufacturers saw advantage in moving chunks of production to America from the 1970s on, Mr Bell believes that Chinese businesses are ready to seek sites in America, as rising global transport costs outweigh the benefits of cheap labour. He sees no reason why Toledo should not be on their list. He has made three official trips to China. In September some 200 mostly Chinese businessmen are due in Toledo for a conference on operating in America. Selling his city abroad was chastening, the mayor says: most Chinese had never heard of it. But as he talked, they would “whip out their smartphones” and check what he was telling them: that it lies on the Great Lakes, where major interstate highways cross; is cheaper than Chicago; is home to skilled car- and glassmakers, solar-panel firms and an under-used airport; and they would go “Aha”.

Mr Bell is a charmer—a city poster shows him astride his Harley-Davidson, urging local youngsters to get a library card—but his quest is taken seriously by sobersided local businessmen and the state’s governor, John Kasich, a robustly free-market Republican.

Some locals have been harder to convince. There was wild talk that Chinese submarines

TOLEDO, Ohio, could be any struggling city in America’s rust



would lurk offshore or that Chinese firms would foul Lake Erie. “Stupid, ignorant” stuff, says the mayor: the legacy of a city unused to selling itself globally. Mr Bell has wrestled with mighty local unions, especially when he sided with Mr Kasich in a 2011 dispute about collective bargaining. Workers, says the mayor, need to be “reasonable”. Pride in a skilled trade is no use if they are at home, unemployed.

Anxiety about China has spread well beyond blue-collar sectors, reports Tony Damon, the boss of a Toledo-based architecture and engineering firm, SSOE, which designs high-tech research centres or test tracks for clients worldwide, including—increasingly—in China. Some of his graduate engineers voice alarm about the rivals pouring out of Asian universities and worry that SSOE does so much business in China. He replies that global growth is a question of survival, not choice, and that profitable work in China keeps jobs in Ohio.

Alas, such pragmatism in Toledo is not matched by national politicians, who have resorted to some of their fieriest China-bashing when in Ohio, a must-win swing state for both parties. In July, Barack Obama boasted to a crowd near Toledo that he was filing a complaint with the WTO against Chinese duties on imported cars, such as the Ohio-built Jeep Wrangler, and accused his rival Mitt Romney of building a business career on outsourcing jobs abroad. Visiting the state on August 16th, Mr Romney’s Republican running-mate, Paul Ryan, accused China of stealing American intellectual property, blocking market access and currency manipulation, and accused Mr Obama of being a “door-mat” in the face of Chinese “cheating”.

In truth, both camps are mostly using China as a proxy—using the idea of a Chinese threat to define the other party as unwilling to defend American workers’ interests. In their more thoughtful moments, Mr Obama and Mr Romney admit that global competition is a reality that cannot be wished away. Yet such election-year double-talk has consequences. When Mr Obama and Mr Romney “talk that trash” about free trade, it makes it harder to win the trust of Chinese investors, frets Mr Bell. Both presidential candidates are “shooting for emotion”. His task is practical: saving his home city.

[From the print edition: United States](#)

## **The Todd Akin affair**

# **One stupid remark about rape and pregnancy gives the race a jolt**

Aug 25th 2012 | [From the print edition](#) FOR a few months, it looked as if the 2012 general election might mark a pause in the culture wars that have roiled so many previous American political contests. Though evangelical Christians and other “values voters” remain a potent force, November’s ballot seemed likely to turn mainly on questions of economics and the role of government. Then Todd Akin—a six-term con-

gressman and Republican Senate nominee for Missouri—set off a verbal grenade with an assertion on August 19th that women subjected to “legitimate rape” very rarely became pregnant, because their bodies had “ways to try to shut that whole thing down”.

His claim—a pseudo-scientific fiction that has long been advanced by some pro-life activists who want to outlaw abortion for rape victims—was denounced by the Republican establishment. Senate leaders and the party’s presidential nominee, Mitt Romney, urged Mr Akin to abandon his Senate bid: a step he was resisting as *The Economist* went to press, despite warnings that he would be starved of funding and assistance. But damage had already been done, on several fronts.



Brought by the stork

Republicans need to take

four seats to control the Senate, and Missouri was near the top of their target list. Mr Akin was never the choice of Republican bosses for this vital task. Unusually, he won his fiercely contested primary for the Senate seat with help from the state’s incumbent Democratic senator, Claire McCaskill, who ran television advertisements calculated to boost Mr Akin among local conservatives, in what appeared to be a pick-your-own opponent gambit. The first opinion poll after the controversy showed Mr Akin’s 11-point lead over Ms McCaskill all but vanishing.

The reverberations will be felt beyond Missouri. Mr Akin (who says that he “misspoke” but that his critics are overreacting) used extreme language. But his general hostility to abortion even in cases of rape and incest is shared by many Republicans in Congress. As Obama campaign aides were quick to point out, that includes the vice-presidential candidate, Paul Ryan, who last year co-sponsored a bill in the House of Representatives seeking unsuccessfully to tighten rules so that federally funded abortions would be available only for victims of what was termed “forcible rape”.

More broadly still, Mr Akin’s defiance is a further testament to the insurgent mood sweeping the modern Republican Party, leaving party leaders struggling to control their own foot soldiers. Though Mr Romney says that, as president, he would support abortion in cases of rape or incest, his party’s platform at the Republican National Convention, to be held in Tampa from August 27th-30th, will uphold a strict pro-life policy countenancing no such exceptions.

Even before this latest skirmish in the culture wars, Mr Romney lagged behind Barack Obama by several points among women voters. Mr Obama was careful to acknowledge this week that Mr Romney and Mr Ryan had distanced themselves from Mr Akin's comments. But the president went on to criticise, more generally, male politicians who seek to take medical decisions on behalf of women. As an attack on his Republican rivals, it was more a stiletto thrust than a grenade. But it may prove wounding, for all that.

[From the print edition: United States](#)