

Ill. politicians expend capital on factory layoffs

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SPRINGFIELD, Ill.

Employees of a window-and-door factory that went out of business who have refused to leave the building are drawing the attention of many of Illinois' top Democrats -- even the one headed for the White House.

In the middle of putting together an administration and trying to solve the worldwide economic crisis, President-elect Barack Obama this weekend voiced support over the weekend for 200 laid-off workers who have refused to leave the Republic Windows and Doors factory in Chicago.

The protest began Friday after the plant gave the workers just a few days' notice of its shutdown.

Gov. Rod Blagojevich met with the workers Monday and ordered the state to stop doing business with Bank of America, which canceled Republic's financing. Attorney General Lisa Madigan has opened an investigation. U.S. Rep. Luis Gutierrez has tried to mediate.

The Rev. Jesse Jackson and Obama's former U.S. Senate colleague, Dick Durbin, stopped by the plant to lend support.

"If they can't expect their elected officials to help them, then who's going to help them?" Blagojevich said outside the plant.

The workers have vowed not to leave until they're assured severance and vacation pay.

"What has happened to them is unfair," Durbin said.

Madigan spokeswoman Robyn Ziegler said the attorney general's office is investigating possible violations of wage-payment laws, plant-closing warning and fraud laws and is working with Blagojevich's Department of Labor.

The situation is classic politics, but politicians who can "make a reasonable case" they have something to offer are rightly intervening, said Kent Redfield, political scientist at the University of Illinois at Springfield.

"You can talk about layoffs and hard times and credit crunches -- this puts a face on it," Redfield said. "It becomes a metaphor for what's going on in the larger economy because all the elements are there."

It would almost be a bigger deal if politicians didn't step in, he said.

In fact, said U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky, it's the start of a movement.

Associated Press Writer Deanna Bellandi contributed to this report from Chicago.

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