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OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
Rod R. Blagojevich – Governor

news

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GOVERNOR BLAGOJEVICH ANNOUNCES UP TO \$1.5 MILLION TO ASSIST LAID OFF MITSUBISHI WORKERS AND THEIR FAMILIES

Local Stakeholders Will Play Important Role In Determining How Funds Will Be Spent

SPRINGFIELD – Responding to Wednesday’s disheartening news that Mitsubishi Motors North America plans to lay off 1,200 workers at its Normal plant, Governor Rod Blagojevich today announced a comprehensive strategy to provide transition services to the workers and their families and to help every laid off worker regain quality employment as quickly as possible.

“The news that Mitsubishi Motors will be laying off 1,200 employees is very tough to swallow. The decision to scale back operations certainly doesn’t reflect on the caliber of performance or the work ethic of the autoworkers at the Normal plant. But now is the time to help the workers and their families move forward. From this point on, our financial and human resources will be dedicated entirely to helping these workers get back on their feet and back into quality jobs. The North Central region has a diversified and vibrant economy ripe with many new opportunities. It is our mission to work closely with the local stakeholders and Mitsubishi to provide a set of comprehensive services that will help these workers seize those opportunities. We won’t rest until we accomplish that,” Governor Blagojevich said.

Governor Blagojevich is directing the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) to allocate up to **\$1.5 million** in funds to assist the employees and their families affected by the announcement of the mass layoff by Mitsubishi Motors. Union officials, Mitsubishi Motors, the local workforce investment board, economic development and business leaders, educational institutions and local elected officials will begin an almost immediate dialogue with state officials to ensure that the programs and services delivered are highly specialized and entirely need-based.

The United Workforce Development Board, the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) and the Illinois Department of Employment Security will partner together to provide a comprehensive suite of services. Those services available include comprehensive assessment, counseling, employment and job search assistance, as well as customized education and training programs for laid off workers and their spouses. Assistance can also be provided through community-based organizations to provide work support services, individual and family counseling, and social services.

"We are incredibly appreciative of the innovative support Governor Blagojevich is providing our community through *Opportunity Returns*. I know that working together we can turn obstacles into opportunities for these
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workers and their families," Economic Development Council of Bloomington-Normal Area Executive Director Marty Vanags said.

"This shows Governor Blagojevich does care about our members and their families. His immediate response is a crucial step in helping create more good jobs for Bloomington-Normal and the entire region," United Auto Workers Local 2488 President Ralph Timan said.

A wide variety of other local stakeholders will be participating in this process, including the Town of Normal, the City of Bloomington, Economic Development Council of Bloomington-Normal Area, McLean County Chamber of Commerce, United Auto Workers – Local 2488, McLean County AFL-CIO, Illinois State University and Heartland Community College.

"Governor Blagojevich understands that a more comprehensive response is vital in helping us rebound from this very unfortunate situation. He also understands that our region needs to come together and decide how to best move forward. We will get to work immediately on devising the best options for the workers and their families during this difficult time," United Workforce Development Board's Career Link Vice President Gary Cicciu said.

The re-employment initiative in Normal could potentially be modeled after the Galesburg Transition Training Center, a family focused approach that Governor Blagojevich announced in January after the Maytag Corporation decided it was closing its Galesburg facility. Additional unique services that center is designed to deliver include: family transition assessment & planning, tutoring for adults and youth, spousal training, referral services, health & medical services, transportation services, center website, outreach services, elder services, and family & youth activities. While the Galesburg Transition Training Center has provided a successful blueprint for helping workers find new jobs, the choice of whether or not to follow this design lies with the community.

The re-employment initiative will also compliment Governor Blagojevich's Critical Skills Shortage Initiative (CSSI), a program designed to arm workers with new skills and prepare them to fill jobs in industries facing critical shortages in skilled labor. A group of local stakeholders, which includes the private sector-led local workforce investment boards, area employers, economic development professionals, educators and service providers, is already using an earlier \$150,000 *Opportunity Returns* planning grant to identify industry sectors, and specific occupations within those sectors, where there are current or projected shortages of skilled workers. Once these industries and occupations have been selected, the group will work to determine the root causes of these skill shortages and then develop regional solutions to address them. DCEO is administering CSSI and will competitively award additional funds to help bridge the gap in training services available to fill these occupations.

"The critical partnerships Governor Blagojevich has forged ensure that a highly specialized collection of resources will continually be at work for the Mitsubishi workers and their families, but how those resources will be shaped and delivered is a decision that should be made by the community. This regional economy and its workforce hold a great many strengths, our steadfast goal is to parlay those strengths into new jobs for individuals and renewed vitality for the community of Normal and the entire North Central region," DCEO Director Jack Lavin said.

Governor Blagojevich's *Opportunity Returns* regional economic development plan is the most aggressive, comprehensive approach to creating jobs in Illinois' history. Since a one-size-fits-all approach to economic development just doesn't work, the Governor has divided the state into 10 regions – finding areas with common economic strengths and needs, and developing a plan with specific actions for each region.

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