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ILLINOISANS ARE ‘STRONGEST ASSET’

Lawmaker meets with DeKalb mayor to visit \$1B facility under construction expected to bring hundreds of new jobs to the area

By MEGANN HORSTEAD
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DeKALB – Months after several high-profile corporations announced plans to move regional-based headquarters out of state, Sen. Dick Durbin said during a visit to Meta’s DeKalb Data Center Thursday he believes Illinois still has a bright economic future.

Durbin made a stop in DeKalb Thursday to tour the progress now underway at the construction site of Meta’s \$1 billion data center. Meta is the parent company of social media giant Facebook.

The facility, located along Interstate 88 and Gurler Road, is expected to bolster the local economy by hundreds of jobs after an expansion was announced in April.

“What Meta is doing here in DeKalb is amazing,” Durbin said after the tour Thursday. “It’s incredible. Thank goodness they chose DeKalb and Illinois to be part of it. This is a massive investment. It is a game-changer for a lot of lives.”

The Democratic senator’s DeKalb stop was one of several planned in northern Illinois. During a Thursday stop in Dixon, Durbin also said he believes lawmakers “ought to draw a line” on assault weapons days after a Fourth of July mass shooting Highland Park left seven and dozens more injured.

The Meta DeKalb project promises to employ about 200 operational jobs and is enlisting the services of 1,200 construction workers.

In response to spring announcements that several high-profile businesses, Caterpillar, Boeing and Citadel, plan to move their Chicago-based headquarters out of state, Durbin said he believes Illinois still offers a compelling pitch for businesses.

“I think we continue to sell our strongest asset: the people who live here,” Durbin said.

The lawmaker said it’s been his experience while working to entice businesses to put down roots in the state that Illinois labor is a selling point.

“I think back on all the different ventures I’ve been involved in trying to attract businesses,” Durbin continued. “The successful ones all say, ‘We like



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Sen. Dick Durbin speaks to members of the press during a stop in DeKalb Thursday to tour Meta’s DeKalb Data Center. Meta is the parent company of social media giant, Facebook. Durbin’s DeKalb stop was one of several planned throughout northern Illinois.

your people.’ They’re hardworking, they’ve got a work ethic, they can learn on the job, they can improve themselves and take pride in their work. That is I think a real showcase of the Midwest right here when it comes to our workforce.”

DeKalb Mayor Cohen Barnes said Meta is committed to providing good paying jobs.

“They’re all excellent opportunities, excellent jobs for everyone,” Barnes said. “So, well above what you’re asking.”

DeKalb city leaders worked for more than a year to entice the social media giant – which also owns Instagram, Facebook, Instagram, Messenger, WhatsApp and the virtual reality platform Oculus – to put down roots on the city’s south side.

Among the offers made to help lure the company here, DeKalb County area governments worked together to approve a multi-decade tax incentive for Meta.

The data center is privy to a 20-year, 55% property tax abatement plan, already approved by the DeKalb City

Council and agreed upon through the DeKalb County Enterprise Zone, a program administered by the DeKalb County Economic Development Corporation. The tax incentive includes a stipulation of 50 tech jobs with a starting wage of \$38.50 an hour to qualify for tax abatements within the first few years, documents show.

Durbin said the tour of Meta’s data center prompted him to get a good impression of the city.

“I’m bedazzled by what I’ve seen here,” Durbin said. “Ferrara’s right across the street. Meta’s undertaking here. ... It’s an exciting experience here to come and see all these new investments. You can see a bright future for this area.”

Barnes said he thinks that that Meta and the construction engineering company the social media giant is employing, Mortenson, will leave a lasting impact on the community.

“That impact that they’re already having in our community has been substantial,” Barnes said. “Many [workers] are living in our community as well. They’re buying houses. They’re renting

apartments. So, the economic impact ... goes well beyond just this particular project. It ripples on the individual small business owner in our community.”

Durbin said Meta’s decision to build in DeKalb couldn’t come at a better time.

“It’s a major investment in our state at a time when some people are questioning the future of Illinois. They say come to DeKalb, see what’s happening here.”

Barnes gave kudos not only to Durbin but also Sen. Tammy Duckworth and U.S. Rep. Lauren Underwood, D-Naper-ville, for their support of the city.

With the 2022 Midterm election months away, Durbin addressed presidential prospects for the Democrats and said it’s too early to throw support behind President Joe Biden for a 2024 White House campaign.

“The president has to decide his own future first,” Durbin said. “I’ve been working with him in his days in office to make him a success. We’ve got a lot of things we can achieve together.”