# Gov. Quinn Supports Striking Caterpillar Workers

The Associated Press

JOLIET, Ill. (AP) — Gov. Pat Quinn offered his support and a $10,000 donation to workers striking outside a Caterpillar plant south of Chicago, wading into a months-long labor dispute with a company whose chief executive has been a harsh critic of his administration.

The Peoria-based heavy equipment maker has taken issue with the state government's handling of the Illinois economy. And last year, Chief Executive Douglas Oberhelman, in pressing Quinn to work on improving the economy, reminded him that the company had out-of-state suitors.

The visit Friday with workers picketing outside the Joliet plant might also have been aimed at bolstering the Democratic governor's standing with organized labor amid his drive to reduce the crushing cost of paying for state employee pensions.

"When people are united, they can't be defeated," Quinn told about 100 picketers, some of whom are struggling financially since rejecting a proposed six-year contract and walking off the job May 1.

Local 851 of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers is demanding cost-of-living pay increases and lower health care premiums, and is asking the company to honor seniority rights. The negotiations have made no progress since late June.

The $10,000 donation to a food fund for the workers came from the governor's re-election campaign funds.

Quinn said he wasn't concerned about how Caterpillar would view his gesture to the strikers. The company declined to comment on the visit.

Caterpillar, a Fortune 500 company, is the world's largest maker of construction and mining equipment and has factories all over the world. It's also Peoria's largest employer, with about 3,200 jobs in the downtown headquarters and nearby offices.

Earlier this year, Caterpillar chose a site in Georgia over several sites in Illinois, including Peoria and Galesburg, and other states to relocate the operations of a Japanese tractor- and excavator-building plant that will employ 1,400 people. The company cited, among other things, concerns about Illinois' economy and a massive state government budget deficit.

Some union members said they were cheered by the governor's visit.

"It's a shot in the arm," Mike Kinkin told the Chicago Tribune. "It's good to see someone cares a bit. Maybe that's what we need to bring more attention to our

fight."

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