

Gov., Relco talk worker shortage

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Relco President Mark Bachman and Human Resources Director Tim Ash met Gov. Kim Reynolds for the first time on Friday when the governor stopped in Albia on a day trip visiting Iowa industries.

Eventually, she got a tour of the plant, but there was a long discussion before that, one that she had apparently had with every other industry leader she had visited that day.

The subject was employees, or lack there of. Bachman told the governor that just under 200 people were working at Relco with wages of \$20 per hour and above. But he said the company could hire 70 to 80 people immediately—welders, electricians and mechanics.

“We’re actually okay with hiring diesel mechanics and our ability to hire people for our paint shop is all right,” said Bachman. “But we face critical shortages of welders and electricians.”

So much so that he has been forced to outsource work to factories in eastern Iowa, in Hibbing, Minn., and back in Illinois, which is where the company headquarters remain.

The great news for Relco and most of other manufacturers in Iowa is that business is booming. The bad news is that if employees can’t be hired, that new business either goes elsewhere or orders get backed up. Neither is a solution Bachman likes.

The governor, along with Lt. Gov. Adam Gregg, clicked off a number of state initiatives. HR head, Ash said Relco is tapped into virtually every program available, from “Future Ready Iowa” to job and career events with Iowa Workforce, to recruiting as far away as Oklahoma and Missouri, as well as Illinois.

Not much is working. Monroe County is a Home Base Community in an effort to hire veterans and that program has netted zero for Relco.

Bachman and Ash in turn asked the governor if the state’s economic development group was actively recruiting in states like California and Illinois, where people are exiting in record numbers.

The governor said they were.

The governor said that Iowa Workforce Development is even working with Prison Industries to create job opportunities for non-violent offenders.



Governor Reynolds

GOV. KIM REYNOLDS stands on the front steps of a locomotive under reconstruction at Albia’s Relco factory. With her from left, Sen. Ken Rozenboom, Mark Bachman (Gov. Reynolds) and Lt. Gov. Adam Gregg.

Around the Relco meeting table the discussion moved to local initiatives, including the Albia Community High School Career Academy that currently has 34 students enrolled, taking classes in welding, electricity and diesel mechanics.

“We’re needing to expand our painting area and we’d like to expand in other areas, but we can’t do it if we can’t hire people,” said Bachman. “My family would kill me if we considered moving back to the Chicago area.”

Albia Industrial Development President Dan Tometich was in on the discussion and said a housing study is about to be launched. “We need people to live here,” he said. The governor talked about quality of life issues and marketing the region. “We’ve just been named #1 in the nation by U.S. News and World for quality of life,” said Gov. Reynolds. “Des Moines is ranked number four for most livable cities, up from #11.”

But those numbers are helping growing urban areas, not rural areas of Iowa. And, according to the governor, Iowa’s rural labor shortage is everywhere across the state.