



Gov. Rauner: Administration won't relent in pro-business reforms pursuit

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JACKSONVILLE - Gov. Bruce Rauner toured the manufacturing plants of two successful central Illinois businesses this morning as he continued to advocate for the reforms he believes necessary to advance the state's economic climate and competitive



stance.

His first stop was at Eli Bridge Co. The Jacksonville firm has been producing Ferris wheels since the turn of the last century. Its 16 employees now also produce other amusement park rides sold to parks worldwide, and support a metal fabricating and heavy equipment repair division.

“What an impressive operation,” Rauner said while visiting the home of the “Big Eli” Ferris wheel. “Thanks for helping to put Illinois on the map at amusement parks around the world, and of course for your company’s contributions to the fun at our own State Fair, the Sangamon County Fair and other venues.”

With company President and CEO Patty Sullivan, the governor toured the 76,000-square-foot facility located on the Case Avenue site where it has been since 1919.

Rauner noted that companies like Eli Bridge and Rack Builders Inc. in Quincy — his other manufacturing plant stop today — have business models worth emulating. He reiterated that it is his administration’s goal to make it easier for existing businesses to thrive while also attracting others to Illinois.

“We are fighting to cut the costs of government,” he said. “If we cut taxes and get government out of the way, companies like Eli Bridge, Rack Builders and others across the state can grow faster and create more jobs.”

At Rack Builders, the governor met leaders Robert Johannessen, Jason Johannessen and John Schmidt, CEO, president and vice president, respectively.

The three founders incorporated the business in 2009 to fill a void in the structural pallet racking market, creating problem-solving products for both distributors and storage system end users.

Sales have increased an average of 137 percent a year since the company’s start, and Rack Builders has increased its plant size from 96,000 square feet to 160,000 square feet. Over the last five years, RBI has shipped more than 170 million pounds of structural pallet rack to 45 states, Canada, Mexico and Central America. The company employs 122 people.

“When you succeed, Illinois succeeds,” Rauner said. “We’re committed to doing all that we can to reduce unnecessary regulatory burdens and increase your bottom line so that you can continue to thrive, hire and build.”

John Schmidt of Rack Builders said he admires the governor’s devotion to advancing the interests of business and, in turn, the economic welfare of the state.

“Since Gov. Rauner took office in 2015, we have doubled the capacity of our factory here, and we have added more than 50 employees,” Schmidt said. “We’re glad that he wanted to meet with us, and learn about our business.”

State Sen. Jil Tracy, R-Quincy, and state Rep. Randy Frese, R-Paloma, also attended the Rack Builders tour.

“Manufacturing jobs are exactly the type of high-wage earning employment we need in this region and throughout Illinois,” said Tracy. “It is great to see the governor tour and take an interest in Rack Builders and other businesses in our area. With the state’s help and encouragement, along with more business-friendly reforms, manufacturers will choose to start here and grow here.”

“Illinois communities have suffered a devastating loss of manufacturing jobs over several years, and we desperately need to turn that around,” added state Rep. Randy Frese, R-Paloma. “I am always glad to welcome the governor to talk with businesses in our local communities about what we need to do at the state level to help grow manufacturing jobs and other good jobs here in west central Illinois.”