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Newly elected US Rep. Nikki Budzinski visits Metro East

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U.S. Rep. Nikki Budzinski, D-Illinois, talks with students Monday at the Riverbend Head Start in Granite City.
Joe Holleman,

By Joe Holleman

Joe Holleman is a reporter for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

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Making her way to the south end of her district, U.S. Rep. **Nikki Budzinski**, D-Illinois, stopped in Monday to visit with the staff and children at the Riverbend Head Start program in Granite City.

Showing some serious skills with crayons and safety scissors, Budzinski joined one class of youngsters crafting cards for the “Valentines For Veterans” program.

“I could stay here all day,” Budzinski said as she pared a heart from construction paper to put on a card. “This is a great stop.”



U.S. Rep. Nikki Budzinski, D-Ill., works on a "Valentines for Veterans" project Monday at Riverbend Head Start in Granite City. Working with her are Sirena Lopez-Rush, center, and Amaya Walker.

Joe Holleman, Post-Dispatch

Budzinski is a member of the House Veterans Affairs Committee and also serves on its health subcommittee. She started the program last month and will distribute the cards her office has received to veterans in her district.

The Riverbend organization has two locations in Granite City and serves about 550 children in the Metro East area.

After a 90-minute visit that included a bunch of hugs and a bit of dancing, Budzinski said her day's visit to the area would evolve into more serious issues: She planned to meet later Monday with retired members of the United Steelworkers.

“The Granite City Steel situation is one I’m watching closely and plan to be involved with,” said Budzinski, who garnered strong union support in her 2022 election win.

Last year, U.S. Steel announced plans to **sell a large portion of the mill** to Chicago-based SunCoke Energy.

The company was formed in 1896 and was known as Granite City Steel for more than 70 years. In the 1970s, it became National Steel; then the Granite City Works after U.S. Steel bought the company in 2003.

The sale of the mill, which now has about 1,500 employees, would likely reduce the workforce by two-thirds over a two-year period.

“That’s up to 900 jobs moving to Arkansas,” Budzinski said. “And that’s not good.”