

By Charlie Savage

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WASHINGTON — The Obama administration is expected to announce on Tuesday that it has selected a prison in northwestern Illinois to house terrorism suspects now being held at [Guantánamo Bay](#), Cuba, in a major step toward shutting down that military detention facility.

An administration official said [President Obama](#) had directed the federal government to proceed with acquiring the Thomson Correctional Center, a maximum-security prison in a rural village about 150 miles west of Chicago.

Gov. [Patrick J. Quinn](#) of Illinois and the state's senior senator, [Richard J. Durbin](#), will be briefed about the plan at the White House on Tuesday afternoon. The officials, both Democrats, have been enthusiastic supporters of bringing Guantánamo prisoners to Thomson, arguing that it would bring jobs to an impoverished part of the state.

When talk of bringing Guantánamo detainees to Thomson first surfaced in late November, both Mr. Quinn and Mr. Durbin held a series of news conferences to promote the idea of turning over the empty state prison, which was built in 2001 at a cost to Illinois taxpayers of about \$120 million, to the federal penal system.

Top Illinois Republicans — including Representatives Donald Manzullo, whose district includes the prison, and Mark Steven Kirk, a candidate for the [United States Senate](#) seat once held by Mr. Obama — have denounced previous talk of such a move, saying it could make Illinois a target for terrorist attacks.

But Obama administration officials argue that the prison would be secure and that it would enhance national security to close Guantánamo because it has become a global symbol and a

recruiting tool for [Al Qaeda](#) .

Mr. Obama declared shortly after his inauguration that he would close the Guantánamo prison — a signature component of the Bush administration's counterterrorism policy — within a year. But dealing with the roughly 200 detainees at the prison has proved difficult, and he is widely expected to miss that deadline.

In May, Mr. Obama proposed bringing some detainees to a facility inside the United States, including some who officials have decided are too difficult to prosecute and too dangerous to release. They would continue to be held without trial as "combatants" under the laws of war.

Under the proposal for Thomson, the Bureau of Prisons would buy the facility and improve its security. Most of the prison would house ordinary high-security inmates, but a part would be leased to the Defense Department to hold terror suspects.

It was not immediately clear how the government would pay for the prison and upgrades, but White House officials have floated the idea of including financing for it in the 2010 military appropriations bill.

Earlier this year, Congress enacted a law forbidding Guantánamo detainees to be brought onto United States soil except for the purpose of prosecution. But leading Democrats said they were open to lifting that restriction after the administration came up with a plan for how to handle the prisoners.