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Report: Make Illinois, neighboring states an economic driver for world

By Anna Marie Kukec

A Paris, France,-based organization is releasing an in-depth report today that looks to improve economic development in the Illinois, Indiana and Wisconsin region and to encourage local governments to work together to further boost the region as a driving force in the world economy.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) worked closely with the U.S. Commerce Department's Economic Development Administration, the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce and other groups to provide a 330-plus page report. It encourages innovation-based growth, entrepreneurship, startups and financing to boost business and jobs in the three states, specifically focusing on Chicago, Milwaukee, Gary and northwest Indiana.

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"One of the key issues is skill mismatch," said OECD Secretary General Angel Gurria. "There are certain skills in the people looking for jobs, but they're not necessarily matching what businesses need. That needs to be addressed."

The announcement of the report is part of a two-day program in Chicago — that also included the Ministers and Mayors, a group of dignitaries from around the nation — seeking to help the city become more competitive on a global scale. New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, U.S. Secretary for Housing and Urban Development Shaun Donovan, former Illinois Gov. James Thompson and Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel were among those discussing the area's assets and challenges. They'll also help seek solutions to help make the region more marketable in the future, leaders said.

The OECD has done about two dozen such territorial reviews worldwide. But this is the first such review of a U.S. metropolitan area and likely will be one of its highest profile reviews to date, officials said.

The OECD also is involved in the Chicagoland Chamber's effort, with support from the U.S.

Economic Development Administration, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Institute for Work & the Economy in Chicago, and others. The study cost roughly $1.2 million, provided by government and private sector donations and pro bono work. Of that total, about $600,000 came from Boeing, Motorola, ComEd and others.

Last October, the Chicagoland Chamber and other organizations gathered a number of experts to study ways to get Illinois recognized as part of a vibrant economic focal point. That study is examining ways to boost the region's innovation and entrepreneurship. The groups sought to shape Illinois, Wisconsin and Indiana as a premier hub for business, transportation and supply-chain needs. They also examined how to grow jobs, train workers and retain talent.

Its findings are expected to follow the OECD report. The 34 member countries use the OECD as a forum where they can share experiences and seek solutions together.