

GUEST COMMENTARY: Chicago metro area should work together



FEBRUARY 07, 2014 12:00 AM • BY RANDY BLANKENHORN

Although it clearly benefits neither state to gloat at the expense of its neighbors, that was unfortunately the case in your Jan. 20 story, "Illinois ranks 2nd, Ind. places 3rd in outbound migration."

Setting aside whether there's any satisfaction in being one slot higher in a race to the bottom of 50 states, we found the story's premise — that it's great for Indiana if people leave Illinois — to be flawed.

An extended decline for metropolitan Chicago in coming decades would be bad for the entire Midwest and worst for our closest neighbors. Also, migration patterns are influenced by a wide variety of complex factors, not just by cost of living and certainly not just by the cost of cigarettes.

Maybe it's to be expected that economic development professionals brag about poaching businesses from neighboring regions or states. But recent analysis of Dun and Bradstreet data (<http://goo.gl/zhb23F>) indicates such efforts generally result in little or no net gain — in other words, businesses and jobs move into our respective states at about the same rate by which they move out.

It's far better for us to join forces in improving infrastructure and pursuing investment from around the U.S. and overseas, as recommended not long ago in an important Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report (<http://goo.gl/v3HfUk>) on the deep economic interdependence of Indiana, Illinois and Wisconsin. By working and planning together, we can win big rather than fight over the scraps.

More often, The Times of Northwest Indiana tends to demonstrate how Northwest Indiana and northeast Illinois work best as a combined region within the global economy. Your Jan. 22 editorial, "Get ball rolling to get trains rolling," described benefits of connecting our transit systems. Specifically, transit improves connections between employers and workers, regardless of state boundaries.

Rather than compete with each other, our two states and regions need to compete together in today's globalized economy. Can anyone really believe Indiana would benefit if metropolitan Chicago were to take a step backward? Or that Chicagoans would benefit if Indiana were to decline?

Northwest Indiana stands to lose a lot if the Illinois economy doesn't rebound. And metropolitan Chicago benefits from a strong Indiana economy.

We're rooting for you, in fact, and that's not just neighborly — it's enlightened self-interest.