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## Why we all need to embrace regionalism



**GREG HINZ ON POLITICS**



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They metaphorically sang a few verses of “Kumbaya” at the stately Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago the other day, gathering to chant the praises of Illinois, Indiana and Wisconsin working together for the common good of greater metropolitan Chicago, instead of trying to poach one another's jobs.

Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle was there, at the Alliance for Regional Development's fourth annual conference. So were Gov. Bruce Rauner's top economic development aide, **Intersect Illinois** CEO Jim

Schultz; a top aide to U.S. Vice President-elect Mike Pence, Indiana's governor; and a boardroom full of transportation and job-training officials.

It looked real. It certainly was the right message in a world that increasingly pits not only country against country and state against state but metropolitan area against metropolitan area. But is it real? Let's say it's a start—even if Mayor Rahm Emanuel was, typically, off doing his own thing.

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One sign of progress is in transportation/land-use, where the three agencies that serve as master planners and gatekeepers for federal funds—the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning and its counterparts in southeastern Wisconsin and northwestern Indiana—begin to get a little closer to each other. Indiana is paying to doubletrack the South Shore Line from Michigan City to the Illinois border, and all three states are behind efforts such as the 75th Street rail corridor project and the Elgin O'Hare Expressway, notes veteran local transit activist Steve Schlickman.

Preckwinkle talked about the new Chicago Metropolitan Metal Consortium, a collaborative effort that she says has had a \$279 million economic impact. Then there's the **Digital Manufacturing and Design Innovation Institute** on Goose Island, a federally funded factory incubator of sorts that has received big investments from throughout the Midwest.

But to work, all of this has to occur at the state level, and while Rauner, Pence and Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker all are Republicans, collegiality can be tough.

In a joint interview, Schultz, Indiana Secretary of Commerce Victor Smith and Wisconsin Deputy Development Corporation COO Tricia Brown all pointed to new efforts at cooperation. In fact, while I was interviewing the trio, Schultz asked Smith if he'd be interested in a joint trade mission to next year's **Paris Air Show**, the huge convention of the aeronautics industry. Smith said yes.

Then I asked the three if they'd agree to end cross-border job raids.



Indiana Secretary of Commerce Victor Smith

Smith said Indiana has ended those **lovely "Illinoyed" ads**—"That campaign was successful"—but added: "We don't say no to anybody. We recruit companies from all over. That's our job." Wisconsin's Brown turned a thumbs-down, too. "The reality is it's a competitive environment," she said. "There's a role for incentives."

But Schultz, who earlier had compared the three states to Big Ten football teams that beat the tar out of one another until the bowl games roll around, said he's sworn off such raiding. "I've talked to the governor. Our agreement is we don't do that," he said. If a Wisconsin firm calls, Illinois certainly will talk to it, Schultz said. But, in general, luring a company from Zion to Racine or Elkhart to Watseka is "just moving deck chairs. I'm not planning to go into Wisconsin or, for that matter, Indiana."

I should add that even Brown conceded a little mutual aid is beneficial. When a company from Europe or Asia calls, "they might not know where Madison is," she said. "They know where Chicago is."

Still, it's obvious that this is, at best, a work in progress. Though the city's economic development unit, World Business Chicago, reportedly works well with Schultz, a little high-level involvement from Emanuel wouldn't hurt.

Seriously, real jobs and real wealth are at stake here, folks. I hope they keep at it.

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