



# Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity

Rod R. Blagojevich, Governor / Jack Lavin, Director

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## Opportunity Returns: Blagojevich Launches Second Of Ten Regional Economic Development Plans For Illinois

*Manufacturing Is The Top Priority For Governor'S Proactive Approach To Create Jobs And Spur Growth In The Quad Cities And Northwestern Illinois*



**NEWS**

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 22, 2003

## **Opportunity Returns: Blagojevich Launches Second of Ten Regional Economic Development Plans for Illinois**

*Manufacturing is the top priority for Governor's proactive approach to create jobs and spur growth in the Quad Cities and Northwestern Illinois*

EAST MOLINE – During a speech this afternoon at a manufacturing plant in East Moline, Governor Rod R. Blagojevich announced the second of 10 new major economic initiatives to spur growth in the region and across the state. The Governor's plan, *Opportunity Returns*, is the most aggressive, comprehensive approach to create jobs to date in Illinois. The plan is a product of outreach over the past several months to the region, with business leaders, labor leaders, government officials and local community activists.

"When I was sworn in as Governor, Illinois was in the midst of its worst economic downturn since the Great Depression," Blagojevich said. "Every community and most working people were suddenly faced with the uncertainty of what tomorrow might bring."

"It's now time we try to do something and not just wait for the economy to turn around or for

Washington to act. We need to stop taking a one size fits all approach to the economy and start doing things that are targeted specifically to help communities throughout Northwestern Illinois. The plan I'm announcing today is designed so it will be effective and deliver real results that local businesses need. It is meant to make a difference," Blagojevich continued.

*Opportunity Returns* includes five areas specifically targeted to meet the economic and workforce development needs of the Northwest region: expand manufacturing, develop and market regional assets, assist entrepreneurs, strengthen education and job training, and improve local infrastructure.

The Northwest region, which includes Jo Daviess, Carroll, Whiteside, Rock Island, Mercer, Henry, Bureau, Lee, Putnam and LaSalle counties has many strengths, including manufacturing and existing infrastructure - like the Rock Island Arsenal, but like most regions has suffered from the economic downturn of the past decade.

Since 1998, the United States has lost 2.4 million manufacturing jobs – a 14 percent drop in factory employment. In Illinois, 60,000 manufacturing jobs were lost and in the Quad Cities alone manufacturing jobs have dropped from more than 50,000 to less than 25,000 in the past two decades.

The Governor announced several major initiatives to counter job loss and spur economic development in the Quad Cities and the Northwest region including:

- Supporting development around the Global III Intermodal Facility in Rochelle.
- Providing \$13 million to develop the Galena Bypass which will benefit the region through improved access for tourists and expanded opportunities for commercial and retail development.
- Creating a revolving loan fund, with an initial investment of \$25 million, to help manufacturing companies retool and upgrade their equipment.
- Assisting manufacturers in reducing their energy costs through the Manufacturers Energy Efficiency Program.
- Maximizing the potential of the Rock Island Arsenal through improved marketing with \$200,000.
- Speeding up efforts to complete the West Rock River Bridge project which will provide access to the Quad Cities Airport. Directing \$65,000 for marketing the Quad Cities Airport.
- Assembling a team of experts to figure out how to overcome the physical and financial boundaries to laying broadband as part of an initiative to bring broadband to every part of the state.
- Committing \$300,000 to open a new Entrepreneurship Center in the Quad Cities in order to coordinate small business services and programs available throughout the region.
- Making it easier for businesses and local governments to make use of community development funds through the "Capital for Tomorrow" program.
- Redeveloping the region's brownfield sites.

*Opportunity Returns* reflects my belief that we can make things better" said Governor

Blagojevich. "We will work day and night to put people back to work, to create opportunity and economic security – and when we do, we will make the great dream of building a better life as real and vibrant and alive as it was meant to be."

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