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Local expert joins Gulf assessment team

Economist to help develop recovery 'tool kit' for area

By BRUCE ERSKINE Business Reporter

The vice-president and chief economist with the Greater Halifax Partnership is heading to the Louisiana bayou to help assess the economic damage wrought by the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

"We hope to get a plan in place so that the community can really deal with the challenges it faces more effectively," Fred Morley said in an interview Thursday.

Morley is travelling to Lafourche Parish in southern Louisiana on Saturday as part of a team of International Economic Development Council staff members, post-disaster recovery experts and representatives from the U.S. departments of commerce, economic development, agriculture and labour.

They will spend three days in the coastal community, which U.S. President Barack Obama recently visited, to assess its economic recovery needs and provide recommendations.

Morley, a former senior manager with Nova Scotia Business Inc., the province's economic development agency, and a former economics professor at Saint Mary's University in Halifax, is a longtime member of the International Economic Development Council.

The American-based association of economic development groups and practitioners has 4,000 members, making it the largest organization of its kind in the world, he said.

"I got a call last Friday from Washington asking if I was interested."

Morley was asked to be involved because Nova Scotia has physical, economic and cultural similarities to Louisiana.

"We've had our own challenges."

Morley said the council team going to Lafourche Parish is bringing a "community economic development tool kit" to the beleaguered area.

"That's what they're looking for. It's interesting to be part of that team."

Morley said coastal Louisiana has benefitted from the offshore oil and gas industry and will have some serious adjustments to make as a result of the unpopular deepwater drilling moratorium imposed in the wake of the BP disaster, which killed 11 rig workers and spewed oil into the Gulf of Mexico for months.

"It affects the livelihood of a lot of people," he said, noting that incomes in the area from fishing and the oil and gas industry are generally higher than in the rest of Louisiana.

"It's a challenge to have all that turned on its head."

Jeffrey Finkle, the council's chief executive officer and president, welcomed Morley's involvement in the Louisiana economic recovery effort.

"Our assessment will focus briefly on the impacts of the oil spill and the deepwater drilling moratorium, help uncover priority needs from an economic recovery perspective, outline local, state and national resources available and develop several key actions steps for moving forward," Finkle said in a news release.

"We knew that Fred would answer the call and lend his significant economic development expertise to this initiative."

The council, funded by the U.S. Economic Development Administration, has provided post-disaster economic development assistance to the Gulf of Mexico region since hurricane Katrina hit in 2005.

The Greater Halifax Partnership promotes economic and business development in Halifax.

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