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By **Andrew J. Manuse**

Members of a coalition dedicated to improving the Massachusetts work-force development system met with Daily News editors yesterday to tout a bill they say would help improve the state's economy.

By itself, the Workforce Solutions bill won't fix the economy, but "it is a step in the right direction," said Coleman Nee, spokesman for the Workforce Solutions Group. "Investing in people is important."

The bill is the coalition's response to recent reports that Massachusetts is losing residents to other states, such as North Carolina, which are offering incentives and worker training programs, he said. The bill also responds to industry executives' statements that they can't find enough workers here with the necessary skills to fill high-tech and other high-wage jobs, he said.

The bill would add \$39 million to the \$82 million already dedicated for work-force development in the budget for fiscal 2005, which ended yesterday.

The legislation would primarily focus on a Workforce Competitive Trust Fund for training the unemployed, low-wage earners and others in need of new skills; adult basic education; the state's One-Stop Career Centers; an employment service program for moving welfare recipients into the work force; new educational rewards for 4,000 low-income, under-educated adults; and initiatives for connecting high schoolers with internships at companies.

The bill also calls for more collaboration among employers, the work-force development system and others, including labor unions and community organizations.

House Speaker Salvatore DiMasi and Gov. Mitt Romney have filed their own economic stimulus proposals that would also address work force issues.

The coalition's bill has the support of more than 90 co-sponsors, said Sheelah Feinberg, director of advocacy for The Women's Union. That's because the bill calls for a Workforce Accountability Task Force, which would create benchmarks to evaluate the success of its programs and make sure funding is removed from initiatives that are not working, she said.

The support also stems from the bill's breadth: It addresses the needs of a wide range of groups that usually compete for resources to fund their own programs, Feinberg said.

Groups as diverse as the Associated Industries of Massachusetts, the Metro South/West Regional Employment Board and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers have expressed their support.

"This is the first time anyone has crafted one piece of legislation to make sense out of this work-force development system," said Sylvia Beville, executive director of the Framingham-based employment board. George Noel, business manager for Local 1505 of the electrical workers union, supports the bill because it might make corporations think twice about leaving the state.

"If we make it attractive to do business (in Massachusetts), Raytheon is going to stay here and Intel is going to stay here and, God forbid, we might attract a few," he said.

If lawmakers pass the bill later this year, any funding that isn't in the fiscal 2006 state budget could be covered with supplemental appropriations, Beville said.