

Northeastern Ohio Should Recognize the Opportunity It Has To Be the Leader in New Technology

Ashley Solomon

The economy in both in Cleveland, and Ohio, has been stagnant or worsening—Ohio's job growth rate for 2006 lags behind the national growth rate: .2% versus 1.3%¹. The results of this lack of economic growth have been a decrease businesses coming to the Northeastern region of Ohio, businesses leaving the region, an insufficient number of jobs, and a limited tax base with which to provide social services.

There are many causes of the current lull in the economy. First, Ohio is experiencing the negative consequences of globalization (businesses relocating to places where they can minimize costs, which often results in the exploitation of the local environment and the workers of that country) due to the freedoms of the NAFTA². Next, the shift from industrial to technology based business, like information services, has been particularly painful for Northeastern Ohio. Unfortunately, Ohio has not supported an early development of the technology business sector as other states have³. Lastly, some of the downward trend in the economy can be written off as a byproduct of the shift from manufacturing and industrial based corporations to technology and information based corporations.

In response to globalization, Ohio and cities in the state have offered tax breaks and incentives to businesses to remain in or come to Ohio, but the number and degree of these offerings has not be sufficient to stem the loss of jobs to other countries⁴. Additionally, Senator Eric Fingerhut (Ohio-D) has pointed out that access to and knowledge of these

benefits has been limited⁵. Senator Fingerhut has offered his own solutions to Ohio's economic woes: the "three I"s - Ideas, Innovation and Investment. We need ideas, not excuses; genuine innovation, not incremental change; smart, performance-based investments, not rollbacks, givebacks, and cutbacks"⁶, in addition to promoting Ohio exports on a global scale⁷. Fingerhut also insists that the environment should not be sacrificed to stimulate economic growth, but rather supports a plan that does not requiring making a choice between either⁸.

In addition to economic incentives, Northeast Ohio should also reexamine itself to ensure that it is fully utilizing all of its resources. For example, Ohio's northern border lies next to Lake Erie. Lakefront land has historically been used for industrial purposes, which has potentially environmentally destructive results. Now that many heavy industries have been 'out-sourced,' much waterfront acreage is open for new uses. Essayist Philip Lopate has some ideas about how 'empty harbors' should be redeveloped. First, he says, "any redesign on the waterfront must start from the principle of public access"⁹. This is especially important if we consider that land near water has been priced at a premium or privately owned, often preventing the average person from partaking of water's wondrous qualities. But, Lopate is quick to remind us, this does not mean that business should be excluded entirely; rather, "a compromise: a low-rise density that will not overtax the sewage treatment plants, but will being to invite the activity of a human hive..."¹⁰. This balance is certainly something to strive for, and will benefit both people and the economy—new waterfront development could even become a selling point of the region. Geographer Judith A. Martin notes other goals for old industrial lakefront/riverfront land:

“remove... incompatible heavy industrial uses and railroads... preserve and interpret the area’s history... develop a mixed-used community...”¹¹. With some effort and a unified plan, old industrial dumps along the shoreline can be transformed into vibrant centers of activity and economic growth.

Another underutilized resource that Cleveland possesses is land. According to developer Scott Wolstein, Cleveland has a surplus of land downtown, especially parking lots—which is completely unacceptable¹². When land is at such a high premium in urban areas, parking lots should be integrated into infrastructure to maximize land usage. Wolstein advises Cleveland to find unique ways to use its land so that people and businesses are attracted to the region.

Above all, Northeast Ohio should engage in smart growth principles. According to former Minnesota State Senator Myron Orfield, “‘smart growth’ is an efficient and environmentally friendly pattern of development that focuses growth near existing public facilities... [and] provides people choice in where they live and how they get around”¹³. Smart growth requires regional cooperation to work, according to Orfield, lest it lead to further sprawl. Governments must take responsibility for their role in granting building permits and zoning; officials should develop a cohesive plan that clearly outlines where and how development can happen—regardless of whether or not public infrastructure is provided. In other words, the haphazard free market development of the past should no longer be allowed, as it more often than not creates more trouble than it is worth (see

development along coastal areas for prime examples of the dangers of building according to so-called free market imperatives).

Obviously, economic growth is vital to Northeastern Ohio and the state itself. Without businesses and jobs, everybody suffers. One way Cleveland can contribute to the economic growth of the city and the region is to provide incentives for highly trained college graduates to remain and invest in Cleveland and the region; their presence will then attract more businesses that require highly educated workers, and vice versa, and so on. Additionally, Northeastern Ohio should invest in information based industries and emerging industries, like the alternative fuel technology industry (development of fuel cells). Both information based businesses and alternative fuel industries need college graduates, which Cleveland especially, and the Northeastern region in general, have in ample supply if they are able to retain them. If Northeastern Ohio is able to invest early on in an emerging industry, like alternative fuel cells, the resulting profits could revitalize the entire region. Finally, economic growth, while necessary, should not trump environmental concerns. Allowing the economy to take greater precedence over the environment will not only produce detrimental long term effects, but also contributes to urban sprawl, which can also harm the economy.

Creative economic strategies to lure businesses to the Northeast Ohio region must be combined with smart growth principles as well as wise use of land if the region is to experience a long lasting renaissance. This combination will help to create a balanced environment in which business as well as people can thrive and develop.

¹ Zeller, George. Economic Indicators: Ohio's Job Growth Relative to the USA's Job Growth. (2006). The Center for Community Solutions: Ohio's Job Growth Relative to the Nation's Job Growth: October 2006 Update. The Center for Community Solutions. 2004. 25 Oct. 2006.

<http://www.communitysolutions.com/store/item.asp?ITEM_ID=1154&DEPARTMENT_ID=144>.

² "Background of Free Trade :International Trade Buzzwords." *On The Issues: Every Political Leader on Every Issue*. Thursday, October 26, 2006
<http://www.ontheissues.org/Background_Free_Trade.htm >.

³ Frolik, Joe. "Making Business Feel at Home." The Plain Dealer. 20 November 2002, Special Series: Quiet Crisis. 25 Oct. 2006
<<http://www.cleveland.com/quietcrisis/index.ssf?/quietcrisis/more/1037788449285630.html>>.

⁴ Frolik, Joe. "Making Business Feel at Home."

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ "Eric Fingerhut on Budget and Economy." *On The Issues: Every Political Leader on Every Issue*. Thursday, October 26, 2006 <http://www.ontheissues.org/Economic/Eric_Fingerhut_Budget_+_Economy.htm>.

⁷ "Fingerhut Announces Legislation to Promote Ohio Exports." *SenatorFingerhut.com: Your Link to State Government*. Wednesday, October 25th, 2006
<<http://www.senatorfingerhut.com/site/pp.asp?c=bgKILTOzEoH&b=312050>>.

⁸ "Erick Fingerhut on Environment." *On The Issues: Every Political Leader on Every Issue*. Wednesday, October 25th, 2006
<http://www.ontheissues.org/Domestic/Eric_Fingerhut_Environment.htm>.

⁹ Lopate, Phillip. 2003. The Empty Harbor and the Dilemma of Waterfront Development. In *Toward the Livable City*, ed. Emilie Buchwald, 104. Milkweed Editions.

¹⁰ Lopate, Phillip. 2003. The Empty Harbor and the Dilemma of Waterfront Development.

¹¹ Martin, Judith A. 2003. Reinventing a Vibrant Riverfront. In *Toward the Livable City*, ed. Emilie Buchwald, 126. Milkweed Editions.

¹² Wolstein, Scott. "Cleveland, A Magnet for New Residents." Panel Discussion, 20th Annual Western Reserve Studies Symposium (Transformation of a Region: The Western Reserve and the "Livable City"), Cleveland, OH, 3 November 2006.

¹³ Orfield, Myron. 2003. The Region: The True City. In *Toward the Livable City*, ed. Emilie Buchwald, 177. Milkweed Editions.