

## Tech Belt Initiative helps area compete in global markets: Joe Roman and Dennis Yablonsky



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*By Joe Roman and Dennis Yablonsky*

Economist Christopher Briem's column urging more regional cooperation between Cleveland and Pittsburgh presents a long list of impressive reasons why the Pittsburgh-Akron-Youngstown-Cleveland region must work closely together for mutual economic gain. Together, we have world-class universities, 30 Fortune 500 companies, many emerging industries, unparalleled hospitals and research centers and more than 6 million residents.

All of these strengths make us a formidable global competitor.

Four years ago, with the leadership and encouragement of Congressmen Tim Ryan of Youngstown and Jason Altmire of Pittsburgh, leaders in this powerful region came together to create the Tech Belt Initiative. Today, it includes representatives from the region's key economic development organizations, universities, technology-focused investment organizations, businesses and philanthropic foundations.

Our mission is to leverage our strengths to enhance brain gain, plentiful employment and a stronger economy rooted in technology-based industries. We have all the ingredients, and we are beginning to see results.

Today, discussions and collaborations between Carnegie Mellon University and Case Western Reserve University, for example, are under way. Likewise, leaders from economic growth organizations such as Cleveland's BioEnterprise and the Pittsburgh Life Sciences Greenhouse are routinely at the table together to explore opportunities and joint projects.

And our two organizations that were pivotal in helping form the Tech Belt Initiative -- the Greater Cleveland Partnership and the Pittsburgh-based Allegheny Conference -- are today working together more than ever to determine how we can grow our respective metropolitan areas by helping each other through a regional approach.

Last year, collaboration within the Tech Belt Initiative reached a high point when we submitted a \$130 million proposal to the U.S. Department of Energy for its Energy Regional Innovation Cluster program. While we did not emerge as the winning applicant, the process served as a platform for the future and demonstrated that this is indeed a region with a willingness and ability to collaborate.

Our geographic proximity in an increasingly competitive world demands such collaboration. Cleveland, Youngstown, Akron, Pittsburgh and the surrounding areas need to continue to encourage and grow this effort. Our future is brighter if we all join forces for job growth and economic expansion.

Clevelanders and Pittsburghers are business and academic leaders, entrepreneurs, visionaries and, above all, neighbors. When football rivalries don't demand that we take sides, we can, and must, continue to collaborate.

So, welcome to Cleveburgh! The short distance that separates our cities is shrinking. All of Northeast Ohio should welcome that.

*Roman is the CEO of the Greater Cleveland Partnership. Yablonsky is the CEO of the Allegheny Conference.*

# Residents of Cleveland and Pittsburgh need to rethink their place in the world: Christopher Briem

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***By Christopher Briem***

Cleveburgh.

To anyone who has survived the many cold slugfests pitting the Steelers against the Browns, this word may grate like fingernails pulled across a chalkboard. But chalkboards have seen their day. It may be time to realize that what separates Pittsburgh and Cleveland is more artificial than real. It may be time to talk about the once-unthinkable: a combined Cleveland-Pittsburgh metro region.

A two-hour drive up the turnpike is all that separates downtown Cleveland from downtown Pittsburgh. Suburban counties of both regions are much closer.

Pittsburgh and Cleveland, along with Akron, Canton, Youngstown, Steubenville and Weirton, W.Va., could all fit within the area that currently makes up the Chicago Metropolitan Statistical Area. Cleveburgh is not a vast "megalopolis," and in many ways it already functions as a single region.

Northeast Ohio and southwestern Pennsylvania are far more interconnected with each other than either region is with other parts of Ohio or Pennsylvania. The day-to-day interactions of local businesses are geared toward regional partners, not Harrisburg or Columbus. Pittsburgh industries are linked far more closely to markets and suppliers in Youngstown, Akron and Cleveland than with those in Allentown, Pa.; Scranton, Pa.; or even Philadelphia. In so many ways, the state boundaries we think of as important are no more than lines on a map.

Both regions share an economic history that has defined them. Both regions have worked to streamline fragmented local governments. Both regions have sought to re-educate their work forces and redefine themselves in a new economy.

For the most part, each region has proceeded independently. Could more be achieved by working together?

**What is Cleveburgh? [Click here](#) to view the online story that includes an interactive map showing what Cleveburgh might look like.**

The metropolitan statistical areas of Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Akron, Canton, Steubenville, Weirton and Youngstown, along with adjacent counties, add up to a population of more than 6 million and a labor force of more than 4 million. They make up a combined market that many local businesses already treat as a single region when looking to the future.

Nowhere is the connection between the two regions stronger than in the labor market. The interconnected Cleveburgh work forces have long had a symbiotic relationship, and it's been growing over time. Both regions have long obsessed over migration and job growth, while both have depended on each other for workers.

Annual migration among Cleveburgh communities dwarfs the movement of people to other places across the nation. Daily commuting over state borders is a growing phenomenon. It is not uncommon to see workers from Ohio and West Virginia looking for jobs in Pittsburgh, and Pittsburgh residents considering jobs in Weirton or Youngstown or farther reaches of the region.

In many ways, Cleveburgh already exists. The Regional Learning Network was formed in 2009 and brings together local leaders of Cleveland, Youngstown and Pittsburgh to address shared problems. The Tech Belt Initiative brings together emerging technology industries of the greater Pittsburgh and Cleveland regions. These are seeds of what could become broader regional cooperation -- if we make it so.

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Cleveburgh is not meant to be the single definitive map of our region. It certainly is not the only version of what a "greater" metro area might be; other broad regional definitions are being discussed.

The Pittsburgh Regional Indicators Project looks broadly at 22 counties in Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Ohio, while the Power of 32 regional visioning project focuses on a 32-county area extending into Maryland. Each of these definitions, and possibly others, are meant to expand how we Pittsburghers view our place in the world -- and, hopefully, how the world views our place in it.

If Pittsburgh and Cleveland can greatly expand the cooperation that has only just begun, then maybe we can lose the inward-looking parochialism that also is part of our common legacy.

The challenge of competing as a region can only be met if we combine both metro areas' networks of resources, if we share ideas, capital and talent. Cleveburgh could take advantage of a much broader set of strengths than either Pittsburgh or Cleveland can tap on its own.

This all sounds straightforward, but it is far from where we are. Can our leaders pitch the region jointly for future investment, or must we treat each other as competitors far beyond the gridiron?

No one definition of our greater region is right for all circumstances. But we can't be limited by municipal or state boundaries that mean less and less as time goes by.

Roads and rivers, power lines and pollution; all ignore the lines arbitrarily drawn on maps centuries ago. It is our mental map of who we are that will have the most to do with who we become.

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