

RESTORING PROSPERITY TO OHIO

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Restoring Our Prosperity
The State Role in Revitalizing Ohio's
Older Industrial Communities



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THE PLAIN DEALER

KEEP POLITICIANS' STICKY HANDS OFF THIRD FRONTIER MONEY

September 10, 2008

EDITORIAL

About 1,000 civic, business and public policy leaders will meet today in Columbus to talk about how Ohio can help revitalize its urban centers. The conference builds on recent research from the Brookings Institution that identifies metropolitan areas as the keys to innovation, and therefore prosperity, in the global economy.

Based on his research, Brookings scholar Bruce Katz says state policies have too often kept Ohio's cities from reclaiming or sharpening their natural competitive edge. One big problem he identified is Ohio's tendency to spread development resources "like peanut butter," rather than concentrate on projects with the greatest potential.

Let's hope the Strickland administration, which helped organize the conference, takes note. Because it's preparing to tamper with perhaps the smartest development effort Ohio has undertaken in a generation.

Conceived by former Gov. Bob Taft and financed to the tune of \$1.6 billion by voters in 2005, the Third Frontier invests in technology projects with potential to draw private investment, seed new industries and create jobs. Key to its chances of success and to public confidence has been the Third Frontier's use of experts from the National Academy of Sciences to evaluate grant proposals.

That's all about keeping politics out of the decisions. It also means there are clear winners and losers -- not a dollop of peanut butter for everyone.

So far the administration has twice raided Third Frontier money for other uses. Now it wants to change the guidelines for Third Frontier grant-making to give itself a stronger voice.

That threatens to invite politics to the table and endanger public support. Ohio's metropolitan centers can't take that risk -- and neither should this governor.

The Lima News

A STATE HEAVY ON GOVERNMENT REPORT: OHIO SHOULD FOCUS ON CENTER CITIES, NOT EXPANDING

September 12, 2008

EDITORIAL

One only needs to consider the economic pinch local governments are feeling to understand Ohio has too many of them. Local governments compete against one another for industry, for residents and for state assistance - and there simply isn't enough to go around in Ohio.

But, according to a think tank report released last week, Ohio's policies have left behind the state's metropolitan centers. The 16 largest areas in the state - Lima is one of them - account for 84 percent of jobs, 81 percent of the population and 87 percent of Ohio's gross domestic output. The report was meant as a method for Ohio to create "competitive communities," recognizing the importance of center cities on entire regions' well-being.

Yet the state favors policies that promote growth in new places. Ohio cannot compete in the 21st century with a system of local governments still set up for the 19th century, said Bruce Katz, vice president of the Brookings Institution.

Ohio Gov. Ted Strickland told The Columbus Dispatch he would use his position to encourage the consolidation of governments - and that's a wise idea. Ohio's population isn't growing as rapidly as other states' are, so more governments are serving fewer people. It makes little sense for two small communities to

pay for the same services when they could combine costs and either have money left for other services or, even better, to return to taxpayers.

Lima Mayor David Berger, who was among the more than 1,000 Ohioans involved in the study, was understandably pleased with the findings. However, he and other center city advocates need to temper their enthusiasm. While state residents would be better served if government services would merge, those in the center city are going to be quick to assume their municipalities would be the beneficiaries of consolidation. That might not be the case.

Politically, trying to restructure how the Ohio Legislature divides funds will be a nightmare if those outside the center cities want to mount a spirited resistance. Republicans, the majority of whom do not live in the state's core communities, still control the General Assembly. They are as good as listening to their constituents as are inner-city Democrats.

Reshaping Ohio governments will require cooperation from all sides. Decades of trying to apply guilt to the suburbanites for fleeing - whether in Fairborn outside Dayton, Grove City outside of Columbus or Shawnee Township outside of Lima - hasn't worked. It's hard to believe a report suggesting the state needs to consolidate and rethink government services is

going to do much to sway people who stand to gain little or nothing from such a change.

THE PLAIN DEALER

OHIO MUST STRENGTHEN ITS CITIES

September 14, 2008

EDITORIAL

On the very day when Gov. Ted Strickland announced that the state's resources were thin and likely to get thinner, he also assured business, civic and academic leaders gathered elsewhere in Columbus that he is committed to renewing Ohio's urban centers.

Obviously, that won't be easy. Cleveland and other major cities have endured decades of job losses, population flight and disinvestment. And yet research -- much of it by the Brookings Institution, a co-sponsor of last Wednesday's summit -- shows that metropolitan regions wield disproportionate economic clout in the global marketplace. If the core cities of those metros are weak, they pull down entire regions.

Bottom line: Ohio's economy won't be healthy until its cities do better. The task facing Strickland is to use the state's limited resources to help those cities. Yes, a better national economy would help; so would a more sympathetic administration in Washington. But Ohio and its cities can't control those things. So they had better use their own tools wisely.

To its credit, the administration -- which until now has not been very city-friendly -- asked Brookings and Greater Ohio, a land-use reform group, for ideas to spur urban rebirth. They were joined in that call by Republican House Speaker Jon Husted and Senate President Bill

Harris, who've shown they understand the importance of Ohio's cities. Last week's conference, and a preliminary report distributed there, offered some suggestions and sought to generate more.

Almost everyone wants Ohio to end its addiction to "peanut butter" -- the political impulse to avoid tough decisions by spreading goodies evenly, so everyone gets a taste, but so thinly that almost no one gets enough to make a difference. Instead, Ohio needs to make fewer investments, and to make each substantial enough to have real impact -- the model of former Gov. Bob Taft's Third Frontier.

Brookings urban expert Bruce Katz notes that cities are rich in the anchor institutions -- hospitals, universities, research centers -- that drive a "knowledge economy." So why not accelerate development by focusing enterprise zones on those hubs? But don't use them in areas that don't need the boost or to foster competition within a metropolitan area.

Lt. Gov. Lee Fisher says the Ohio Department of Development, which he heads, plans to propose similar reforms soon. That's good. It's also good that the Ohio Department of Transportation, widely viewed as an agent of sprawl, is working on a strategic plan that might evaluate future proposals on how they boost competitiveness. Clevelanders, sick of seeing

ODOT stall the West Shoreway and stonewall the Opportunity Corridor, will be watching for real change.

Ohio's cities, despite their obvious problems, are rich in assets. With the state as a partner, those assets could multiply and lift all of Ohio.

THE PLAIN DEALER

OHIO'S RULES HINDER PROGRESS, BUSINESS LEADERS SAY

September 10, 2008

TOM BRECKENRIDGE

Business leaders and top elected officials are calling for reforms to state policies that they say have hobbled Ohio's cities and stymied the Buckeye economy.

More than 1,000 influential leaders gathered Wednesday at the Greater Columbus Convention Center to hear a hard-hitting critique of Ohio's struggling urban centers and how they can be restored.

The Brookings Institution, a pro-urban think tank based in Washington, D.C., and Greater Ohio, a like-minded nonprofit group in Columbus, hosted an eight-hour summit that drew mayors, university presidents, development professionals and nonprofit leaders from every corner of the state.

Brookings and Greater Ohio released a preliminary report, titled "Restoring Prosperity: The State Role in Revitalizing Ohio's Core Communities," that they hope will become a national model for urban renewal.

Lt. Gov. Lee Fisher said the state is adopting the Brookings strategies, with a number of them contained in a new economic development plan rolled out last week.

Fisher also acknowledged that the state is guilty of anti-urban bias across an array of state programs.

"We've divested from the urban core and higher education," said Fisher, adding that Gov. Ted Strickland's administration and a bipartisan effort in the Statehouse is trying to reverse the damage.

Ohio's fortunes are tied directly to its cities, officials said.

Brookings and Greater Ohio say 32 "core" cities -- those with at least 15,000 residents and a 20 percent share of their county's population -- host many of the assets that drive prosperity: innovation, skilled workers, road and telecommunication networks, and quality neighbor-

hoods.

The cities, from Cincinnati to Cleveland, are home to seven of the state's 11 research universities; two-thirds of the state's 60 Fortune 1000 companies; most of the state's ports and Amtrak stations; and 40 percent of the state's registered historic places.

Yet the core cities suffer. Many, like Cleveland, are hemorrhaging population while dealing with concentrated poverty. Employment levels, average incomes and educational attainment all lag national averages.

State policies must be reformed across an array of programs, urban proponents said. Problem areas include:

- **Fragmented governance.** Ohio has 3,800 governmental units. Many of them battle over relocating companies, trying to boost city budgets that are shrinking in a sour economy, said Bruce Katz, Brookings' guru on metropolitan revitalization.

"As a result, everyone is diminished," Katz said.

Reformers advocate consolidation of government services and a sharing of income taxes when a business moves across city borders. A Northeast Ohio mayors group is considering such reforms.

- **Tax incentives.** A number of speakers Wednesday called for an end to Ohio's "peanut butter" approach for business tax breaks -- spreading them thin across the state rather than focusing on distressed communities.

The state's popular enterprise zone program, which allows communities to offer property tax breaks to business, was designed to benefit struggling cities, officials said. But Ohio now has 200 such zones, many of them in high-income communities.

Fisher, who also heads the state's development department, said a task force is considering changes to that program and other tax incentives.

Under a new development strategy favored by Brookings, Ohio will target technology grants and other resources at 12 "hubs" of innovation, such as the sprouting biomedical cluster in the University Circle area.

- **Education.** Funding policies that rely on local property tax to fund schools means wealthier districts have more resources for their schoolchildren, critics said.

Strickland's administration is expected to suggest funding reforms soon. As for higher education, State Rep. Jon Husted, the House speaker, suggested that the state continue freezing college tuitions for six years, to bring them in line with national averages.

- **Transportation.** Ohio's "addiction" to building new roads, rather than developing public transit or other alternatives, has led to the sprawl that is sapping core cities, Katz noted.

Strickland has directed the state's transportation department to consider development of core cities as it reviews road projects. And the state has a task force that's studying ways to better link Ohio's roads, railroads, ports and airports.

One prominent business leader applauded the new strategies for core cities, but believes increasing Ohio's population should be paramount.

Albert Ratner, co-chairman of Forest City Enterprises Inc., said Ohio should do whatever it can to draw new blood, whether it's from Indiana or India.

"I'll take every illegal immigrant I can get," Ratner said.

OHIO MUST RETHINK GROWTH, STUDY SAYS

September 10, 2008

JOE HALLETT

Ohio has too many governmental entities that compete with each other and for too long has fostered state policies that wastefully favor the growth of new communities rather than the redevelopment of older ones, according to a report released today.

"Ohio cannot advance a 21st-century economy with a system of local government rooted in the 19th," said Bruce Katz, vice president of the Brookings Institution in Washington.

In collaboration with Greater Ohio, a Columbus nonprofit organization devoted to smart-growth policies, Brookings released a 41-page report on policy reforms to revitalize Ohio's 32 core communities that serve as regional centers of economic, educational, medical and cultural activity.

The study, available at www.greaterohio.org, was delivered during the "Restoring Ohio's Prosperity" summit, attended by more than 1,000 of the state's leaders in government, education, business and civic activism at the Greater Columbus Convention Center.

The report stresses that Ohio needs a "competitive communities" strategy that recognizes the importance of core cities, particularly the state's seven biggest, as economic, social and cultural centers of the regions they domi-

nate. The seven largest metropolitan regions account for 33 percent of Ohio's land area and 71 percent of its population while generating 80 percent of the state's gross domestic product.

And yet, "Ohio's cities are weaker than they should be, undermining the ability of the state to attract and retain innovative firms and talented workers," Katz said, because state policies favor growth in new places.

"The Ohio way - sprawling fast while growing slow, hollowing out older cities only to build new housing and retail facilities 30 miles away - does not make fiscal, environmental or competitive sense and must end," Katz said.

Major forces, including deindustrialization, global competition and energy shortages, are forcing Ohio's cities, suburbs, exurbs and rural areas to become "tightly bound and inextricably linked," making it more important to strengthen core cities' ability to deliver educational, medical, social and cultural services, the report said.

Katz said that "the balkanized landscape of governance in Ohio has hurt core communities" because the nearly 3,800 local governmental jurisdictions, including 250 cities, 695 villages and 1,308 townships, "spend more

time competing with their neighbors for a piece of property tax here or payroll tax there than working with them to pursue a unified vision for economic development."

In remarks to the summit, Gov. Ted Strickland said he recognized the importance of Ohio's cities and his administration would give full attention to the report by Brookings and Greater Ohio.

Asked afterward whether he will seek to consolidate governments in Ohio, Strickland said: "It is not my position as governor to make these decisions for local communities. But encourage it, say it's a good idea, try to use whatever bully pulpit I have or influence I have to say, 'We need to streamline,' and say, 'We need to become more efficient,' of course I'll do that."

OHIO LEADERS DISCUSS CITIES' FUTURES

September 11, 2008

G. PATRICK KELLEY

State and civic leaders discussed the economic potential of Canton and other Ohio communities in Columbus on Wednesday.

Gov. Ted Strickland and legislative leaders joined other Ohioans to discuss policy reforms needed to reinvigorate core communities.

Bethany Chamberlin, an aide to Canton Mayor William J. Healy II, attended for the mayor. She said a recurring theme of the meeting was "partnerships on many levels are keys to keeping the state competitive."

Canton and other cities "can play a major role in these partnerships," she said.

The report, *Restoring Prosperity: The State Role in Revitalizing Ohio's Core Communities*, looks at the economic potential of Ohio's industrial cities and "core communities" and offers a policy blueprint for their revitalization.

Called the Brookings-Greater Ohio Summit on Restoring Ohio's Prosperity, participants had the chance to respond to a preliminary version of the report. Comments from the gathering will help to shape a final report, to be released early next year.

The summit was hosted, and the report was generated by the Brookings Institution, a nonprofit policy organization based in Washington,

and Greater Ohio, a nonprofit research and advocacy group based in Columbus.

Chamberlin said the discussion was a general one, but there were points brought out that Healy has been working on. One was the need for cooperation between state and local government on economic development, she said.

Another was the "need to use partnerships at the local level to increase efficiency." She cited Healy's work with the Northeast Ohio Mayors Association, his work with regional economic development efforts, and cooperation between the city and Stark County.

Participants also reviewed a set of proposals for state policy reforms aimed at revitalizing communities. The recommendations focus on Ohio's 32 core communities — including Canton — whose revitalization is important to the economic health of the state.

The report said the 32 core communities have significant assets: Seven of the state's 11 research institutions, nearly half of the state's hospitals, more than two-thirds of the state's Fortune 1000 companies, more than 57 percent of higher education institutions, and 40 percent of the state's registered historic places.

Those communities also have valuable infrastructure components, including roads,

bridges, rail and ports, the report said.

The Lima News

REPORT: CITIES BUILDING BLOCKS FOR STATE'S SUCCESS

September 11, 2008

HEATHER RUTZ

Ohio's 16 metropolitan areas account for 84 percent of the state's jobs, 81 percent of the state's population and 87 percent of the state's economic output.

Yet, Ohio's policies have left them behind in favor of ones encouraging development of new communities over redevelopment of older ones, such as Lima, and needless competition among communities, according to a draft report presented Wednesday.

A summit with more than 1,000 Ohioans, from Gov. Ted Strickland to township trustees, focused attention on using the state's "core" communities to reinvigorate the state's economy. A draft report from Greater Ohio and the Brookings Institution, "Restoring Prosperity: The State Role in Revitalizing Ohio's Core Communities," drew the attention of leaders across the state, including Lima Mayor David Berger, who sat on a panel responding to the policies presented and whether their implementation is realistic.

"This cannot just be a homily for the church choir and congregation within the walls of the church," Berger said. "It has to be a tool for evangelizing those who don't hear."

Berger, fired up after what he called an "unprecedented day" decades overdue, said Lima's situation and other central cities', in which more people live around the city than in

it without understanding a struggling center means trouble for everyone, creates an uphill battle.

"The power of the status quo is absolutely enormous. Those who are doing well under the current rules of the game like it," Berger said. "They like it when sprawl occurs. They like it when shootings take place in downtown Lima and they go back to their homes and not have to worry about it. They like it when they can continue to support the well-to-do suburban school districts and criticize Lima schools, saying to get rid of teachers who don't know what they're doing and chastise children who are failing."

The challenges are great for cities such as Lima, with unemployment rates and high school dropout rates higher than those nationally. But officials also believe Ohio has unmatched assets.

"The people who came before us created a state so good that try as we have, we haven't been able to kill it," said Al Ratner, co-chairman of Forest City Enterprises. "We need immigration. Immigration is anyone who doesn't live in Ohio."

Ohio communities will not rebuild the way they grew through the early part of the 20th century, the report said. They must focus on innovation, educating their work forces, modernizing trans-

portation and creating quality places with history, culture, amenities and walkable neighborhoods.

The state needs to support communities, focus resources and leverage assets that matter in a new economy, said Bruce Katz, director of the Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program.

"Ohio's policies stack the deck against core communities at the very moment these places have a critical role to play in helping the state compete," Katz said. "The Ohio way - in which resources get spread across the state like peanut butter and local jurisdictions proliferate - is a luxury that Ohio taxpayers can no longer afford."

Jerry Good, Strickland's economic development representative for the region, liked what he heard.

"The historic piece is that after 30 or 40 years we're coming together as a state," Good said. "We're investing in regions and their assets. We're trying to do that with our eight-county region."

MASSIVE DUPLICATION TOO COSTLY FOR OHIO

September 12, 2008

JOE HALLETT

Ohio has six medical schools and nine law schools. Do we need that many? Ohio taxpayers spend tens of millions of dollars every year to build facilities and renovate old ones at state universities. As ever more students take courses online, is all that spending on buildings necessary?

Ohio State University has at least 98 employees making \$250,000 or more a year, more than half of them in medicine-related fields. Considering that more and more Ohio students are being priced out of college - or going deeply into debt to attend - is a review of university salaries and services in order?

Every week, scores of private-sector workers lose company-paid health-care and retirement benefits. Considering this, is it fair to provide generous health and retirement packages for our public employees?

Almost all of the billions of dollars Ohio receives from the federal Highway Trust Fund are used to build and maintain roads. In an era when high fuel costs are eating up more and more of families' incomes, isn't it prudent to spend more of the money on transportation options that don't involve autos?

Enrollment in many of Ohio's 610 school districts is declining. Do we need all this school governance, or is it time to consolidate districts and reduce the education bureaucracy?

Ohio has nearly 3,800 governmental jurisdictions, including 250 cities, 695 villages and 1,308 townships. Wouldn't consolidating into regional govern-

ments be more cost-effective and engender more cooperation among municipalities?

These types of questions need to be asked, because we simply cannot afford to continue doing what we're doing. Global forces are profoundly transforming Ohio's economy and its human condition, and until we reposition this state to compete in the new world, hardship will necessitate change. A quarter of our manufacturing jobs disappeared over the last seven years, and the median Ohio household made about \$4,000 less in 2006 than the national median.

Thankfully, some big brains are contemplating how to shape Ohio's future. More than 1,000 of them from government, business, academia and civic organizations gathered Wednesday in Columbus for the "Restoring Prosperity to Ohio" summit. A blueprint for how to proceed was presented by the prestigious Brookings Institution, a Washington think tank.

Brookings advocated a "competitive communities" strategy that would leverage the economic, educational, social and environmental strengths of 32 core communities - ranging in size from Ironton (11,000 people) to Columbus (730,000) - to serve their regions. Rather than empower these core communities, Ohio policies historically have served to weaken them, Brookings found.

"Ohio policies stack the deck against core communities, systematically favoring the growth of new places over the redevelopment of older ones and

failing to leverage the assets in these places in any coherent way," said Bruce Katz, vice president of Brookings. "At a time when the economy rewards places that collaborate, Ohio's structure of government does the exact opposite, encouraging cities and surrounding jurisdictions to engage in needless and wasteful competition."

Gov. Ted Strickland, who addressed the summit after announcing budget cuts of \$540 million, said Brookings has it right: "I am unhappy and troubled by what I perceive to be unhealthy competition in many areas of public life. An example is the proliferation of medical facilities, which seem to be designed more to compete and get patients than to serve the health-care needs of a community or region. That's just one example, but it is also true of government entities. ...

"When the public dollar is involved, competition should be competition that is designed to benefit the public, not to benefit the particular entities or organizations that are engaged in that competition."

To his credit, Strickland is in the midst of a top-to-bottom review of Ohio's primary- and secondary-education system, saying he is open to sweeping changes.

It should be just the beginning. Given Ohio's problems, it's time to rethink everything.

OhioNews Bureau

OHIO CONFERENCE CALLS FOR MAJOR MAKEOVERS

September 13, 2008

JOHN MICHAEL SPINELLI

State leaders, including Gov. Ted Strickland, Lt. Governor Lee Fisher and legislative leaders, were told this week at a well-attended conference in Columbus that Ohio needs an agenda for change because the current state policies, accumulated over the decades, have failed to keep pace with the changing dynamics of today's social, environmental and economic reality, resulting in the loss of manufacturing might that under-girded the dynamism its cities once had but have lost to a great degree, resulting in a trend toward an older and poorer population unable to compete in the unforgiving global economy.

The conference, "Restoring Our Prosperity: The State Role in Revitalizing Ohio's Core Communities," undertaken jointly by the Metropolitan Policy Program (MPP) at the Brookings Institution, a nonprofit public policy organization based in Washington, DC., and Greater Ohio, a policy center created to help Ohio build a vibrant economy that produces a quality of life for the common good, unveiled fresh proposals to take advantage of innovation, human capital, infrastructure and quality of place, assets found in metropolitan regions and the 32 core communities that are their hubs.

Bruce Katz, VP and Director of the MPP, and Lavea Brachman, Co-Director of Greater Ohio and a non-resident senior fellow at Brookings, laid the wood to Ohio leaders and other devel-

opment administrators, education, business, neighborhood and civic leaders in attendance, calling on them to stop doing what they've been doing if they want to alter the state's growth trajectory.

Reforms Katz and Brachman spoke to was not an appeal to more programs or more spending, but for policy makers to "reevaluate how existing policies, practices and administrative structures could be updated and realigned to better catalyze and encourage regional innovation and development. In simple language, they said Ohio needs to maximize the use of existing state resources in more effective ways.

The duo challenged the state to undertake an "honest assessment of what its real and potential assets are, where they exist, and ultimately, to make difficult choices about where and how to target scarce resources to best leverage them."

One unmistakable message Katz and Brachman drove home was that state officials must relinquish commanding control over strategies, policies and programs to regional leaders, thinkers and stakeholders who need flexibility and incentives to keep their regions, supported by their core communities, growing and prospering.

Ohio's leaders, then, need to design and implement a "competitive communities" strategy that strives to strengthen and leverage the economic potential and environmental role of core communities, their preliminary report called for.

Conference officials called on Ohio to "set forth a clear vision for the renewal of its core communities with "ambitious, transparent, and measurable goals to guide public, private and civic sector investments, and a new way of doing business so that these goals can be accomplished."

Strickland, who had earlier in the day announced that due to a continued decline in state revenues he was ordering his administration to cut another \$540 million in spending, made his homage to the importance of cities and the role they play in the vitality of a region.

As the after lunch key note speaker, Strickland, who inherited a state already hammered by massive job losses, especially in the manufacturing sector, has been stymied in trying to turn it around, as he promised to do when running for governor in 2006. He lauded the notion that cities serve as centers of "clusters that can energize an entire region."

Brandishing numerous awards Ohio received recently from R&D Magazine, which each year

OhioNews Bureau

OHIO CONFERENCE CALLS FOR MAJOR MAKEOVERS (CONTINUED)

September 13, 2008

JOHN MICHAEL SPINELLI

recognizes the states and their innovations, Strickland enumerated Ohio's national and world prominence in areas like health care for children and adults, its leading role in research and manufacturing of solar panels, bio-medical advancements and the state's new energy bill, which he said puts the Buckeye State among two other states that have mandated through law that 25 percent of all electricity produced and sold in the state by 2025 will come from renewable energy sources.

"Collaboration between cities and towns has the potential to solve problems that no town alone can possibly address," he said to a receptive audience. "In challenging times, when we need world class facilities or experts, we need not travel the world to find them, because we can rely on Ohio's cities," he said, adding that a city's agenda is a regional agenda and that agenda becomes a state agenda.

In closing remarks, Strickland, the first Democratic governor in 16 years, said he and his staff would give full attention to the reports recommendations, some of which he said he agreed with and some he didn't agree with. "A moment like this requires bold thinking, he said, "because simply repeating what's been done before will entrench our weakness and

leave to chance the fate of our strengths."

The conference sessions focused on creating vital neighborhoods, enhancing skills and earnings, boosting business growth and job creation, investing to promote economic development, promoting regional solutions and learning from local leadership and promising practices.

Two prominent Republican leaders, Senate President Bill Harris and House Speaker Jon Husted, were also in attendance. Harris (R-Ashland) pointed to the reform of the state's tax system, known as the Commercial Activity Tax, which he said will lead to a better business climate because it provided a 21 percent across-the-board tax in personal taxes and eliminated various business taxes that were designed decades ago when Ohio was an industrial titan but no longer needed.

Husted (R-Kettering), an advocate for charter schools, spoke about education reforms and said Ohio would need to freeze college costs for six years just to have them catch up with the national average of higher education.

In the larger scope of the debate, Republicans, who have controlled Ohio from top to bottom since 1992 when it reclaimed the office of governor and then in 1994 when it also acquired control of the state legislature, were

indirectly accused of "stacking the deck" against cities in favor of suburbs and rural areas.

From a political perspective, cities are bastions of Democratic leaning voters while sprawling suburbs and "exurbia," mainly townships, are home to fiscal and social conservatives who generally eschew the kind of progress measures Brookings and Greater Ohio are calling for.

Another major theme of the conference, although not formally addressed, was the drag on progress too much government brings. Ohio has thousands of government entities, from townships to counties to various district authorities that really work against each other. Calling for a streamlining of the superstructure of government is a daunting and likely impossible dream, given that townships and school boards are the birthing centers for aspiring politicians who seek a higher office to ascend to. Asking townships to be pared down or eliminated or for Ohio's 88 counties to be reduced to a lesser number is indeed tilting at windmills.

No group of elected politicians will willingly cut their offices, so for any radical change to occur, the citizens of Ohio will be faced with mounting a drive to change the Ohio Constitution in ways that can undue the power and

OhioNews Bureau

OHIO CONFERENCE CALLS FOR MAJOR MAKEOVERS (CONTINUED)

September 13, 2008

JOHN MICHAEL SPINELLI

authority of all the offices that have an iron grip on the gears of government.

This is certainly not the first conference of its kind I've been to and I'll wager it won't be the last one either. Groups like Brookings and Greater Ohio, who have awesome sounding mission statements and pedigreed staff experts who make their living at producing far flung recommendations about change and how to achieve it, should understand that making a crack in the armor of the status quo is all consuming. And while some tinkering and tweaking can be achieved, the issues they talked about today could easily have been talked about 30 years ago and will likely be talked about 20 years from now.

While the tenor of the proceedings in the larger plenary sessions was collaborative and positive, the break out sessions offered stark enactments of the kind of turf warfare between state, regional or city officials and planners who battle against state domination of programs and funds.

Ohio is in a real fiscal pickle, to be sure, as demonstrated by Strickland's orders to cut \$1.2 in state spending so far this year as a result of the hard times residents and businesses are undergoing as the nation slips closer to recession, which may economists say we're already in.

With no more rabbits to put out of its hat, state leaders like Strickland, Harris and Husted are befuddled about their inability to do much in the present to reverse the downward decline of the state, which boasts some of the poorest big cities in the nation and a rising level of poverty as jobs disappear and people wonder whether to stay or move to greener pastures.