

This shouldn't be the Rust Belt, it should be the 'Green Belt'

By PHILIP BRENNAN

Over the past few decades, the Rust Belt, which begins in central New York and crisscrosses to the west through Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, and the Lower Peninsula of Michigan, ending in northern Illinois and eastern Wisconsin, has experienced the loss of hundreds of thousands of jobs in the region. As the U.S. steel and automobile industries have been reinvigorated by automated processes which require fewer workers, Rust Belt workers require retraining to find new sectors for well-paying employment in the technology and clean tech markets.



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We choose not to see Ohio as the Rust Belt, but have been participating in the aggressive transformation into a "tech belt" state, which requires support from state politicians and nonprofit and for-profit organizations to succeed. Witness the success of the Youngstown Business Incubator, which has become an internationally recognized program focused on the development of B2B software application companies in the Mahoning Valley, which has over 30 portfolio companies operating out of a downtown campus.

About 17 percent of Ohio's economy is generated by manufacturing, compared with about 12 percent of the U.S. economy. Ohio lost 20 percent of its manufacturing jobs during the peak of America's recession from 2007-2009, according to the state's Department of Job and Family Services. It has regained about

50,000 over the past four years with much more work to be done.

Earlier this year, Gov. John Kasich signed a bill tabling requirements for utilities to increase the use of renewable energy and energy-efficient options. The Environmental Defense Fund states that this is a step back, as earlier legislation has created 25,000 jobs in the renewable industry and saved Ohio citizens \$1 billion through energy-efficiency utility options.

Clean tech creates jobs and improves the environment by investing in practical clean energy/energy efficiency. New jobs will be created and manufacturers will become more energy efficient. The Natural Resources Defense Council states that "Ohio's clean economy has created 126,855 green jobs in the state, many of them in the renewable energy industry. Clean energy can further boost the local economy by transforming Ohio's coal-dominated, imported energy supply." The council adds that "over 80 percent of Ohio's electricity comes from coal, and the state spends \$1.59 billion each year to import it — more than \$300 per household." Continuing to harness Ohio's own unique renewable resource that is the energy-efficient harnessing of industrial waste heat will undoubtedly keep more money in-state and expand Ohio's workforce.

Companies that use clean energy sources help reduce harmful emissions which provide healthier air for us all. My company, ECHOGEN Power Systems, along with over 400 other companies, is part of the clean energy economy in Ohio. Clean energy companies need to place a priority on repurposing and training traditional manufacturing and autoworkers for clean technology sector positions. We can do this by supporting a national Green

Jobs Act, which directs support for the workforce to retrain for clean energy manufacturing positions. Our state should have a clean energy task force that brings together state and federal agencies to make clean energy a priority here in Ohio. Our governor started his tenure with a commitment to exploring the best energy portfolio at his 21st Century Energy and Economic Summit. We need to recommit to exploring a comprehensive policy for the State of Ohio as we have an abundance of waste heat that could be economically repurposed being lost at our industrial facilities.

Managed by inventive businesses, universities and public policy, Ohio's clean energy economy can continue to drive job growth and attract significant investment money to our state. There are distinct economic benefits of a stronger tax incentive for industrial energy-efficiency technologies such as combined heat and power and waste heat to power. Deploying more industrial energy efficiency helps create jobs, saves manufacturers money, and reduces emissions.

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