

# Comment

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## Next governor must see Ohio for what it can be

If the recently concluded presidential contest was the "mother of all elections," then the 2006 election in which all statewide offices will be up for grabs must be its only child.

Thanks to term limits, one of the worst governor's in Ohio history, Bob Taft, is forbidden from running again opening up the flood gates for a bunch of wannabes and pretenders to succeed him.



Dennis E. Eckart

The Republican statehouse incumbents who have enjoyed a 15-year monopoly on state government are now

lining up to tell us that they will each be different and better if only we give 'em four more years.

They have raised this child of state government for 15 years and now want to take a paternity test to prove they aren't the parents. We are not so easily fooled.

Democratic pretenders, so far, don't seem to get it either.

The most visible of the announced Democrats is Columbus mayor Michael Coleman. He recently started his campaign with a bus tour of several so-called "red" counties that were carried by President Bush in 2004.

Coleman's stated purpose on his arrival in Bowling Green was "to listen."

Listening is good. After all, as my mother has often reminded me, "God gave us two ears and only one mouth." Real people have real stories and real problems and, in the end, need real help.

But this is also a state in real trouble, and psychoanalysis alone won't fix it.

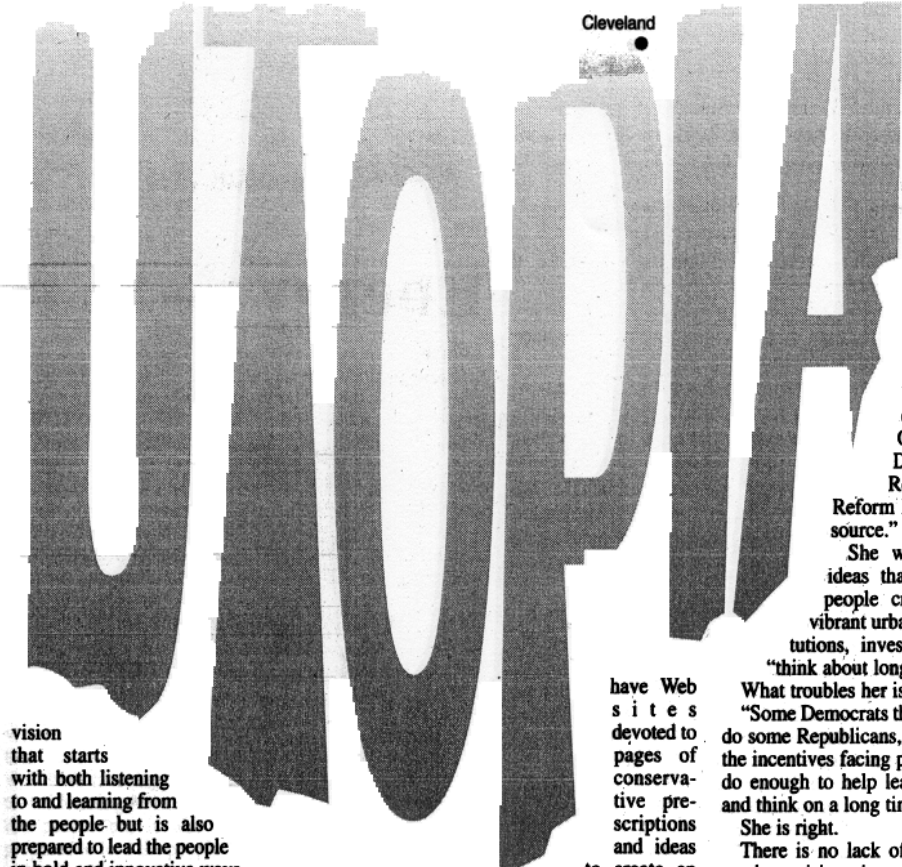
Ohio has lost its way but we continue to play the economic development game as if we are sitting on a lead.

The Republicans, for 15 years, have turned a deaf ear to the cries of thousands of jobless and under-educated Ohioans.

And the Democrats think they can win if they are simply not Bob Taft.

We deserve better. The next governor should NOT win simply because he or she has a good bedside manner, a great resume or political pedigree, or an easily recognized household name.

The next governor WILL win on the strength of his or her ideas and vision. A



vision that starts with both listening to and learning from the people but is also prepared to lead the people in bold and innovative ways.

Where is the next great idea, this new vision, coming from?

Can and should incumbents be granted an edge or a doubt in the ensuing debate?

Does changing people mean changes in policy and direction?

To become the next governor it is clear to me that policy does matter. It is the difference.

Gov. Taft found out the hard way when the conservative Washington, D.C.-based think tank, the Cato Institute, gave him an "F" for his poor performance in dealing with Ohio fiscal issues. Based on 15 objective measures of fiscal performance, their report card, for a conservative group, was relatively balanced from a partisan objective.

Taft's economic policy for seven years has been to not have one, and as we all know, not doing your homework gets a failing grade.

On the "right," Cato is not alone. The national organization, Club for Growth, and here at home, the Buckeye Institute,

have Web sites devoted to pages of conservative prescriptions and ideas to create an economic healthy environ-

ment in Ohio.

Policy does matter. There are other sites and organizations across the political spectrum full of innovative, bold and sometimes radical or controversial policy choices just waiting for a leader to embrace and articulate them with clarity and precision.

In Ohio, the Center for Community Solutions and the emerging Progressive Scholars Network both stand out as forward-thinking promoters of innovative ideas backed by sound research.

In the center, left and right, there exists a veritable cornucopia of visionary ideas waiting to be adopted by a leader to drive fundamental change in a state badly in need of bold economic reform.

But who shall sound the note?

In Ohio, a relatively young organization called Policy Matters, stands out for its bold and sometimes audacious thinking.

It is led by their incredibly thoughtful executive director, Amy Hanauer, who thinks thoughts big enough to be governor herself.

But, that's not her goal in life.

"Viable ideas intrigue me, whether they come from the Greens, the Democrats, the Republicans, the

Reform Party or any other source."

She would like to see ideas that help innovative people create jobs, create vibrant urban and public institutions, invest in children and "think about long-term goals."

What troubles her is that, "Some Democrats think in that way, as do some Republicans, but in many ways the incentives facing policymakers don't do enough to help leaders be visionary and think on a long time horizon."

She is right. There is no lack of vision. What we need are visionaries.

The building blocks for Ohio's future success are found on the Web pages of Policy Matters Ohio and other similar sites where policy is more important than politics and the next generation more important than the next election.

Check 'em out.

Hanauer articulates well what most politicians miss when she says, "you might not always agree with our conclusions but I think we are developing a very coherent vision."

Scripture reminds us that, "If the trumpet gives an uncertain sound who shall prepare himself to the battle."

Hanauer and her colleagues are sounding certain notes about the battle for Ohio's economic future.

We should listen.

And for now, "Amy for governor."

Dennis E. Eckart is a former congressman who now practices law with Baker & Hostetler in Cleveland. He may be reached at [denniseckart@news-herald.com](mailto:denniseckart@news-herald.com).

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