

Political Cooperation toward Globalizing the Quad City Region

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Background

For years the Midwest has thrived in the era of an industrialized marketplace. Many Midwestern towns were homes to factories full of hard-working, blue collar workers. However, with the rise of technology, the personal computer, and the Internet, the marketplace has gone global. Meaning, now companies in Iowa are not just competing with companies in Illinois, but in China, Brazil, and India as well. As competition has grown fierce, companies have had to lay off workers, and/or shut down entire factories. As companies cut workers and shut down factories, Midwestern cities have been devastated.

In Richard C. Longworth's book: "Caught in the Middle: America's Heartland in an Age of Globalism," he argues that there are several obstacles the Midwest needs to overcome in order to compete in a global economy. One key element is the need for economic and political leaders of the Midwest to start working together to share resources, ideas, and information. Only through cooperation will the Midwest be able to thrive once again.

Abstract

The Quad-City area will be examined to determine what political efforts are underway to make the shift from four industrialized towns to one global region. Mark Schwiebert stated, "Without regionalism we will not have globalization." The focus of attention will be primarily on federal, state, and municipal elected officials to see how well they have worked together historically as well as presently. It will also be important to determine what ideas are being formulated for the future. It is believed that if our region is going to compete in a global market, the charge will need to be led by current and future political leaders. The politicians interviewed were:

- Mark Schwiebert, Rock Island Mayor
- Bill Gluba, Davenport Mayor
- Elesha Gayman, State Representative (Iowa)
- Bruce Braley, Congressman (Iowa)
- Phil Hare, Congressman (Illinois)

- Mike Freemire, Bettendorf Mayor
- Pat Verschoore, State Representative (Illinois)

Problem Statement

"One barrier looms higher than any other. It's the political barrier, the balkanization of the Midwest into a hive of squabbling states that would rather fight than cooperate," Longworth said.

Several Quad-City area elected officials were interviewed to ascertain the strength of historic and current efforts. The first question probed to determine if the political culture in the area has historically been a culture of cooperation or competition. The particular concern being addressed was what progress has been made to this point in the region's effort to globalize. Based on responses from the elected officials, the Quad-City region is now leaning toward an atmosphere of cooperation, although not all officials agree. Most elected officials stated that in the past there was not a culture of cooperation between the communities. However, because of recent economic stress and need for globalization, the local legislators have recognized the need for cooperation within the region. Phil Hare summarized, "There have been issues with competition between the states and cities but those times are largely behind us. The local governmental units realize that cooperation is imperative and economic benefits don't recognize state and city boundaries."

The next question investigated was what efforts are currently on-going to globalize the region. The consensus by those queried was Bi-State Regional Authority, Rock Island Arsenal Development Group, Rock Island Arsenal Task Force, and Quad City Development Group. Each of said entities melds public and private sectors to develop initiative, strategies, and goals throughout the Quad Cities.

Another area of interest was discerning what barriers these officials could identify in making the area competitive in the global marketplace. What was found was only a few barriers could be identified by each. However, a common thread mentioned by elected officials was lack of budgetary considerations for economic development in each municipality's budget. Mayor Bill Gluba of Davenport stated that the total financial commitment of the entire Quad-

City region is one-third of what Cedar Rapids and Des Moines each invest on economic development. Also, there is no money appropriated for foreign trade missions to expand area business.

Individuals were asked to expand upon what ideas and solutions they have to help the Quad Cities prosper in a global market. Through this process no concise, universal solution was uncovered, due to lack of defined obstacles. The solutions shared showed each elected official's unique perspective. This is mostly discouraging as all legislators polled had different ideas as to how to regionalize.

Proposed solutions

Through this process several potential solutions were uncovered. The first step is ensuring time and efforts are not duplicated. This can be done by identifying the role of each of the separate Chambers of Commerce in the area and determine regional priorities. One idea mentioned was the creation of a Web site to pitch the Quad-City area to potential employers. To increase global awareness, create a campaign to support Chicago Olympics. If the Olympics come to Chicago, the Quad-City region could benefit because it has training facilities and accommodations for both teams and spectators.

It will be important to address the issue of the mentality of the Quad-City community. Elesha Gayman stated, "We are only limited by our ingenuity and willingness to change." This can be accomplished by creating regional pride among young children and providing global economic education for middle and high school age children. Additionally, the Quad-City area should increase economic development funding in order to compete with regions of comparable size. Funds designated for economic development would be money well spent as it can ultimately ensure the future viability of the Quad-City community. Another elected official suggested it is important to advocate locating logistics, manufacturing, and supply chain for wind energy in this region. And finally, community members should support the region's lobbying efforts in Washington D.C.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Quad-City area has substantial resources to compete in a global economy. It is encouraging to note that all elected officials polled recognize the need to regionalize the area in order to globalize. While each seemed willing to work with other officials in order to regionalize, the elected officials do not share a common view of the current obstacles.

It is evident that short and long term efforts are required to ensure the vitality of the Quad-City economy. In order to regionalize, the city's elected officials will need to work together and dedicate more time, money, and resources to economic development.

Longworth said, "The job of state government is to get out of the way, while providing a sort of safety net for those left behind. Cities however, need to join in new and powerful alliances to leverage their strengths to create a new mid-western century...The global age will belong to the spry and imaginative. The mid-west needs to get smart, fast! What happens next is vital not only to the mid-west but to all of America! The first era of Midwestern history is over. The next one has begun. We can make of it what we will!"