

CRAIN'S CLEVELAND BUSINESS

Another interloper puts in his two cents on how to fix the Midwest

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A *Washington Post* reporter's visit to Cleveland sparked some [random thoughts](#) about immigration, job growth and the quality of urban life.

Joel Achenbach, who covers science and politics for *The Post*, notes that Cleveland is among a bunch of Midwestern cities contending with big-time population loss.

“The manufacturing is gone and suddenly you've got all these cities with gobs of infrastructure and not enough human beings,” he writes. “These cities aren't dead, but they need a jolt of life desperately. They need people.”

His suggestion: immigrants.

“Put out an advertisement: Got city, need people. Lots off empty housing stock, low cost of living. Great universities!,” Mr. Achenbach writes. “These Midwestern schools already have lots of students from overseas. Why not cut them a break on the tuition if they stick around?”

He visited Cleveland to visit his “collegians” and found a city that “doesn't have much of a rush hour these days as far as I could tell. After driving in DC it was a shock. And very pleasant. There's something to be said for depopulating a city. You can cruise wide streets at high speed. You can get a table at a restaurant right away even on trendy E. 4th street or in the warehouse district. You can find parking! “

So what's not to like?

“Maybe the wind off the lake is brutal,” he writes. “It's too cold. But we're taking care of that with the global warming thing! Got that covered. Picture palm trees lining Lake Erie. Tiki bars, jet ski concessions, beach volleyball.”

Seems like we could sell that vision, right, even if it's more than a little tongue in cheek?

Long road ahead

The valuable blog Urbanophile.com studied the new [Urban Mobility Report](#) from the Texas Transportation Institute and found some data that's [troubling for Cleveland's redevelopment efforts](#).

As part of its report on traffic congestion, the Texas institute considers the size of metro areas' roadway networks relative to their population. (It compiles freeway and arterial lane miles to enable making that calculation.)

It turns out Cleveland is sixth in the number of freeway lane miles per capita for metro areas with greater than 1 million people. The city trails Kansas City, Mo.; Richmond, Va.; St. Louis; Nashville, Tenn.; and Hartford.

“The one that jumps out at me is Cleveland,” according to Urbanophile.com. “As a shrinking region, it would appear to be significantly over-supplied with freeways. I think this shows the excess infrastructure overhang that hurts these places in trying to turn around decline.”

Hey big spenders

A *USA Today* [op-ed piece](#) by Michael Tanner, a senior fellow at the [Cato Institute](#), leads with a [Cleveland Clinic](#)-related anecdote to argue for the primacy of the U.S. health care system in the world.

“When Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi needed heart surgery, he didn't go to an Italian hospital. He didn't go to Austria or the Netherlands. He had his surgery at the Cleveland Clinic in Ohio,” Mr. Tanner writes.

“Similarly, when Canadian Human Resources Minister Belinda Stronach needed treatment for breast cancer, she had it done at a California hospital,” he continues. “And, when then-Newfoundland Premier Danny Williams needed to have a leaky heart valve repaired, he had it done at the Mount Sinai Medical Center in Florida.”

The high-profile patients “were following in the footsteps of tens of thousands of patients from around the world who come to the United States for treatment every year,” according to Mr. Tanner. “They come here because they know that despite its flaws, the U.S. health care system still provides the highest quality care in the world.”

True enough, though commenter “cognate3715” nails it with this post:

“What the author proves is that if you are rich and powerful, you scurry on over to the USA for your health care; a phenomenon that I can attest from personal knowledge that has been ongoing for at least the past 20 years,” the commenter writes. “How he can write this, when we have one of the highest infant mortalities in the developed world, lowest rate of completely vaccinated kids and in some states, 25% with no health coverage. ... “I would laugh if it was not such a pathetic joke.”

Today's Occupy Wall Street fix

The Wall Street Journal asks a reasonable question in [this blog post](#): If Cleveland has an Occupy Wall Street protect, why isn't there one in Stamford, Conn., home to the North American headquarters of Switzerland's UBS and Britain's RBS Group, two one of the world's biggest banks?

The easy answer, *The Journal* says, is that these are foreign banks with less name recognition here, and the U.S. government was as directly involved in spending taxpayer money to prop them up.

But the blog post says the lack of activity in Stamford is more fundamentally about self interest.

“Their livelihoods (in Stamford) depend on Wall Street,” according to the post. “Not just the briefcase-and-blackberry crowd, but the shop-owners, waitresses, drivers and landscapers whose livelihoods also directly or indirectly depend on it. The high concentration of financial firms in this mid-sized city of less than 125,000 throws that into sharper relief here than in places where the linkages are more complex. That isn't to say people are happy with the current state of affairs; they simply have more to immediately lose from Wall Street's collapse.”

In *The New York Times*, data expert Nate Silver [takes a look](#) at the size of Occupy Wall Street protests and tries to figure out why some are so robust and others, like in Cleveland, are small.

He has one provocative thesis.

“Cities where African-Americans make up a majority of the population, like Detroit, New Orleans and Cleveland, have tended to have underwhelming numbers of protesters and poorly organized Occupy groups,” Mr. Silver writes.

Technology is a factor, too, he writes, as the Occupy movement is stronger on the tech-savvy coasts.

“I suspect that more than anything, however, it reflects the politics of the protesters. Specifically, they tend to be more liberal than they are Democratic partisans,” Mr. Silver theorizes. “Take liberalism, subtract the Democratic Party, and the remainder might look something like Occupy Wall Street.”