

ISSUE: Vision for the Future

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Allegheny County Executive candidates offer contrasting visions for the region's economic future

Democrat Sara Innamorato to face Republican Joe Rockey in the Nov. 7 election

Introduction: The two candidates for Allegheny County Executive have different visions for the economic future of the county and the region. This information is based on the answers they submitted on May 1 to a candidate questionnaire from **Pittsburgh Works Together**.

Natural Gas Industry: *Do you support a ban on natural gas drilling and production in Allegheny County?*

Innamorato: Yes

Rockey: No

Background: *No country has reduced its carbon emissions more than the United States, thanks to increase use of natural gas over the past 15 years. It has also helped decrease air pollution as well. From a local perspective, in addition to the jobs and land-lease payments associated with the industry, impact fees paid by the natural gas industry to Allegheny County and each of its 130 municipalities over the past five years have totaled more than \$13.5 million. That money can be used in areas such as housing, social services, and tax reduction.*

Hydrogen Hub: *Do you support the construction of a hydrogen hub in Southwestern Pennsylvania using natural gas as the feedstock along with carbon capture and storage technology?*

Innamorato: No

Rockey: Yes

Background: *The Biden administration has designated \$8 billion for development of hydrogen hub projects around the country to explore using hydrogen as a non-carbon emitting energy source. The Team PA Foundation, with the support of Gov. Shapiro, has submitted a proposal to the Department of Energy, which it describes as “a collective vision for emissions reduction and economic revitalization driven by increased GDP, the*

creation of new family-sustaining jobs, an expanded and shared concept for community-level investments, and new business opportunities for local supply chains.”

Air Quality: *Do you believe the air in Allegheny County is safe to breathe?*

Innamorato: No

Rockey: Yes

Background: *Allegheny County is in compliance with all federal Clean Air Act regulations. Average levels of PM_{2.5}, tiny soot that can cause health problems, have declined about 25% since 2010, according to EPA data. The Biden administration is proposing a new lower standard for PM_{2.5}. [Research by Pittsburgh Works](#) shows that air quality in Allegheny County and the Pittsburgh region is fairly typical of major metro areas – better than in some places, worse than in others.*

Rebuilding the County Economy: *To help bring new jobs to Allegheny County and improve the economy, who is the first person you would contact once you were in office, and why?*

Innamorato: President Joe Biden. I want the president to know that Allegheny County is open for business to absorb and deploy the hundreds of billions of federal dollars to help us rebuild and reorient our economy in a sustainable and resilient way. President Biden launched his campaign right here in Pittsburgh because he knows that our Labor built America — now we can serve as a model of what it means to shift to a green economy for post-industrial regions across the country. President Biden knows how important this region is and I look forward to a strong partnership with his administration.

Rockey: There isn't one individual that defines our economy. I will reach out to business leaders, our universities, labor unions, State and Federal officials, foundation leaders and more to lead the execution of a plan to change the trajectory of our region. Further, as noted earlier, I will meet with companies around the country to promote the advantages of joining the Allegheny County of the future. One with prosperity for all that is welcoming to industry and labor.

Background: *Research by Pittsburgh Works shows that Allegheny County has lost 50,000 jobs over the past five years, the most of any county in Pennsylvania. The county's job performance also trails behind the major metro counties in Ohio (the counties that are home to Cleveland, Columbus, and Cincinnati.)*

Population Decline: *What one or two specific steps would you take in your first year to help address the declining population in Allegheny County?*

Innamorato: A few things I will do that will make a huge difference are. 1) Attract several multi-billion dollar investments in high-tech manufacturing facilities, creating hundreds of new union jobs making the things that will make us competitive in the new global economy. 2) Make significant investments in housing accessibility and affordability to help us get back to being a place where a young family could afford to buy a home and thrive here. 3) Improve our air and water quality and health outcomes. Who wants to move their family to a place in the top 1% for cancer risk in the country? People have choice and mobility, and we have to compete with much cleaner, safer places to live. 4) Meaningfully investments in our main streets and small business economy.

Rockey: Allegheny County can only reverse its population loss by becoming what it was for so many of our parents and grandparents: a beacon of economic opportunity that draws industry here from across the country and from around the world. As employment opportunities expand in our region, population growth will follow.

Background: *In the 2020 census, Allegheny County was the only urban core county in the 50 largest metro regions where deaths outnumbered births for the decade, illustrating the issue of an aging population that was worse than anywhere else. After an influx of new residents in the early part of the last decade, Census Bureau estimates show that trend reversed in the middle of the last decade and now more people are leaving Allegheny County each year than are moving in.*

Environmental Permitting: *Do you believe the Allegheny County Health Department properly balances economic and environmental interests in its permitting process? If 'no,' please explain your concerns.*

Innamorato: The Allegheny County Health Department heavily favors industry over public health in its regulatory decision-making in direct contradiction to its charter to “protect, promote, and preserve the health and well-being of all Allegheny County residents, particularly the most vulnerable.” Allegheny County is in the top 1% for cancer risk of all counties in the United States. We have some of the highest asthma rates, particularly for children, in the country. We have some of the highest levels of PM_{2.5} in the country in some of our communities. These are not data points that suggest a strong balance between economic and environmental and public health issues. The role of the Allegheny County Health Department is not to balance economic interests. That is the role of Allegheny County Economic Development and other entities in Allegheny County government. Under my leadership the Health Department will be focused on the health and safety of our residents.

Rockey: The failure of the health department to act in a timely manner on U.S. Steel’s efforts to grow operations in our County has cost us jobs and jeopardized the remaining steel jobs in Allegheny County. Further, the health departments expanded reach and introduction of

regulatory burdens beyond those mandated by the state and federal government must be stopped. The health department must be reformed in ways to make it aware that poverty, underemployment, and further deindustrialization of our region presents its own unique health hazards. We must create a welcoming, business friendly environment to attract and retain quality employment opportunities for all.

Background: *The Shapiro administration has said the loss of large manufacturing investments is one reason why Pennsylvania needs to reform its permitting processes to make it easier for businesses to invest and create jobs.*

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