

Twenty years ago, the 10-county Middle Tennessee region was home to less than 1 million people.

Today that number has nearly doubled, and in the next two decades another million more will call Middle Tennessee home. Wilson County has experienced even higher growth rates over this time, and there's no doubt that some of these new regional neighbors will continue to call our county home. The Middle Tennessee region's tremendous growth has brought economic prosperity everywhere, including right here. Even in these difficult times our standard of living is better than ever and we are a short drive from some of the world's best companies, entertainment venues, universities, and sports teams.

However, with growth comes change, challenges and opportunities. The interstate and road systems that take us to these places are often congested—ranking us nationally as one of the worst commutes in the country. Our local leaders are continually challenged to make difficult decisions on how to fund infrastructure, how to provide community services, and what land should be developed and what land should be conserved. Air, watersheds, and where we live and work are not subject to political boundaries and these issues don't just affect Wilson County, but the whole region.

How we deal with these issues both at a local and regional level is a matter of economic competitiveness. In today's competitive globalized economy it is simply not enough to offer tax incentives and cheap energy. Today, the best companies are seeking places and regions that offer a high quality of life for their employees and seek communities that have a clear path for future growth, development and educational opportunities. In this effort our region has succeeded, as evident through the adopted 2035 Regional Transportation Plan, ranking fifth in overall job growth across the country in 2011, and Wilson County's own Power of One initiative and mass transit system.

However, as we continue to welcome more companies, such as Amazon, and more workers, we must remember what brought so many of us here in the first place. There will always be other regions and counties that can offer a "better deal," but few can offer the affordable living, quality of communities, beautiful landscapes, vibrant culture and educated and skilled workforce like Middle Tennessee and Wilson County can.

Can you imagine what the next 20 years will look like and all the great opportunities my children and your children will have? But those opportunities can only exist if we work as region to balance economic growth with quality communities and use our fiscal resources wisely.

On Wednesday, May 23, the discussion continues on how to do just that. Leaders from across our region, representing business, agriculture, tourism, economic development, transportation and planning will all come together in Nashville at the annual POWER OF TEN Regional Summit and discuss the important connection between quality of life and economic competitiveness. Wilson County residents interested in these issues are encouraged to attend, as we all work to make our region an even better place for tomorrow.