

# TIMES WEST VIRGINIAN

Sunday, September 15, 2013

## EDITORIAL

### State leaders should respect North Central high-tech sector

You can point to the I-79 Technology Park as an example of success.

In fact, what was once rolling farmlands was transformed into a booming high-technology park, which includes a supercomputer for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to the headquarters of a massive power transmission project and everything in between.

The I-79 park has created thousands of high-tech jobs employing high-tech, highly educated people with an average salary of \$60,000. It is an anchor in the high-tech sector of West Virginia.

From the top of Monongalia County to the bottom of Lewis, I-79's High-Tech Corridor is home to NASA, FBI, NOAA, NIOSH, NETL, Lockheed Martin and a veritable "who's who" in technology.

And there is no doubt that the vision of former congressional leaders did much to prepare this area for growth and foster it once it began to bloom. Former Congressman Alan B. Mollohan and the late Sen. Robert C. Byrd had a vision for North Central West Virginia, and it included economic diversification by stretching into the high-tech sector.

And this area is all the better for it.

But things have dramatically changed in the last five years. Mollohan no longer serves in Congress, and though his replacement U.S. Rep. David McKinley has always been a strong advocate for the high-tech companies, the river of funding that once flowed through contracts and construction funding can be more described as a trickle these days.

The economy changed, and Congress is trying to deal with being trillions in the red. Sequestration took effect, slashing federal budgets. The I-79 park has survived, but with more funding, leaders say the group would implement a program to invest in start-up companies that are technology-driven with innovative ideas, create a high-tech campus for new businesses and create an Internet career page for all West Virginia technology-related jobs.

And they've looked to the state, asking that an annual grant be increased. The I-79 Technology Park is being left out of much-needed state dollars in favor of a technology park in Charleston, say members of the Affiliate Leadership Council, which represents more than 140 members of the high-tech community in North Central West Virginia.

The group recently sent a letter to Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin. They say the state-run Regional Technology Park in Charleston receives millions as a line item, while the Marion County park receives a quarter of a million from a grant.

There's no specific amount the group is asking for; they're just asking for more state support to grow, to reinvest into the state's economy and to continue to build upon a strong foundation.

We see the position the state is in. During the Joe Manchin administration, West Virginia took over the nearly bankrupt facility in South Charleston and created a park for nonprofit organizations and higher education. It is a

different creature, and must be fed differently. The state's involvement in the I-79 park has been historically limited primarily because of its federal support.

But that doesn't mean the mindset shouldn't change, or at least state leaders should consider supporting the Fairmont park a higher level because of its potential to give back even more to the state in revenue, payroll and taxes.

We know how important the high-tech sector is to North Central West Virginia. We hope that in the coming months that state leaders realize it, too.