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OPINION  
GUEST OPINION

We need research to attract new jobs

By Rick Myers

SPECIAL TO THE ARIZONA DAILY STAR

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With the latest figures for state unemployment at 9.2 percent, the worst in more than 25 years, Arizona is clearly feeling the impact of job losses. What is even more troubling is that much of these losses are occurring in high-wage sectors, such as manufacturing, all while the state's population continues to increase. Since the year 2000, the manufacturing sector alone has shrunk nearly 24 percent from its peak of 212,000 positions — down 50,000 jobs.

These numbers sound the alarm that Arizona is at a critical juncture in determining whether we will invest in a future of economic prosperity or be satisfied with the status quo.

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monies to corporations; rather, it gets the private sector to contribute to its pool of funds that go directly to nonprofit research institutions and breakthrough technologies that show the highest likelihood of returning promising innovations. These include: nanotechnologies for national defense, advances in solar silicon, revolutionary skin cancer detection, sustainable mining technologies, vaccines for emergent viruses and the creation of jet fuel from algae.

Research that can revolutionize cities and nations has always consisted of a triangle comprised of highly talented researchers at labs and universities, private industry and supportive public policy.

In my own career, I have witnessed how research emerging from the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, supported by businesses, that led to the innovation that we now all consume daily: the Internet. The agency's research made the Internet — arguably one of the most significant new technologies in our lifetimes — not only possible, but marketable beyond military applications.

Science Foundation Arizona's numbers show its efforts are working. The initial \$60 million for research grants has been leveraged to \$169 million by attracting additional outside capital. This has led to: 750 jobs statewide that have been created or retained; 11 new high-tech companies that have been formed; 50 patents that have been filed; and more than 54,000 students who have been educated in areas of critical science and math skills.

Nearly half of these monies and efforts have benefited Southern Arizona, including a groundbreaking biomedical consortium that works to streamline and accelerate the development of crucial drug therapies for major diseases, such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. These medical breakthroughs will benefit Arizonans directly as we age, but also help attract more companies to invest in a growing pharmaceutical sector in Southern Arizona. This translates to stable, high-paying jobs.

For Arizona's sake, I hope this momentum, with the support of the Legislature and public, can continue.

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Rick Myers

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I see the continuing decline in jobs as both a wake-up call for our state, and an invitation to support a new direction, one that drives research to create new companies, well-paying jobs and an Arizona where generations into the future can prosper.

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