

MY VIEW

Cutting SFAz funding shows legislative myopia

Myopia is a condition in which close objects are seen clearly, but objects farther away appear blurry. Most of us need to have our vision corrected to see clearly both near and far.

In political terms, myopia unfortunately has become a defining characteristic of the Arizona Legislature. In their zeal to close the budget deficit, our lawmakers have conspired to throw the baby out with the bathwater.

The legislative sucker punch recently thrown at Science Foundation Arizona

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Arizona Rep. Sam Crump, R-Phoenix, showcased Tempe-based First Solar as an example of a company that presumably did not need government assistance to reap economic success in developing solar energy. He missed the point.

The truth is, First Solar capitalized on economic incentives outside Arizona to locate and expand its manufacturing infrastructure. Arizona represents a very small proportion of the company's overall employment. Of the 105 job openings recently posted on First Solar's Web site, only three are in Arizona. Indeed, it is outside Arizona where the economic



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is a prime example of political myopia. Here is a partnership with an outstanding track record of engaging the private sector to co-fund technology-based initiatives. It would be great if Arizona's technology incubation infrastructure were sufficient to obviate the need for such a public-private partnership.

Regrettably, that is not the case, and SFAz plays a vital role in helping fill this void.

In a recent guest column in *The Arizona Republic*,

benefits of First Solar's success are manifested. The company conducts all of its manufacturing in Ohio, Germany and Malaysia, and its research and development activities are based in Ohio. The "multiplier effect" of the wages and associated economic activities are recycled back into the respective markets, yielding a positive return on the local government's investment. That is Economics 101.

Over the coming decades, Arizona will produce an increasing amount of our energy from sunlight. To do this, we will deploy many thousands of solar panels

and associated systems. Arizona can — and should — benefit from this industry growth by encouraging producers of solar panels, related equipment, installation and support services to locate their factories, facilities and offices here, where the solar systems will be installed and operated.

We need to be competitive with other states, such as New Mexico and Oregon, which are attracting solar companies to establish high-wage development and manufacturing operations.

However, if we take the myopic approach — if we fail to support emerging technology and effectively compete for new industry — then Arizona will continue to underperform.

We will lose our talent. We will fail to attract and retain enterprising minds. We will lose any of the remaining technological momentum that was established during the semiconductor boom. We will become, in essence, a giant retirement community with appealing resorts and recreational attractions. That is not a model for sustainable growth.

This is the time for our legislators to correct their vision and take some corrective action. Reinstate the funding for SFAz. Enact legislation that will enable Arizona to compete effectively for solar energy jobs.

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