

Let's cut expenses, but keep N.J.'s future

By RICHARD LEHMAN

While expense-cutting may be the order of the day in Trenton, one target of Gov. James E. McGreevey's axe is not an expense at all, but rather a generator of revenue, jobs, technology and industrial development. Let's make sure the governor and the state Legislature understand the difference and keep valuable state assets off the chopping block.

My case in point is the proposed elimination of all state funding for the New Jersey Commission on Science and Technology, an organization that provides seed money for about 20 technology centers that perform research and development in the state. Mostly based at universities, these centers use the funding to research a wide range of promising technologies, establish self-sufficiency, bring technology to market, train our work force and create jobs and economic growth in the state. But besides these medium-term gains, there's also a surprisingly immediate return on the investment. Technology centers receiving commission funding must match these grants several times over with revenue from industry and the federal government. Thus, these state expenditures are not expenditures at all, but investments that pump cash into the New Jersey economy, provide an almost instant

covery, biomedical technology and national defense. Our center has already teamed with industrial sectors in the state that represent these three strategic areas and have, in our first year, attracted substantial federal and industrial money to the center. It turns out that the novel polymer processing methods used by our researchers produces materials that mimic natural biological systems, generate tough materials that are important to defense and homeland security, and enable the transformation of landfilled waste

plastics into strong structural I-beams for vehicular bridge construction. All this in just the first year of the center.

These technological successes have led to numerous publications and patent applications. AMIPP has also in the past year submitted four proposals for additional federal and in-

dustry research funding, winning two of them an excellent record. As I write the AMIPP Center is preparing proposals to the federal government for well over a million dollars a year. In order to bring this revenue into New Jersey, it is absolutely critical to provide a basis for matching funds. Simply put, the small state investment in science and technology centers results in New Jersey receiving far more in federal and industry funding.

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payback to New Jersey from outside sources and ensure the technological health of New Jersey's industrial base.

The rationale for establishing the New Jersey Commission on Science and Technology in the 1980s, was to stem the flow of high-tech companies to places like North Carolina's Research Triangle Park and to bring technology and technology-oriented companies to New Jersey. Numerous centers over the past 20 years have done exactly that, and new centers such as the Center for Advanced Materials via Immiscible Polymer Processing (AMIPP) at Rutgers are demonstrating that this original mission of the commission continues to be fulfilled.

The AMIPP Center, which researches, develops and commercializes new types of plastics, first received state funding a year ago — \$500,000 as part of a five-year pledge of \$2.35 million. We have just completed a tremendously successful first year and are on track to become self-sufficient if the state seed money continues for the promised five-year term. Strategically, AMIPP focuses on three important New Jersey constituencies and stakeholders: environment and resource re-

Cutting funding at New Jersey centers like AMIPP also has immediate human consequences. I estimate that about 150 graduate students throughout the state will lose their positions through the ill-advised elimination of science and technology grants. Many of these students have come from around the country to study at New Jersey universities because of the excellence of our education. This excellence will be eroded, if not irreparably harmed, by the state budget cuts as students migrate to technology centers in our neighboring states or elsewhere.

The New Jersey state budget shortfall is an impressive \$5 billion, so it is clear that something has to be done, probably a combination of new revenues and cuts in spending. We all recognize this and want to contribute to the process. However, it is going to be crucial to go after the true expenses — not investments that produce revenue and assist in generating the high-technology industrial base of our state.

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