Rich Studley: Isotope facility at MSU needs support from Congress

The Michigan Chamber's mission statement calls for us to create conditions favorable to job creation and business growth in Michigan.

That's why we're pleased to see this summer's construction work of the Facility for Rare Isotope Beams on the campus of Michigan State University following the groundbreaking ceremony in March, as a premier new research facility unfolds and develops right here in mid-Michigan.

FRIB is a $730 million project that will elevate the United States as an international leader in vital research on rare isotope beams. These beams could lead to important discoveries in national security and nuclear medicine, an example of basic research that needs to be funded by government and made available to entrepreneurial companies to create the innovations that lead to more jobs and a better quality of life for all of us.

At the Chamber, we are excited to see FRIB using Michigan employers who are hiring workers in the civil construction phase of the project underway today. We also see FRIB as a talent magnet, attracting top scientists from around the world to develop and then operate the laboratory. And we are watching for ways to help FRIB play a role as an important economic driver for Michigan, as the research spins off commercialization opportunities for entrepreneurs. We see FRIB as a beacon for young adults to get them more interested in science and engineering careers.

Here in mid-Michigan, the Lansing Economic Area Partnership (LEAP) is aggressively working to connect talent and tools in our community as a byproduct of FRIB. The agency is working with both the entrepreneurs and companies already operating in the region that came into existence because of MSU's leadership in rare isotope research, either by using the fruits of that research or knowledge of the tools used in it. LEAP is moving to examine what businesses might be encouraged to come to the region, or what local entrepreneurs might need to commercialize opportunities, as part of its plan to turn the region into the "Accelerating Capital."

But FRIB construction and operation depend on support from Congress, which needs to appropriate funds for this important basic research facility to move forward. We are joining the chorus of support across the state, and collectively calling on Michigan's elected leaders to continue their support to ensure completion of the FRIB as a cutting-edge research facility.

This project is an issue that crosses partisan boundaries. Members of Michigan's congressional delegation, including U.S. Sens. Carl Levin and Debbie Stabenow, have worked in tandem with U.S. Reps. Mike Rogers, Dave Camp and John Dingell to move FRIB from concept to reality.

With several members of Congress retiring, including Rep. Mike Rogers here in the Lansing area, it is important the new elected leaders rally behind FRIB.

The project has momentum now; it's up to the new members of Congress to take the baton and surge ahead. If the appropriate funds aren't allocated to this vital project in the coming years, we could see costly delays.

The Michigan Chamber is committed to supporting economic and innovation opportunities that attract talent. FRIB promises to be an important economic driver in our state, and we're encouraging Michigan's political and economic development leaders to support the facility, both in its construction and operation phases.

We are confident the newly elected members of Congress will join the state's business community to continue their support for FRIB, which will benefit our world, our nation, and our state.

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