



Portland

OPINION: Oregon needs to invest in education, alter land-use rules, to attract top high-tech jobs

April 14, 2023

Elizabeth Mazzara Myers



Sen. Ron Wyden (left), U.S. Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo (center), and Oregon Gov. Tina Kotek discuss boosting semiconductor manufacturing in Hillsboro. A columnist argues that Oregon needs to improve education and land-use rules to create more high-tech workers and high-tech jobs. PMG Photo: Peter Wong

As the ink dries on the governor's signature on Senate Bill 4, we are left to wonder, what's next?

The Oregon CHIPS Act (SB4) provides \$210 million that semiconductor and advanced manufacturing companies can tap into to acquire and develop land.

Additionally, and more controversially, the Oregon CHIPS Act grants the governor one time authority to bring tracts of land, which meet very clear specifications, into the Urban Growth Boundary, allowing them to begin the process of transitioning to "shovel ready" land.



Westside Economic Alliance has been a strong proponent of Senate Bill 4, as we were for the recommendations developed by the Semiconductor Task Force which informed the bill's language.

We know the work continues to develop tax incentives for companies that bring jobs to Oregon, as well as for those already here on the ground who hope to expand.

We want to highlight two priorities we hope the Legislature continues to work on this legislative session, the workforce pipeline and identification of industrial lands.

We know there is a worker shortage across the region. Just last week, WEA had the opportunity to meet Commerce Secretary Gina Raimundo, who was in town to tour Portland Community College's mechatronics program.



Portland

OPINION: Oregon needs to invest in education, alter land-use rules, to attract top high-tech jobs

April 14, 2023

Elizabeth Mazzara Myers

In addition to this model program, PCC, in partnership with Intel, Worksystems Inc. and Hillsboro, has an accelerated 10-day training program called “Quick Start” that helps prepare individuals for entry-level jobs as semiconductor technicians.

And, while both of these programs are blueprints for how to move people in and through career technical education (CTE), they are not enough. To truly expand the workforce pipeline, we need to invest in CTE throughout our K-12 system. We also need to ensure our regional workforce boards have the resources they need to connect Oregonians to training and work placement programs.

WEA is aware that the conversations in Salem are continuing, and applaud Rep. Janelle Bynum as she leads the charge to lift up education and training programs through work of the Joint Committee on Semiconductors. We encourage her, Co-Chair Sen. Janeen Sollman and the entire joint committee to push through additional investments for CTE programs this session.

The Oregon CHIPS Act provides a very narrowly tailored solution for fast tracking industrial land development to meet the timeline provided by its federal counterpart. However, there is a longer and larger conversation that needs to happen here in Oregon.

When Oregon’s land use laws were drafted and adopted 50 years ago, forest and agriculture were protected — at least in part — because those were two of Oregon’s primary industries.

But half a century later, Oregon has changed; and we have begun to fall behind as other states have land use regulations that are more nimble, allowing them to identify appropriate opportunities for industry to expand and to move quickly to make those lands available for development.

Here in Oregon, one land use attorney referred to our land use appeals process as “sticky,” as in: Once a decision gets challenged in the system, it is very difficult to get it back out. Without a doubt, there needs to be a process by which individuals and groups can challenge land use decisions — but there also must be reasonable time limits by which these decisions move through and out the other side.

I argue it is a false dichotomy to say we either value agricultural and forest lands, or we value advanced manufacturing and industrial growth. There are smart programs found across the globe that have shown these values are not incompatible.

And, with an economy that is overly dependent on personal income tax, ensuring we are training, attracting and retaining an advanced manufacturing workforce is critical as we seek to support programs that keep our communities safe and healthy.



Portland

OPINION: Oregon needs to invest in education, alter land-use rules, to attract top high-tech jobs

April 14, 2023

Elizabeth Mazzara Myers

At Westside Economic Alliance, we believe that smart investments require a balancing of three elements: creating an environment for businesses to thrive; bolstering a well-trained and well-paid workforce; and investing to create a healthy community.

We are not a business-first, business-last organization. Smart investments that balance the three elements described above can create long-term benefit for our entire community — and our state.

We encourage the Legislature to be bold this legislative session — and beyond. Have hard conversations about bringing balance to our land use system. We can continue to protect a healthy environment while growing our economic prosperity — we just need a land use system that considers all the ways we need to use our land and the legislative will to do so.