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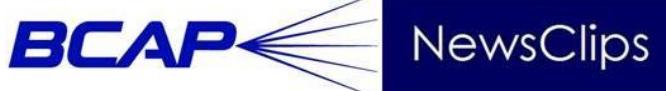
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January 27, 2020

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Gov. Tom Wolf has proposed an increase of \$12.35 million in state funding toward developing innovation in the region.

The governor made the announcement Friday, part of a rollout of specific goals of his 2020-21 budget before he releases the entire proposal at the beginning of February. Earlier this week, he outlined his plans to invest several million dollars in human service programs to protect vulnerable communities.

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Mr. Wolf's most recent budget proposal focuses on creating a "statewide innovation strategy" with three main components: education, workforce development and economic development.

It includes a \$5 million increase for the Ben Franklin Technology Development Authority, a program to promote an entrepreneurial business environment and a technology-ready workforce; a \$2.5 million increase for Industrial Resource Centers, economic development organizations designed to support the manufacturing community; a \$2.5 million increase for the PREP network, Pennsylvania's network of business assistance partners; and a \$2.35 million increase for Invent Penn State, which funds collaborations to turn research into products and services.

The funding will be competitive among statewide organizations, and each group will be required to collaborate with universities in the region.

"It builds on what good things are already happening in Pennsylvania. We're not reinventing anything here," Mr. Wolf said. "These investments are not just blindly throwing money at an industry and saying, 'Eh, I hope it grows.' It's about building a culture."

He outlined the official proposal at an event Friday morning at Hazelwood Green, a redevelopment project that is fast becoming one of the city's innovation centers with tenants like Carnegie Mellon University's Manufacturing Futures Initiative and Advanced Robotics for Manufacturing Institute, as well as self-driving car company Aptiv.

Part of the reason for the investment was to keep Pennsylvania competitive with other states making a reputation for themselves as innovation centers. The governor, like many others involved in the tech industry, lamented the trend of innovators coming to Pennsylvania to learn, grow and experiment and then leaving the state, taking their talent and expertise with them.

"We need to do something to help Pennsylvania help itself before we lose any more ground to our competitor states in an area where we absolutely should be a leader," Mr. Wolf said.

Pennsylvania's tech sector accounts for \$47 billion in terms of economic impact, the governor noted.

"We can not afford to fall behind," he said. "There are so many things Pennsylvania has done, and we need to recapture that innovative pioneering spirit...We've lost the mojo that we had once, and this is how we get it back."

State Rep. Jake Wheatley, D-Allegheny, who also spoke at the event, said it was important to recognize the investment in technology at a time when "we have to figure out how to tighten our belt and live more within our means."

But, he said, government officials also had a responsibility to make sure every citizen was benefiting from these new investments, no matter their background, career aspirations or ZIP code. The government had to look at the entire "pipeline," starting with K-12 education and moving through to state funding and initiatives like the Hazelwood Green redevelopment.

"You may not be able to afford this space, but that doesn't mean you can't take advantage of the partnerships," Mr. Wheatley said. "You don't have to wait to become someone to be an innovator."

The governor's proposal outlined several key initiatives to go along with the funding, including establishing an evidence-based statewide annual innovation report, encouraging development in rural areas, and increasing state resources for early stage companies and venture capitalists.

Earlier this week, the Wolf administration announced new funding that did just that.

The state approved Point Breeze-based Gecko Robotics Inc., a startup that creates wall-climbing robots to perform inspections of facilities like power plants and paper mills, for \$120,000 in state funding to expand its operations.

The funding was part of the Job Creation Tax Credit program, which awards approved businesses tax credits to encourage local job growth.

For Dennis Davin, secretary for the Department of Community and Economic Development, the investment in technology is a safety measure to make sure Pennsylvania maintains a diverse economy that doesn't depend on just one industry.

"I'm old enough to know what it was like to have a steel mill on this particular site," he said at the Hazelwood Green event. "And old enough to know what happened after those steel mills went away. I saw what it was like to rely on one industry, and it was devastating when that one industry had its issues and collapsed."

"Today, people want to live and get jobs here," he added. "And that means technology businesses want to grow here."

The 2020-21 budget is far from finalized, though. Before it goes into effect, the full budget must be approved by the state Legislature, which has historically pushed back on some of Mr. Wolf's funding proposals. The Legislature and the governor have until June 30 to agree on and pass a state budget. – **Pittsburgh Post-Gazette**

