Opinion: CEI brings great things to our community

By STEPHANIE MICKELSEN | Guest columnist, Oct 30, 2022

Idaho is a great place to live. That’s something all of us can agree with. People around the nation are beginning to take notice. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Idaho is the fastest-growing state in the country. Under Republican leadership, we have a growing economy, historic investments in education and safe communities. Idaho has been discovered.

A strong economy produces the kind of stable, high-paying jobs that allow our children and grandchildren to remain in Idaho and raise their families here. As a mother and grandma, that’s important to me. Here’s the challenge. Our children and grandchildren are not getting all these great jobs. Our businesses often must recruit people from outside the state to fill these positions or these jobs go unfilled. Not enough Idahoans are qualified to fill these good jobs. There is a reason for this gap: education. We need more of our children to pursue education and training beyond the traditional high-school diploma, whether at a university or community college.

Here in eastern Idaho, we have developed an incredible resource available to all, College of Eastern Idaho. This remarkable institution provides essential education and training that allows our kids to pursue great careers and perform meaningful and fulfilling work. I’ve had the privilege to personally witness how CEI has changed lives.

Enrollment at CEI is growing. Since 2017, it’s earned several national awards, including one from the Aspen Institute that recognizes CEI as one of the top 150 community colleges in the nation. Faculty and administrators focus on making courses available to our high school students through dual-credit classes. Since 2017, CEI has gone from zero students to over 1,000 in “early college” coursework. The best part? These college classes are free to high school students. Our students can earn college credits while in high school. This allows them to save thousands of dollars while getting started on the training needed to compete for future jobs.

CEI has done a great job expanding access to higher education that makes it available to everyone. If your children and grandchildren are not taking advantage of this incredible opportunity, they should. CEI is looking to bring education to a new level with a building called “future tech.”
This new facility will host approximately 1,000 students annually and provide education and training in cybersecurity, advanced manufacturing, agri-tech and much more. Mark and I support this building effort because we believe Future Tech is vital to changing education and accessibility to great jobs.

The college hopes to complete this $42 million facility for opening in fall 2024. Grants, employer and private donations, funds set aside by the CEI board of trustees and appropriations approved by the Idaho Legislature have CEI off to a good start, with the current total at nearly $39 million.

Idaho Falls is no stranger to public-private partnerships. We have a strong history of working together to meet the needs of our community. Let’s come together once again and do all we can as Idahoans to ensure that our children and grandchildren have access to quality education and the opportunities to succeed.

Stephanie Mickelsen is a candidate for the Idaho House in District 32 representing Bonneville County. She has farmed for 34 years with her husband, Mark, and currently serves as the chief financial officer for Mickelsen Farms LLC.