

Ferdie J. Deering

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Help for Inventors Seems Good Idea

THE INDUSTRIAL Technology Research and Development Foundation might sound like a name for a new Washington bureau, but it isn't.

It is the title of a small, new institution on the campus of Southeastern State University at Durant. Its function, according to news reports, is to help inventors test ideas and market them if they prove to be workable. It has been promoted by Rep. Wes Watkins, D-Okla.

Its clientele includes individuals, small businesses and manufacturers. Its aim is to create more jobs in southeastern Oklahoma.

People with good ideas but limited resources often are unable to bring them to fruition because they don't know where to have them tested, perfected, manufactured, patented or marketed.

A plan to provide such services and assistance through state universities is not new. Both Oklahoma State University and the University of Oklahoma have had institutes for such purposes for decades, but they have "overgrown" their original ob-

jectives.

At first, these research branches favored patronage from state businesses and industries. The intent was to help them develop ideas, solve problems and create jobs for Oklahomans. Faculties and research scientists would make the studies, using university facilities.

It was not long, however, before the billions of dollars behind handed out by the National Science Foundation and other sources resulted in a change of direction. Why bother with a troublesome \$10,000 grant from a small Oklahoma firm when the same professor might obtain funding of \$100,000 or more to carry on a more prestigious study for the Pentagon or other federal agency?

So instead of looking to Oklahoma industries for projects, the big universities have kept the road hot to Washington for funds.

It is encouraging to see another effort being made to serve this neglected area of state needs.

According to Business Week magazine, cutbacks in federal funding

for research has become a matter of concern to universities. They fear grants, foundations and alumni gifts "will not meet university needs in the future." Many are looking for corporate funding.

Perhaps the trend reported does not imply localization of research to the degree that has been set up at Durant, but the opinion seems to be spreading that "putting all the research eggs in the government's basket" might not be the better way to do it.

There is no reason to expect that every one of the state's institutions of higher learning would copy the idea put into effect at Durant. Still, aiming to serve local needs seems to be preferable to becoming a small imitation of the big state universities.

The concept of places over the state where individuals and businesses can get help in solving problems and perfecting ideas ought to grow. If it does, results should help Oklahoma business to grow and make this a better, more prosperous state.