How to invest in Delaware’s community college system

In 2006, Delaware Tech made a plea to Delaware’s General Assembly, asking members to support legislation that would address our long-term capital needs. While there was no legislative solution that year and the state would soon be hit by a national recession, the college has made the best of a difficult situation in order to fulfill our mission.

In 2010, the college determined that we should fund our capital needs. Unfortunately, Delaware Tech is part of the other 30 percent. Across Delaware Tech’s four campuses, on 352 acres of land, there are more than 40 buildings consisting of 1.3 million square feet of space. Based on industry standards, we should be reinvesting $12 million per year simply to keep them safe and operable, but the annual amount we receive from the Bond Bill covers only a fraction of these costs.

The community college movement in the 1960s resulted in the opening of 467 community colleges nationwide, including Delaware Tech. Many of those institutions are also experiencing aging infrastructure; however, more than 70 percent of today’s 1,166 community colleges have local government support — largely through property taxes — to fund their capital needs.

There is a solution. But first let me share a few additional facts.

The economic health of a state is defined by job growth, median income, after it rejected a chance to improve its transportation infrastructure. In 2010, the federal government devoted $4.2 billion to build a rail tunnel to double commuter capacity to New York City. It cost $65 million and construction projects that would further support the needs of local business and connect Delawareans with jobs are on hold.

When (Delaware Tech) students are trained in state-of-the-art-facilities, employers tell us they are job-ready to work in Delaware’s high-demand industries.

This legislation, Senate Bill 137, will fund the Infrastructure and Beyond. Please contact your legislators to help support Delawareans and Delaware businesses so that we may provide for the next generation and beyond. Please contact your legislators and tell them you support SB 137.

For more information on the Community College Infrastructure Fund and how you can support this legislation, please visit www.dccf.edu/ccif.

Mark T. Brainard is president of Delaware Tech.