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Published May 8, 2007

Melot: Out from under dome

Glazer: Economic gain isn't product of state Capitol

In the American lexicon, "future" is a relentlessly positive word. Life always will be better in the future.

Lou Glazer is president of the group Michigan Future Inc. He has some thoughts on the state's and the region's future. They are not relentlessly upbeat.

Michigan could have a better future, but it better get its act together now to have a chance at it.

"Two of the pillars of Michigan are good jobs for low skills and long-term, stable employment. What most people want are elected officials who can preserve that - but they can't," Glazer said during an interview in Lansing last week.

Glazer's group seeks to be a "source of new ideas on how Michigan's people, enterprises and communities can succeed in the Information Age," according to its Web site (www.michiganfuture.org).

Glazer's staccato-style delivery reminds of a PowerPoint demonstration: "Concentrated talent ... that's the key to success ... that's more important than anything."

By talent, Glazer refers to human capital - highly educated people who can succeed in the economies of the future. Greater Lansing as a "car capital" may seem poorly positioned to compete, but Glazer sees potential in the mid-Michigan economy, if we're smart:

"The places where the knowledge economy develops are big metros and mid-size metros with research universities," he explained, "This place has a chance. ... The region has an enormous opportunity. It must keep a more substantial portion of MSU grads (here)."

Of course, Glazer was speaking in the aftermath of the poll showing most undergrads at Michigan's big three research universities planned to move out of Michigan upon graduation.

"You have to design a path with feedback from your consumers - MSU grads," he argued, having noted that with the huge exception of the auto industry and the teaching profession, Michigan's economic sectors are growing.

Unfortunately, Lansing's also saddled with a state government whose leaders and constituents wrongly believe it can fix an economy - and which routinely misuses what economic influence it does possess.

As Glazer noted, concentrating talent is "not a priority" for anyone at the Capitol. The two parties see their budget plans as an economic growth strategy "when they are not" and, unlike California with Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, Michigan lacks someone in state government to offer big ideas.

Glazer's group is counting on leaders to emerge from the ranks of business, civic groups, academia and local government to form regional alliances to spur knowledge-friendly policies.

That's probably a good bet - and certainly a better one for Greater Lansing than relying on any leadership from the folks under the Capitol dome.

What do you think? Write Derek Melot, Lansing State Journal, 120 E. Lenawee St., Lansing, MI 48919. For past columns, visit www.lsj.com/columnists.Melot

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