Silicon Valley is synonymous with transformational ideas. Recently, Ohio State University President Michael Drake and I traveled to that part of California — with others from the Columbus business and educational communities — to visit companies and universities and learn how they describe their creativity and success.

Columbus, too, is full of creative minds and critical thinkers. As leaders of Ohio State University, ranked as one of the world’s most innovative universities, and Battelle, the world’s largest nonprofit research and development organization, we see so many bright people who have found their professional homes in Ohio and within our institutions.

The next important discovery will start with engaged people imagining what could be, using ingenuity to create answers to problems we all share and taking solutions to scale through entrepreneurship.

This process is exciting, critical to economic and societal growth and well worth pursuing as an investment in our future — but it doesn’t occur without active and effective support from our partners at the federal level.

On behalf of Ohio State and Battelle, Drake and I have joined more than 325 higher education, scientific and business organizations around the country in an initiative entitled Innovation: An American Imperative. We are united in urging Congress to support stronger federal policies and investments to stimulate domestic research and development.

Steady and sustained growth in spending on basic scientific discovery is an inherently federal function and has proved to be essential to our ability to take advantage of new knowledge in a timely way. In the health sector, in particular, this has the potential to be a matter of life and death.

Improving the reliability and levels of research funding, as well as implementing immigration reform to retain the best foreign students who are currently forced to leave the country after training in the U.S., are just two examples of changes that would benefit central Ohio’s science community. Others include stimulating improvements in advanced manufacturing, streamlining or eliminating costly and inefficient regulations and bolstering STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) education.

We seek these changes to further unleash transformational ideas found within our institutions and to make life better for citizens of this country and the world. We know that is already happening through the work our scientists do individually and as partners.

Incredible NeuroLife technology, developed by Ohio State's Wexner Medical Center and Battelle to help paralyzed individuals gain some limited motion, has given hope to patients and families around the world. Our institutions also work together and separately to develop life-saving therapeutics, reduce nutrient runoff to increase water quality, increase cybersecurity through advanced computing, ensure greater food security and help keep our military safe through improved armor.

Public-private partnerships such as those between Ohio State and Battelle enable us to bring the most qualified people in the world together to create the best ideas, products and solutions for us all. Government support is vital to advance these efforts.
Our nation must continue to invest in basic science if we are to maintain our well-earned position as the leader in the quality of our ideas and the effectiveness of our solutions. As important is the continuity of support. World-class capabilities take a few days to destroy and years to reconstitute. Actions resulting from sequestration and government shutdowns have devastating impacts on the country’s R&D.

The Innovation: An American Imperative initiative is even more pressing today as our nation competes on a global stage.

Other countries are catching up. Reversing sequestration cuts alone could generate funding for thousands of new competitive grants, sparking ideas to address challenges that once seemed insurmountable to maintain our nation’s leadership.

*Jeffrey Wadsworth is president and CEO of Battelle and chairman of the board of trustees at Ohio State University.*
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