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Opinion: Columns

Mullis: Selection of Northwest Georgia as site for manufacturing THC oil could spur new industry

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Over the course of the last decade, I have worked to recruit and retain industries across Catoosa, Chattooga, Dade and Walker counties. However, the last year has been a major challenge for our existing businesses and many who may have considered locating to the Southeast at large. While we are largely seen as a textile manufacturing region, we are currently presented with a unique opportunity — adding a new industry sector to our area.

"Georgia's Hope Act" created a safe and effective medical cannabis program for qualified patients in Georgia. The act established the Georgia Medical Cannabis Commission to oversee the program and authorized the commission to award six licenses to companies for in-state cultivation and manufacturing of low-THC oil. Included in this legislation was language encouraging companies to select Tier 1 and Tier 2 counties for their facility locations.

The Town of Trion, Chattooga County and Northwest Georgia are fortunate to be involved in the application process, having partnered with Remedium Life Science of Georgia. In fact, Chattooga County is one of only three Tier 1 counties north of I-20 and prior to COVID-19 reported the highest unemployment rate in the state at 12.2%.

The significance of an economic development project of this size in a rural community cannot be overstated, but during this unprecedented time it takes on a whole new meaning and purpose. The opportunity before us is truly a once in a lifetime project and could be the catalyst we need to attract other industry sectors to the region. The opportunity to add an emerging industry to our area, economic diversity, 50-plus high-quality jobs, and significant local investment could be an answer to many prayers.

It is not often that a company invests in a local community before its factory doors are opened or they have obtained a business license. However, Remedium Life Science isn't like most companies. As it stands today, Remedium has delivered more than \$200,000 of goods to local children and families in need, worked to financially support our local civic groups, partnered with our local schools to benefit students, and, surprisingly, declined a multi-million dollar tax abatement package to give a much-needed boost to the community.

On top of this, Remedium has agreed to a profit-share arrangement with the Town of Trion and Chattooga County which could generate up to \$1 million annually to support education and public health programs throughout the community.

Remedium's willingness to engage at this level without any certainty of obtaining a competitive license speaks to their strong desire to be a great partner in our Northwest Georgia community. They have made it clear — their mission is to provide life-changing products to Georgians in need, invest in the local community, and provide residents of Northwest Georgia with high quality jobs.

All this to say, I, along with the Northwest Georgia Joint Development Authority, Top of Georgia Economic Development Initiative, and our local officials, am proud to support Remedium and Georgia's patients. There are truly exciting opportunities ahead, and I have high hopes for Northwest Georgia.

Jeff Mullis is the state senator in Georgia's 53rd District and is president and CEO of the Northwest Georgia Joint Development Authority.