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## EDITORIAL

### A major step

#### **Our position: Gov. Bush's effort to tie growth OKs to services deserves strong support.**

April 3, 2005

If local communities can't afford to build adequate roads and public schools or provide the drinking water needed to accommodate growth, then local government officials shouldn't be able to approve new development.

It's a pretty simple concept: No roads + no schools + no water = no growth. And it's the most welcome cornerstone of Gov. Jeb Bush's latest proposal to overhaul the state's 20-year-old growth-management laws.

Really, the governor's proposal is nothing new. Those very same principles guided lawmakers back in 1985, when the state first attempted to manage explosive growth in Florida. The idea back then was to focus growth in areas where government services could be provided most efficiently.

But those laws were so corrupted over time that schools, roads and water are now little more than fleeting afterthoughts for most local governments. As Mr. Bush noted, most developers take years to pay for transportation improvements while local governments routinely exempt huge swaths of land from growth controls. And the consequences are just staggering.

- In Orange, Osceola and Seminole counties, more than \$8 billion is needed to rectify transportation deficiencies created by poorly planned growth. And that doesn't begin to account for the future.
- A few local governments now consider the effect new development might have on nearby schools. But Palm Beach is the only county to actually require denial of new development if schools are overcrowded.
- Though state water managers warn of a pending water shortage, local governments still act as if the cup is half-full. Most don't seriously consider water resources when approving new developments. Fewer still have a plan to pay for more costly alternatives to dwindling underground water supplies.

Mr. Bush, a developer by trade, has no intention of stopping growth. Rather, his plan would force local governments to finally address the financial consequences of their actions. No financial plan? No new development.

And he wouldn't leave local governments in the lurch -- contrary to the claims of some lawmakers. The state could assume a financial role to protect areas of "critical state concern," including vital commerce routes and environmentally sensitive areas. He also supports the expansion of local government taxing options -- a keen interest of Senate President Tom Lee -- perhaps in exchange for capping the impact fees paid by developers. He'd even consider allowing a super-majority of county commissioners to up the local sales taxes without voter approval.

Mr. Bush has spent six years talking about the need to better manage growth in Florida. And last week, he finally delivered. Still, he warily acknowledged that his plan has a "razor-sharp edge" sure to draw "a lot of blood."

Lawmakers should muster the strength to endure the pain.

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