



Editorial: Wise focus on infrastructure

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Bill Galvano officially became president of the Florida Senate last week, and part of the leading senator's remarks reflected his pragmatism.

Galvano, R-Bradenton, referred to standard GOP fare, such as “keeping taxes low, regulations reasonable” and limiting state debt. But Galvano also sent signals about reshaping a sentiment that has prevailed in Tallahassee for too long — that expenditures on infrastructure are costs to be avoided or delayed.

Instead, Galvano said: “The future of Florida’s economy and the ability to expand and diversify its economy is tied to the strength of our infrastructure and our investment therein. At all levels, from transportation to water to communications. Let us together think innovatively when it comes to infrastructure, so we are not just addressing the needs of today, but anticipating the needs of the tomorrow.”

Exactly.

Accurately predicting long-range conditions, changes in technology and societal trends is difficult. But as Galvano noted, transportation (not just roads), water and communications are necessary now and will be into the near future.

State government, and by extension local governments, should invest in infrastructure strategically and efficiently. But governments should also invest willfully and with recognition of the benefits those investments provide.

One often-overlooked benefit of infrastructure is that, when taxpayers fund roads, rails, water, stormwater management, health care facilities and the like, they help businesses directly and indirectly. The vast majority of infrastructure projects are designed, engineered and constructed by the private sector. When those projects are completed and maintained, they enable business and commerce to continue and grow.

Investment in infrastructure also produces benefits to everyday Floridians. All we have to do is look at the investment city, county and state governments made in the Ocala/Marion County Commerce Park with roads, utility systems and rail, and the jobs that have been produced as a result of that investment.

Largely overlooked, until this year's horrible red tide outbreak, is the need for greater investments in systems — some big, some small — that prevent nutrients generated on the mainland from polluting rivers, bays and the Gulf. If ever there was a politically opportune time to accelerate treatment of South Florida water and runoff from inland and coastal counties, this is it.

We strongly urge Galvano, his colleagues in the Legislature and incoming Gov. Rick DeSantis to revisit how Florida could reasonably re-establish links between



infrastructure availability and local growth-management rules. Previous state requirements may have been too cumbersome, and changes in property-right laws have occurred, but there should be a mandatory connection between sufficient infrastructure and development.

Finally, we hope Galvano will consider adding affordable housing to the definition of infrastructure. The lack of housing that Florida's workforce can afford is becoming a drag on local economies. Fortunately, there's an easy way to jump-start state funding: direct housing-trust funds to housing, rather than raiding them.

Galvano will have no shortage of suggestions and challenges. But we wish him well and applaud his early focus on infrastructure.