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Two shades of 'green'

Environmentalism can spur economic growth

There used to be a time, not all that long ago, when business people were thought to have minimal regard for environmental matters and environmentalists were assumed to not give a darn about economics.

Numerous examples illustrate the stereotypes: companies that flagrantly dump harmful chemicals or extremists who endanger people for the sake of a tree.

But the tendency to oversimplify — in no small way, a failure of the media — has frequently meant that the worst examples receive most of the attention. Meanwhile, those who understand that both objectives can co-exist receive too little.

For the past several years here in Tallahassee, however, there's been a gradual recognition that economic and environmental interests can complement each other.

More than eight years ago, a group called the Economic and Environmental Consensus Committee stopped talking at each other and learned to talk with each other. While the eclectic group of business people, environmentalists and neighborhood activists came at community issues from different perspectives, they soon realized that they had more in common than they previously thought.

The EECC laid the foundation for Blueprint 2000, a holistic approach to stormwater management, transportation and recreational needs. Its underlying principle is not that economic and environmental interests have the ability to co-exist and complement, but that they must if our community is to prosper.

Amid a global sea change in public awareness about climate change this century, the important connection between economic and environmental interests was one of several topics explored last week during the 2008 Business Editors' Summit in the capital city.

If Florida expects to reduce its carbon emissions and soften its other environmental impacts, it's essential to not only modify individual behaviors, but also invest in entrepreneurial innovation. If market opportunities and incentives for green innovation are expanded, the likelihood will be greatly enhanced that technology will play a key role in solutions.

Tallahassee already has begun to understand its importance.

Last week, our city government was recognized for its several green initiatives, winning a Green City Local Government Standard award from the Florida Green Building Coalition. In addition, Fast Company magazine (www.fastcompany.com/magazine/) recently included Tallahassee as one of three "green leaders" (along with Sacramento and Minneapolis) among cities "on the verge," which it describes as "great urban centers (that) almost made our list of the most innovative cities."

But it isn't just a government-led effort. Private citizens ultimately will play the most important role. Without citizen support, governments can easily go astray. Seeing the significance of combined interests, a group called Greenovation was formed last spring under the umbrella of the Knight Creative Communities Initiative. Its goal: to promote Tallahassee and the Big Bend region as a capital for green technology, business and living.

With the yearlong project slated to end in this spring, Greenovation is passing the baton to its nonprofit creation called Sustainable Tallahassee. The group will take an early step in that process during an open meeting from 5 to 8 p.m. Tuesday at City Hall, and it encourages anyone with an interest in growing our community's green economy to attend.

Green can't be about one or the other. At last, it's about both.