



February 10, 2010

## Editorial: Incentives can be good deal for economic development

Santa Rosa County officials are recognizing reality in looking to create additional incentives to help draw new businesses and bring jobs for county residents.

Clearly, there is a limit on how far you go with incentives. If local governments "pay" too much in trying to "buy" jobs, it's not a good deal for county taxpayers. But it is easy to see that not having a variety of economic incentives available can mean losing good jobs to other areas that do offer them.

That's especially true for Panhandle counties competing with local governments in Alabama that tend to be freer with cash incentives.

The hard part is figuring out how what the right "price" is to pay for these jobs. And to have an effective system in place to ensure that employers fulfill their part of the bargain — that is, that they earn the incentives, whether by producing a certain number of jobs, a certain salary level, etc.

The state of Florida simply can't — and maybe doesn't want to — compete with states like Alabama that throw huge amounts of cash at large industries. Depending on the cost, the question is still open as to whether it pays off in the long run.

But when relatively modest amounts of money can make the difference between attracting or losing a good employer, it seems foolish to not be able to put something on the table.

Santa Rosa's economic development efforts have paid dividends in recent years, and officials there continue to be aggressive and innovative. The more variety in terms of incentive packages they can offer prospective employers, the better.

County officials are looking at relatively short-term incentives, to be paid out over five years. That makes sense. It is an incentive for employers to come and stay, but doesn't commit the county to long-term payouts.