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Bill promotes sprawl

OUR OPINION: STATE SENATE COMMITTEE SHOULD REJECT SB 716

Last year, Gov. Jeb Bush gave the so-called "Agricultural Enclave" bill the fate it deserved: He vetoed it. Now it's back, having been approved by the House. Today the Agriculture and Economic Development Act comes before the Senate Environmental Preservation Committee. If approved it will move to the Senate floor. But it doesn't deserve approval this year any more than in 2004.

The bill would force near-automatic approval of comprehensive-plan amendments and rezoning requests to develop farmland if 75 percent of the borders of the land in question are designated for industrial, commercial or residential use. Under this bill, landowners could compel local governments to approve development uses even if the local comprehensive-development plan says otherwise. If governments don't acquiesce within six months, comp-plan amendments and developments of regional impact would be automatically approved.

That's outrageous. It removes local control of the planning process. What's more egregious is a clause that would allow development on parcels of up to 5,120 acres that are within *five miles* of where a "damaging pest, disease or natural disaster has occurred or has been identified." This means that huge tracts under cultivation that were in or near the path of one of last year's four hurricanes, which covered a wide swath, would get carte blanche to become subdivisions. The same would apply to tracts within five miles of where citrus canker is found. Talk about encouraging sprawl on a large scale.

Whole towns could spring up with little government control; 5,120 acres is the equivalent of eight square miles -- a mid-size community.

The Senate committee should reject this bill, and again give the measure its well-deserved fate.