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Bateman: S.C. must hunt more than buffalo to prosper

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Guest Columnist

In the past, economic development was often compared to big-game hunting - buffalo hunting to be exact.

Just recently, South Carolina landed a major buffalo when Boeing broke ground on a new facility in North Charleston, promising 3,800 jobs. This project is a tremendous win for South Carolina, bringing international attention, strengthening our aerospace cluster, and potentially impacting the entire state.

Along with Boeing, South Carolina has won its share of buffalo in the last few years - Google, Monster.com, adidas, DuPont, Starbucks, and the list goes on. These projects are important, but the days are gone when we lived on big-game hunting as our only hope. Today, the buffalo represent only one part of a healthy economic development strategy for South Carolina.

To be successful in economic development - to create jobs and raise income levels - we must develop and implement a strategy that is well-balanced and comprehensive. While we continue to focus on industrial recruitment as one component, we cannot afford to ignore areas like existing industry, smaller advanced manufacturers, distribution and logistics companies, high-tech or knowledge-based companies, entrepreneurship, and tourism development. This multi-faceted approach to economic development will diversify our economy and create opportunities for citizens in rural areas as well as urban ones.

As we look at a broader, more strategic approach, it makes sense to focus on a short list of industries that South Carolina has the greatest chance of attracting: traditional manufacturing and distribution, investment-intensive manufacturing, high tech/high wage, and corporate headquarters. The South Carolina Economic Developers' Association believes that the state's economic development game plan should include an aggressive selling approach and incentives targeted at each of these industries.

To successfully implement this strategy, we must take a few key steps. To start, we must recognize that education has to be the foundation of our efforts. Developing a talented

work force, which will attract companies, starts with building strong K-12 schools and continues with retaining our best and brightest after graduation.

Next, we must have a statewide focus on teamwork and collaboration, which was instrumental in attracting Boeing. We must maintain the attitude that what's good for one part of the state can ultimately be good for us all.

Finally, we need to be sure the state Department of Commerce has adequate funding to lead the way. We also must support hard-working local economic development professionals, ensuring they have the tools and community backing to bring home jobs.

In the end, when a buffalo like Boeing comes along, we celebrate. South Carolina has been successful in the hunt, winning a major prize that will boost the state's economy in countless ways. At the same time, we must also think bigger, recognizing that successful economic development has to involve more than big-industry recruiting. It includes a broad, well-balanced strategy that will help South Carolina win long-term.

Mr. Bateman is president of the South Carolina Economic Developers Association.

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