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**EVERGLADES VISIONARY TAKES ANOTHER SHOT AT STATE HOUSE**

07/27/2008  
Palm Beach Post  
Kleinberg, Eliot

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Three decades ago, Elton Gissendanner ran Florida's top environmental agency.

Under then-Gov. Bob Graham, he was "a key architect," Graham says of the visionary behind Save Our Coasts, Save Our Rivers and Save Our Everglades.

Then he found himself disgraced, in prison and bankrupt.

Now nearing 81, the veterinarian still comes to West Palm Beach to do dozens of low-cost spayings and neuterings.

He's thrilled the South Florida Water Management District wants to buy nearly 300 square miles of land from U.S. Sugar for \$1.7 billion for a giant marsh filter between Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades.

After all, he never had any tolerance for the sugar business anyway.

The old animal doctor has a dog in this fight.

Semi-retired to Lake Placid, near Sebring, he's running for the Florida House in District 77, which covers most of Highlands County and part of Collier County, and all of Glades and Hendry, where sugar isn't just king, it's pretty much everything.

"I just thought, 'There are so many problems,'" Gissendanner said. "I thought, 'I'm healthy, I'm interested, I have a concern for the future.'"

"Elton is an amazing energetic and creative person," Graham said last week. "He's the kind of individual that if you sit down with him for a half-hour, you'll come out with a half-dozen very good ideas. The legislature could certainly benefit by those qualities."

Republican incumbent Denise Grimsley, elected in 2004 and again in 2006, is a nurse and citrus grower who's also from Lake Placid. Grimsley agreed the economy of sugar-growing counties will be a top issue.

She said she's encouraged that the water management district says some land it doesn't need could go back to farming.

Born in 1959, she was in grade school when Gissendanner began his political career.

"I've only met him once," she said.

Gissendanner, a Tallahassee native and 1955 University of Georgia veterinary school grad -- magna cum laude -- served two terms as mayor of North Miami in the late 1960s.

In between, he was the first veterinarian to serve in the Florida House.

In 1978, he helped Graham become governor and served in his Cabinet, running the Department of Natural Resources, forerunner to the Department of Environmental Protection.

But in 1987, he resigned and pleaded guilty to obstructing justice for writing a letter falsely saying a friend who was a drug

smuggler was an informant in order to get the man a more lenient sentence.

He'd also been charged with taking \$80,000 to save another trafficker from jail by making him an informant; he denied the charge but took a deal, pleading on the other allegation.

In January 1988, a judge ordered a sobbing Gissendanner to serve 18 months.

His downward spiral continued after he got out in January 1989 after a year in federal prison.

He briefly headed the Humane Society of Greater Miami, where he'd volunteered since 1956, but had to resign in 1994 after the state attorney general's office said he couldn't run it while he had a \$100,000 veterinary care contract.

In 2001, a Homestead-based car rental outfit he owned went belly-up and he had to file for Chapter 7 bankruptcy protection.

In the last two decades, Gissendanner has set up spay-and-neuter operations in West Palm Beach, Fort Myers, LaBelle, Sebring, Tampa, Key Largo and Marathon. In that time, he figures he's done 200,000 operations, sometimes as many as 50 in a day.

Gissendanner and sugar clashed years ago. As director of the Department of Natural Resources, he suggested sugar isn't a necessary part of a diet and it didn't deserve government subsidies that kept its prices competitive.

He hasn't changed.

"Absolutely. Get rid of all those sugar fields," he said last week.

If the buyout goes through, sugar will be gone in six years.

That's why he suggests retooling the areas' economies by building factories making equipment for wind or solar power.

Gissendanner also would like to see the federal government involved.

He worries future state boards will be pressured to return some land to farming or mining.

"I just don't know that the water management district has the political muscle to keep it off forever," he said.

He also said a federal role means federal money.

One idea struck Gissendanner in a North Dakota sporting goods store.

He saw in a magazine that the U.S. Forest Service manages 20 "National Grasslands" covering about 4 million acres out West.

He said giving that designation to the sugar fields would help protect them.

Forest Service officials said last week that really doesn't work because the grasslands are tracts the government bought during the Depression.

If anything, the government might manage former sugar fields as a national park or a refuge, similar to the Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge.

That 147,000-acre tract actually is state land the feds lease from the district; the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages it.

"We cannot respond to conjecture or assumptions about a potential acquisition still under negotiation," water district Executive Director Carol Wehle said in a statement.

"We can, however, assure Floridians that we are committed to securing an acquisition that is in the best interest of the environment and taxpayers, and to continuing to consult closely with our federal partners on projects to benefit the Everglades," she said.

~ eliot\_kleinberg@pbpost.com

Florida House District 77

Elton Gissendanner

Age: 80. Born in Tallahassee.

Professional: Veterinarian.

Personal: Lives in Lake Placid.

Education: University of Georgia.

Political: Candidate for state House District 77 (Democrat). Mayor of North Miami, 1963-67 and 1969-71. State House, 1967-68. Director, Florida Department of Natural Resources, 1979-87.

Denise Grimsley

Age 48. Fifth-generation Floridian.

Professional: Nurse and citrus grower.

Personal: Lives in Lake Placid.

Education: South Florida Community College, Polk Community College, Warner Southern College. Master's in business, University of Miami.

Political: Incumbent, state House District 77 (Republican). Elected 2004; reelected 2006. Chair, House Agribusiness Committee.

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**MICHAEL PUTNEY 2008-07-27 11 41  
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07/27/2008

Local 10 Morning News at 5 AM - WPLG-TV

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MIAMI

ABC

10 WPLG

MICHAEL PUTNEY

2008-07-27

11:41:50

OUT BIG SUGAR AND WITH WITHIN A NUMBER OF YEARS SIX, SEVEN EIGHT YEARS BEGAN TO RESTORE THE SHEET WATER FLOW TO THE EVERGLADES. DO SPOURT THAT PLAN?

I SUPPORT THE FACT THAT THEY ARE COMMUNICATING, THAT THEY ARE TALKING. I REALLY HAVE TO COMMEND THE GOVERNOR FOR HAVING SPENT ALL THIS TIME, BY THE WAY QUIETLY, PRIVATELY DEALING WITH THIS ISSUE, TRYING TO COME UP WITH A DEAL THAT WOULD WORK FOR THE TAXPAYERS AND THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE STATE OF FLORIDA. AS YOU WELL KNOW THERE A LONG WAY TO GO. THE DEVIL IS IN THE DETAILS BUT THE FACT THIS THEY ARE TALKING. THE FACT THAT THEY ARE NEGOTIATING. THE FACT THAT THEY ARE LOOKING AT WAYS TO MAKE SURE THAT WE CAN IMPROVE THE WATER FLOW AND WATER QUALITY COMING FROM LAKE OKEECHOBEE DUE THROUGH THE EVER GADZ TO FLORIDA BAY IS A GREAT STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION IT IS EXCITING.

I SEE HOW IT WORKS.

HERE IS THE ISSUE. IT IS VERY EXPENSIVE PROPOSITION.

RIGHT.

NUMBER ONE. NUMBER TWO IS THERE ARE A LOT OF DETAILS THAT HAVE TO BE IRONED OUT. THERE ARE ENTIRE TOWNS, COMMUNITIES THAT DEPEND ON THAT INDUSTRY. DO YOU REMEMBER --

CLUE US IN.

IT WOULD POTENTIALLY CHANGE IF IT WERE, NOT IN YOUR DISTRICT BUT NEVERTHELESS I KNOW YOUR CONCERN.

BUT I THINK IT IS A STEP IN RIGHT DIRECTION.

LET'S MOVE ON IN THE COUPLE OF REMAINING MINUTES, I DO WANT TO GET TO SOME ISSUES ON CUBA. AND YOU KNOW, YOUR OPPONENTS INDEED BARACK OBAMA SAYS, THE TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS ON CUBAN EXILES TO BE ABLE TO GO TO CABREA ONCE EVERY THREE YEARS IS UNFRERE. IT SEPARATES FAMILIES. WHY DO YOU CONTINUE TO SUPPORT THIS PROVISION?

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## Salvar el medio ambiente

07/28/2008

El Nuevo Herald

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Cuando se supo la noticia de la compra de 75,000 hectáreas de tierra a la US Sugar por un valor de \$1,700 millones, ya estaba concertada la fecha para la firma de esta transacción. Había apuro para la ejecución del proyecto y poco interés en que se supiera. Estos terrenos que se están comprando a tan alto precio serán convertidos en pantanos e incluidos en el Parque Nacional de los Everglades.

Son tierras que están en producción, que son fuente de empleo y de vida para miles de personas y pequeños empresarios, que pronto serán improductivas. La causa del deterioro de los Everglades está en el abandono sistemático a que fueron sometidos por años debido a la mala ejecución de los planes de restauración, pero eso no quiere decir en ningún momento que para salvarlo haya que destruir la industria azucarera en la Florida.

El cuidado del medio ambiente y los sistemas ecológicos no puede estar reñido con la vida humana. La conservación del ecosistema tiene que tener un equilibrio con el desarrollo de la sociedad y no puede ser causa de pérdidas de empleo y límites para la economía. Pueden hacerse las dos cosas a la vez.

La abrupta desvinculación de miles de personas de sus medios de vida es también un problema y si los ecosistemas son importantes, también lo son y en mayor grado los seres humanos y sus intereses, el desarrollo de la sociedad, la economía y el bienestar de los ciudadanos.

En este planeta tenemos que vivir todos, la fauna y los seres humanos. ¿Cómo podemos estar de acuerdo en seguir recortando planes sociales, de salud y de educación por falta de presupuestos y gastar estas elevadas sumas para salvar manatíes, cocodrilos y serpientes, cuando hay ancianos y muchas personas de bajos recursos que no cuentan con seguro médico y no les alcanzan sus pensiones para pagar la renta? Otra vez seguimos apostando a comprar en el exterior y cerrar fábricas y empleos en los EEUU. Esta práctica ha costado ya muchos empleos, pérdidas de mercado y profundización de una crisis económica que no termina.

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## **EDITORIAL Restoring Florida Transfer of land tract, sugar company to state will help revive**

07/26/2008

Columbus Dispatch

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Jul. 26--Through the years, development and agriculture have stanchd the flow of Florida's "River of Grass," reducing the scope of the Everglades, one of the richest ecosystems in the world. Now, in an amazing turn of events, the potential sale of the nation's largest sugar company to the state of Florida promises to begin undoing much of the damage.

One only can wonder at the extent of negotiations that brought Florida Gov. Charlie Crist and U.S. Sugar Corp. Chief Executive Office Robert H. Buker Jr. to stand together on a hot summer day late last month and outline a plan to return about 300 square miles of sugar-cane fields to nature. The deal would spell the end of a 77-year-old corporation whose name brings to mind an entire industry, rather than a single entity.

The men unveiled the agreement while standing on a levee, backed by a view of the wetlands of the Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge. Remarkably, nearly everyone outside their immediate circles -- from the employees and towns dependent on the sugar business to environmental groups that for years have pushed for Everglades restoration -- was taken by surprise.

Perhaps that same sort of surprise greeted company lobbyists when Crist met with them in November to talk about environmental and regulatory concerns, among other issues. According to U.S. Sugar Senior Vice President Robert E. Coker, the governor at one point said, "Why don't we just buy you out?" The idea was so jarring that Coker said when he learned of it, "I just about passed out."

In the ensuing months, any discussions that led to Florida's offer of \$1.75 billion were kept under close wraps. The state is to take over the cane fields and various other assets, including a sugar refinery and more than 30,000 acres of orange groves. The deal is to be finalized on Nov. 30.

Amid all the cheering by environmental groups, one serious dissent arose in the form of a lawsuit filed this month by the Miccosukee Indian tribe in U.S. District Court in Miami. The tribe seeks guarantees that a water reservoir already under construction will be completed. The project is aimed at protecting reservation land, which is within Everglades National Park, from agricultural and urban runoff.

The Everglades once covered a vast area over the southern half of Florida, stretching from near Orlando along the Kissimmee River to Lake Okeechobee and onward into bays of the Atlantic Ocean on both sides of the Florida Peninsula. In the past century, about 50 percent of these wetlands were destroyed for agriculture and

urban development.

Allowing U.S. Sugar lands to return to their natural state would be a big step toward restoration of the historic flow of the River of Grass and the ecosystem that depends upon it.

The American sugar industry remains politically pampered. The new farm bill, passed in May over President Bush's veto, provides the price supports and tariffs on imported sugar that help protect it from foreign competition.

U.S. policies ensure sugar prices on the American market stay at about 21 cents per pound vs. a world-market price of about 12 cents per pound. The Government Accountability Office estimates that this handout to the industry costs consumers \$1.9 billion.

Few analysts, however, expect the Florida-U.S. Sugar deal, which envisions a six-year phased demise of the company, to reduce the industry's clout. If it does, the buyout could prove to be a boon not only to Florida's environment but also to American consumers, who would benefit from lower prices on their favorite sweetener.

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## **Environmental elites are a force behind Glades**

07/27/2008

Miami Herald - Online

CURTIS MORGAN

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Curtis Morgan-Miami Herald

Early in the hush-hush negotiations to buy U.S. Sugar, Gov. Charlie Crist dropped by a fundraiser for the small but powerful Everglades Foundation.

At the ritzy Mar-a-Lago Club in Palm Beach, the governor hobnobbed with gossip-page lovebirds Chris Evert and Greg Norman, celebrity magnate Donald Trump and the not-so-famous but even richer Paul Tudor Jones II, a Wall Street wizard and avid tarpon angler who chairs the nonprofit foundation.

Behind the glitter was a more telling measure of the foundation's clout: Crist's office put his hosts in the loop on the secret sugar talks well before the February shindig -- and before many of his own top administrators.

Audubon, Sierra and many other brand-name environmental groups have sparred with the sugar industry. But the low-profile Everglades Foundation has played the biggest role, and spent the biggest bucks, trying to cut Big Sugar down to size. Led by Jones, prominent activists Mary Barley and Nathaniel Reed and a small group of directors and staff members, the Palmetto Bay-based foundation has never been more influential.

A former director sits as vice chair of the agency in charge of

Everglades restoration. The governor fishes with its billionaire chairman. Its galas and grants provide millions of dollars that support a network of other groups' advocates, attorneys and lobbyists.

And when Crist unveiled the \$1.75 billion proposal last month, the foundation supplied the glossy press kits hailing the buyout of its longtime foe as the "missing link" to Everglades restoration.

"They're wealthy people. They're philanthropists. They pick their causes, but they like to win, too," said Frank Jackalone, director of the Sierra Club's Florida office.

The foundation isn't one of those trendy new "green" groups. For its leaders, trying to save what's left of the Glades goes back decades.

Barley, named a "Hero of the Planet" by Time in 1999 for her Everglades efforts, said the foundation's most important role has been to keep activists' eyes on the prize.

"We have only one issue," said Barley, a vice chair who lives in Islamorada. "We are where we are because we brought together everybody who is working on the Everglades."

Having deep pockets hasn't hurt, either.

Jones, whose net worth is estimated at \$3.3 billion, ranked No. 105 on Forbes' 2007 list of richest Americans. Other directors, including Jack Nicklaus and Jimmy Buffett, also qualify as well-heeled, well-connected or both. Forget scruffy stereotypes -- these are enviro-elites.

Foundation and tax records don't detail individual giving, but its chairman also is its largest donor. Jones, a hedge-fund manager who lives in Greenwich, Conn., and owns an Islamorada vacation home, has easily poured \$20 million-plus into the foundation himself -- \$11 million alone on a bruising but losing 1996 drive to pass a penny-a-pound pollution tax on sugar growers.

Three weeks before Crist's election, Jones gave \$400,000 to the Florida Republican Party -- the largest individual donation in at least a decade. If it didn't quite match Big Sugar -- U.S. Sugar and Florida Crystals gave more than \$690,000 -- it signaled the foundation's intent to be a major player when Crist waded into Everglades politics.

#### PERSONAL BOND

Jones, traveling in Africa, declined to respond to e-mail questions. But foundation leaders and Crist aides said the men built a relationship through calls and fishing trips.

Before leaving on a European tour, Crist praised Jones to reporters: "This is a guy who cares very deeply about the Everglades and has put his money where his mouth is."

Foundation leaders downplay their role in the U.S. Sugar deal. But if they didn't exactly plant the seed, they plowed the field.

Crist spoke freely and frequently on Glades issues with several board members and listened along with aides as foundation scientist Thomas Van Lent detailed the water storage and

pollution problems that hamper restoration, said Reed, a vice chair from Hobe Sound.

"He became engaged very early on, during the campaign and after," Reed said.

A few months into office, Crist boarded Jones' skiff for a fishing trip.

The destination, troubled Florida Bay, was the place the foundation was created to protect in 1993. Originally called Save the Everglades Foundation, the group was born out of anger that Jones and the late George Barley, neighbors in the Keys, felt when algae blooms fouled their backyard fishing grounds.

"George and Paul liked to fish for tarpon in the Everglades, and that's how all this got started," said Karl Wickstrom, the publisher of Florida Sportsman magazine, who joined as a director. "They thought Florida Bay was being trashed by sugar. I agreed."

Barley, an Orlando developer and state marine commissioner, became chief architect of the penny-a-pound proposal and a fierce critic of the sugar industry -- a role his wife, Mary, assumed after his death in a 1995 plane crash. Jones became its chief financier. At Barley's graveside, his widow and his friend made emotional pledges to continue his fight.

Crist acknowledged the trip with Jones influenced him -- but only to appoint another foundation director, veteran environmentalist Shannon Estenoz, to the board of the South Florida Water Management District, the agency overseeing Everglades projects.

"I think she's a great appointment," Crist said.

Estenoz's appointment and three others by Crist changed the balance of power in an agency previously protective of agricultural interests. Last August, Crist's appointees blocked the sugar-backed practice of replenishing Lake Okeechobee with polluted runoff.

That milestone defeat was high among concerns that led U.S. Sugar to call a meeting last year in which Crist said he seized on an unexpected "opportunity" and pitched the buyout proposal.

#### REJECTING CRITICS

Kirk Fordham, a longtime Capitol Hill aide who is the foundation's chief executive, scoffed at speculation that Jones helped broker the complex deal. He said Jones was too busy with businesses and other charities to act as "some Wizard of Oz pulling the strings."

Downsizing Big Sugar isn't a new idea, Barley said. Environmental groups had urged it for decades, and Crist, as lawmaker, had backed the failed sugar tax.

Whatever its influence, the foundation's importance to the state's environmental interests is huge.

In the past three years alone, the foundation gave more than \$4 million to 16 groups, including Audubon, Sierra and many of the state's big green groups. Each grant comes with one requirement: Spend it on Everglades issues.

Grants are lifeblood for smaller groups such as Everglades Law Center in Fort Lauderdale, whose four attorneys represent environmental groups in lawsuits. The center has received more than \$700,000 since 2005.

"We simply would not be able to do the work we do without the foundation's help," director Richard Grosso said.

Estenoz, who is married to Grosso, resigned from the foundation after Crist named her to the water board. She recuses herself on the firm's cases and dismisses any conflict.

"I don't take marching orders from anybody," she said. "The goal of all of us is to restore the Everglades. It's not to get rid of sugar."

That's a stark change in tone from the foundation's first nasty bout with Big Sugar. The industry defeated the sugar tax in 1996, countering with a \$24 million campaign that portrayed penny-a-pound backers as environmental elitists and Jones as a sharpie scheming to make a killing on the sugar market.

By 2000, both sides had agreed to compromise enough to cajole politicians into supporting the \$10.8 billion state-federal Everglades restoration plan. After the landmark deal, technical disputes became as crucial as political ones, and directors decided to overhaul the foundation.

"What we needed were engineers and hydrologists," Mary Barley said.

In the past three years, the foundation has begun building just such an in-house staff. They now occupy offices overlooking Biscayne Bay in the former Burger King headquarters on Old Cutler Road.

Van Lent, a former hydrologist at Everglades National Park, was the first hire -- "the best hire we have and ever will make," Barley said. His computer models helped make the case that acquiring a swath of sugar fields would fix a flawed plan to restore flow to the River of Grass.

The board also has hired politically plugged-in managers and ramped up fundraising. The centerpiece is an annual gala -- hosted this year by tennis icon Evert and headlined by Diana Ross -- that nets about \$1.4 million.

In some ways, the new approach -- in-house consultants, big political donations -- mirrors tactics employed by developers and industries.

For environmentalists, turnabout is fair play. The foundation, Grosso said, "levels the playing field."

"It's about time somebody did it on the side of the environment," Grosso said. "If Paul Jones has the ear of the governor, I'm thrilled."

Miami Herald staff writer Marc Caputo contributed to this story.

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## Mott Foundation owes Glades a parting gift

07/28/2008

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Palm Beach Post Editorial

The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation gave away more than \$100 million in 2006. Among the 545 grants were \$100,000 to the Civil Society Institute in Druzhby Narodiv, Ukraine, and \$300,000 to the Genesee County Land Bank Authority in Flint, Mich. Is it too much to ask that next year's grants include employment assistance to Belle Glade and Clewiston?

The Mott Foundation is one of the great charitable organizations in the United States, with assets of \$2.2 billion. It was started in 1926 by Charles Stewart Mott, who went from early supplier for General Motors to major stockholder and board member, back when people said that what was good for GM was good for the country. The foundation also is one of the owners of U.S. Sugar, which Mr. Mott formed in 1931.

Assuming that negotiations with the South Florida Water Management District are successful, U.S. Sugar expects to close in six years on its deal to sell the district all of its holdings - including 187,000 acres in Palm Beach and Hendry counties - for \$1.75 billion. Mr. Mott's foundation has a 19 percent stake in U.S. Sugar. The Mott Children's Health Center, another Flint-based charitable group, owns 22 percent and, according to the Flint Journal, the Community Foundation of Greater Flint, has a 6 percent stake. Other owners include the for-profit MFO Management Co. (14 percent) and the U.S. Sugar Employee Stock Ownership Plan (34 percent).

Last week, Palm Beach County Commissioner Jeff Koons made the sensible suggestion that the charitable owners of U.S. Sugar be asked to leave a bequest to the community it will leave behind. The proposal has precedent. After being enriched by South Florida land for two decades, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, a \$7 billion behemoth out of Chicago, has established a \$25 million endowment with the Community Foundation for Palm Beach and Martin Counties.

It's not as if the Glades does not qualify for assistance. Poverty, unemployment, teen pregnancy, AIDS and low graduation rates are serious problems. They are likely to worsen without U.S. Sugar's 1,700 jobs.

And it's not as if U.S. Sugar, whose chairman William White also is chairman of the Mott Foundation, hasn't helped already. Mott money established the Community Foundation and the Glades Community Development Corp. Clewiston literally was built and furnished by U.S. Sugar/Mott money: library, youth center, hotel, airport, day-care center, college scholarships, recreation areas, auditorium, ballfields, tennis courts and streets.

Politicians looking to save the Glades will need to tap federal, state and local sources. But the foundation that gained so much

from the labor in the cane fields - and will benefit so greatly from the taxpayer buyout - also has a responsibility to help.

