

# THE FLORIDA SENATE

Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1100

## COMMITTEES:

Community Affairs, *Chair*  
Banking and Insurance  
Energy, Environment, and Land Use -  
Policy and Steering  
Finance and Tax  
Governmental Operations - Policy and Steering  
Health Regulation  
Military Affairs and Domestic Security  
Reapportionment

## SELECT COMMITTEE:

Florida's Economy

**SENATOR MICHAEL S. "MIKE" BENNETT**

21st District

December 10, 2008

The Honorable Charlie Crist  
Governor, State of Florida  
The Capitol  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001

Dear Governor Crist:

I am one among the many that have steadfastly applauded your decisive and innovative efforts on behalf of Everglades restoration. This unique and vital asset is critical to sustained economic growth and the protection of our treasured way of life.

Both in my capacity as a Senator and as a business owner in Clewiston, and now more recently in my capacity as Chairman of the Community Affairs Committee, I have received various questions about the impending US Sugar land purchase. I am including a number of the questions in the enclosed attachment.

In an effort solely intended to help you and the State of Florida protect this valuable asset, I had planned on having hearings in the Community Affairs committee the first week of January to allow us to receive input from you, your staff, the water management districts and various other public entities in order to completely vet this purchase.

I am respectfully requesting that the vote on the US Sugar land purchase be delayed until February when we will have received and reviewed input from the Community Affairs Committee as well as additional input from our related appropriations committees.

Thank you for your serious consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

Michael S. "Mike" Bennett

Cc: Jeff Atwater, Senate President

## REPLY TO:

- Wildewood Professional Park, Suite 90, 3653 Cortez Road West, Bradenton, Florida 34210 (941) 727-6349
- 306 Senate Office Building, 404 South Monroe Street, Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1100 (850) 487-5078

Senate's Website: [www.flsenate.gov](http://www.flsenate.gov)

**JEFF ATWATER**  
President of the Senate

**MIKE FASANO**  
President Pro Tempore

U.S. Sugar will be able to keep farming much of the land under a lease for up to 7 years, but the lease rate appears to be well below market rates.

**Is leasing the land to U.S. Sugar for as little as one-third of the market rate the best deal we can get to minimize the impact on taxpayers?**

The South Florida Water Management District will be forced to borrow most of the money (\$1.3 billion) that will be necessary to purchase this land. The District covers 16 of Florida's 67 counties and will pay off the debt by collecting property taxes from residents, businesses, and land owners in those counties.

How is this consistent with the state's continuing efforts to control property taxes?

Further, in today's economic climate can bonds be sold and sold at a reasonable rate of return?

**Will the District still need to buy other lands to make the Everglades project work, and will it have exhausted its borrowing capacity with the U.S. Sugar purchase?**

How will this land purchase affect the District's debt ratio?

**We understand that under the original \$1.7 billion proposal, the District needed to increase its debt rate to 30 percent or more. How does the current proposal change this and for how long will the rate be impacted?**

**Do we have firm estimates of the cleanup costs, and how they will be dealt with, for any contaminated portions of the land?**

What is the impact of this acquisition on the 50/50 Federal/State restoration partnership?

**Does the acquisition of these lands mean that the original restoration plan now needs to be substantially re-written? If so, what efforts have been undertaken towards a possible rewrite?**

**We have not seen an analysis of the impact of the land purchase on the local economy, including jobs, community development, and city and county services. Does any such analysis exist?**