

Florida House of Representatives

Representative Juan C. Zapata

District 119

Reply to:

Chairman, Miami-Dade Legislative Delegation

- o 13550 SW 88 St. Ste. 150
(305) 273-3288 Fax: (305) 273-3290
- o 212 The Capitol
402 S. Monroe St.
Tallahassee, Florida 32399
(850) 488-9550 Fax: (850) 921-2484

Committees:

Chairman, Human Services Appropriation Committee
Full Appropriations Council on General Government & Healthcare
General Government Policy Council
Health Care Services Policy Committee
Health & Family Services Policy Council
Policy Council
Select Committee on Seminole Indian Compact Review

TO: Members, South Florida Water Management District Board

FROM: Representative Juan C. Zapata

DATE: May 8, 2009

SUBJECT: Amended and Restated Agreement for Sale and Purchase
and Lease Agreement – U.S. Sugar, et al.

It is our understanding that you will be meeting during the week of May 11 to consider adoption of an Amended and Restated Agreement for Sale and Purchase and Lease Agreement with U.S. Sugar, et al. The proposed purchase is for 72,000-plus acres with options to purchase another 107,000-plus acres around Lake Okeechobee. As elected officials representing the residents and taxpayers of the counties and communities affected by this proposed purchase, we have grave concerns regarding the impact of the purchase and lease. As you know, the State of Florida, in essence, drained this land so that it could be used as productive farming land. These communities and their businesses were built to serve this farming area. Now, through your purchase and lease, you will be reversing the use of the land, reversing the planning and growth of these communities and reversing the lives of these residents. You, as drafters of these agreements, cannot leave the welfare of these people at risk.

Your proposed historic, once-in-a-lifetime deal includes a once-in-a-lifetime obligation to assure that the people who live and work in this region, whose children are schooled here and whose businesses have been established here are able to survive this noble environmental effort. The proposed agreements, while providing a phased-in purchase rather than an immediate transfer of all U.S. Sugar lands, clearly evidence the intent to discontinue farming in this region which causes untold problems for these counties, cities, businesses and residents. As you are well aware, this region already is “at risk” economically and your failure to assure an economic transition plan could financially doom the entire region. We ask that you:

- a) provide an ample opportunity for all citizens to understand the new proposed purchase and lease provisions prior to finalizing the transaction;
- b) provide initial and dedicated ongoing economic transition funding as an integral part of the Board's adoption of this purchase;
- c) commit to a partnering agreement with these communities and counties to assure short-term and long-term mutual objectives and goals, which agreement includes the District's ongoing participation with the communities, business leaders, economists, economic development specialists, etc., for the development and maintenance of a viable plan for the economic transition of the region;
- d) commit to the establishment of local District operations facilities within the Hendry/Glades area; and
- e) commit to the employment of local businesses and residents and to the District's patronage of Hendry/Glades businesses to assist in the economic transition of the region.

The human cost of your proposed environmental plan cannot be understated. There are those who would tell you this is not the District's concern. We beg to differ. The District has the power and is the only party in a position to effectuate a plan for protection of these residents at the time that you initiate this historic transition.