

Eve -

Thank you for raising awareness to the need for smarter water policy in Florida. We haven't met yet, but I've taken your draft and highlighted some factual errors so readers will know we need more people focusing on sound science not political science.

- Mark Wilson
Florida Chamber
of Commerce

Dear business leaders: ~~We need your help tackling Florida's water crisis~~

Eve Samples, Nov. 13, 2017

Thank Florida Chamber
leaders for helping tackle
Florida's water crisis.

An open letter to the Florida Chamber of Commerce:

Business leaders of Florida,

Glad you noticed. We've been talking about water for years.

It's great that you're talking about water. You got together in Tallahassee on Wednesday to discuss the future water needs of 1,000 people a day who are moving to Florida.

It ~~won't~~^{will} be easy to accommodate the 6 million new Floridians expected by 2030., if we follow water science, not political science.

Our water is in distress right now. Consider:

- State officials issued 13 avoid-water advisories for beaches and rivers earlier this month.
- Algae is blooming in the waters of Florida Bay.
- Billions of gallons of polluted freshwater from Lake Okeechobee are being dumped in the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries, where toxic algae made international headlines last year.
- Sewage leaks recently fouled the northern Indian River Lagoon.

This wouldn't have happened had politicians fixed the problem sooner. For example, the Indian River Lagoon portion of CERP should have been completed 10 years ago.

Just as the science shows, septic systems are polluting water ways.

All of this, just in time for peak tourist season.

Playing politics with Florida water is bad

~~Bad water is bad for business.~~ You get that., right?

But Floridians need Florida Chamber leaders to be more honest about the solutions.

The Florida Chamber has issued 5 educational water videos highlighting the science. See what legendary environmental crusader Nat Reed said on our video about Indian River Lagoon.

On Wednesday, your president and CEO Mark Wilson stood in a conference room in Tallahassee and preached the importance of heeding "water science, not political science."

Joined by Rep. Gayle Harell, Rep. Thad Altman, Rep. Larry Lee, Rep. Randy Fine and Sen. Debbie Mayfield.

That sounded reasonable — until Wilson wildly exaggerated the size of a proposed reservoir in the Everglades Agricultural Area, calling it "a second Lake Okeechobee." The Chamber also debuted a "research video" Wednesday that included a fisherman from Clewiston disparaging the reservoir as "not a good solution" (without citing science to back up his claims).

Someone should PolitiFact your math. At 30,000+ acres, Little Lake O will be the 6th largest lake.

Agree. Just ask Bill Nelson.

Well-known pro-angler

Lake Okeechobee is more than 467,000 acres. It's huge. You can see it from outer space.

Think you forgot about Drew Bartlett, Deputy Secretary from DEP, and Doug Smith and Deborah Drum from Martin County government, and Ernie Barnett, former SFWMD executive who now leads the Florida Land Council.

The proposed Everglades reservoir would be somewhere between 16,000 to 32,000 acres. At the high end, that's 7 percent of the size of Lake Okeechobee.

Thank you for making my point. Little Lake O will be the 6th largest Florida lake.

Not even close to "a second Lake Okeechobee."

Wilson also said Wednesday the reservoir would "fill up" when we get too much rain. But the intent is to link it with water-treatment areas that would cleanse the water before moving it south to the Everglades.

Wilson's exaggeration should not be dismissed.

As you probably know, the Florida Chamber opposed this same reservoir when Senate President Joe Negron, R-Stuart, worked to get it approved last year in Senate Bill 10.

Did you double check your homework? The Florida Chamber didn't oppose the final amended SB 10.

The Florida Chamber's opposition stung on the Treasure Coast — because so many of our businesses have been hurt by toxic algae and other impacts of the discharges.

The Everglades reservoir is the best chance we have at diverting a portion of the Lake Okeechobee discharges away from the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries. It's not a new idea: It was called for in the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan, which was authorized by Congress 17 years ago.

Since the Florida Legislature approved the Everglades reservoir and Gov. Rick Scott signed off on it in May, the South Florida Water Management District has been working at a respectable pace to plan it.

Little Lake O

Thanks to Sen. Bradley's improved SB 10, we didn't oppose the construction to Little Lake O.

The Army Corps of Engineers is cooperating on the \$1.6 billion project, too.

The pieces are falling into place, ~~but we need business leaders' support to keep it on track.~~

And business leaders at the Florida Chamber are raising awareness of additional water needs so Little Lake O doesn't become a diversion from other water needs.

Instead of helping in that regard, the Florida Chamber focused its Wednesday news conference on the need for septic-to-sewer conversions and water storage north of Lake Okeechobee. This isn't an either-or proposition. Florida needs all of the above.

"People who don't want to focus on water science are making Florida a less desirable place to be," Wilson said Wednesday.

Yes, we said that too.

That's exactly right. So why isn't the Florida Chamber supporting more than 200 Everglades scientists who have backed plans for more water storage, treatment and conveyance south of Lake Okeechobee?

Thanks for making my point. "This isn't an "either-or-proposition." Both are important.

The Florida Chamber represents diverse interests across the state ~~from power utilities to manufacturers to U.S. Sugar Corp., which owns large swaths of land south of Lake Okeechobee.~~

DYK: Environmentalists tell us that water leaving sugar property is actually cleaner than when it arrives?

How great would it be if some key chamber leaders got on board with the reservoir? Executives from Florida Power & Light, Publix Bank of America and Ron Jon Surf Shop are on the chamber's board of directors. They could be heroes if they stepped up.

Said differently: How great is it that business leaders are investing in educational videos and unanimously support an agenda that puts Florida's water future ahead of short-term politics.

Clean water and a thriving business climate are ~~critical~~ ^{essential} to the future of Florida. *That's why following the science is so important.*

Please, help us with both.

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Visit www.FloridaChamber.com/WaterVideos and help me raise awareness.