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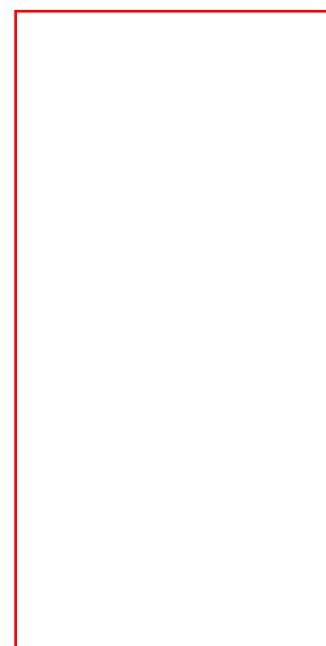
## Glades gets thrown under the bus

By [Joel Engelhardt](#)

Palm Beach Post Editorial Writer

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For six years, a 12-seat shuttle bus has run between the Hendry County city of Clewiston and Belle Glade and South Bay in Palm Beach County. The people who ride it can't afford a car to get to the store, the doctor or the community college.



This year, the state, Palm Beach County and Hendry County paid about \$200,000 combined to make sure that the bus ran six days a week, 16 hours a day. Ridership didn't compare well to coastal bus routes, and the state money ran out. On Tuesday, Palm Beach County voted to stop its support as well. In less than two weeks, the cross-county bus will make its final run.

Also on Tuesday, the South Florida Water Management District agreed to buy U.S. Sugar's land for \$1.34 billion. To Clewiston residents, who opposed the sale, the death of U.S. Sugar means the end of the town U.S. Sugar built. "It will annihilate our community," Deborah Van Sickle, senior vice president of First Bank in Clewiston, tearfully told the district board. "It will be our economic Hiroshima."

What does one small bus have in common with one giant land

## U.S. Sugar deal



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sale? Both show the state in action, or, in this case, inaction.

Could the state save Clewiston and the Glades communities, where unemployment rates hover at 25 percent and sugar jobs are among the best? If the state can't save a shuttle bus, how can it save a small town?

In his letter urging the district to buy the land, Gov. Crist threw Clewiston a bone. The governor said he would support an inland port, a warehousing district that could bring thousands of jobs. He is "keenly aware of the desire by the city of Clewiston to make this concept a reality" but didn't endorse a Hendry County site.

Gov. Crist's letter did nothing to remove the sting from his failure to appoint a Glades area representative to the water district's governing board. The seat has been vacant since June 25, the day after the governor announced the U.S. Sugar deal and board member Malcolm "Bubba" Wade, a U.S. Sugar vice president, resigned to avoid the obvious conflict of interest.

On Tuesday, Clewiston could have used that absent voice. A torn governing board voted 4-3 to buy U.S. Sugar's land. Would a Glades-area representative have insisted on more than a vague promise from the governor?

Just as the vacant seat loomed large, so will the void left by the shuttle. "The reason this is so crucial is that we use that route to get people to work, to the doctor and to school," Hendry Commissioner Janet Taylor said. "These are people who make the minimum wage. They have no other transportation."

She won over Palm Beach County Commission Chairman Jeff Koons, who calls the bus line "the canary in the coal mine." If the state can't help residents of an area with chronically high unemployment get to classes at a community college, how is the state going to fill the 80-year-old shoes of U.S. Sugar?

Hendry County offered \$60,000 to keep the buses rolling through June. Riders suggested raising fares and operating fewer buses. Commissioner Koons sought help from the state's Office of Tourism, Trade and Economic Development. That's the group that Gov. Crist says will help Clewiston. But OTTED had no money. Commissioner Koons' proposal that Palm Beach County pitch in \$45,000 for now failed on a 3-3 vote because commissioners couldn't justify spending money in Hendry County when cutting in Palm Beach County.

"This is pretty symbolic of this whole area south of the lake," Commissioner Koons said, "how these people need these basic services to improve their lives and how they can't do it themselves and there has to be extra help."


As Clewiston residents think about life without U.S. Sugar, they have to be realistic about what they can expect from the state. Unfortunately, that looks too much like the same response the bus service got: Nothing.

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