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Since June 24, 2008, when Gov. Crist announced the plan to buy U.S. Sugar, the agency that must pay the bill has voted not once but twice on scaled-back versions of the deal.

Also on that day, Malcolm "Bubba" Wade, the South Florida Water Management District board member who represented the area that would be most affected by the sale, resigned his seat. Mr. Wade, from Hendry County, was a U.S. Sugar vice president, so his board position was a conflict of interest.

Not surprisingly, the news about the company that built Clewiston worried Hendry County officials. They worried that the deal at first to buy 187,000 acres, then 180,000 acres and finally 73,000 acres would devastate the lake towns. But Gov. Crist has refused to give those concerns a voice. Mr. Wade's seat, representing Collier, Lee, Charlotte, Hendry, Glades, Osceola, Okeechobee, Polk, Highlands and Orange counties, remained empty in May, when the board approved a scaled-back plan. It remained empty last week, when the first anniversary of the deal passed.

And it no longer is the only vacancy. A Miami-Dade County member, Paul Huck, resigned in March. The term of Martin County representative Melissa Meeker expired in March. She is not seeking reappointment, but continues to serve.

Gov. Crist can't blame a lack of qualified candidates for his refusal to act. Nine people, four from Hendry County, have applied for Mr. Wade's seat. Three others are from Lee County, which has a representative on the nine-member board. Among the four Hendry residents, Gov. Crist could give Clewiston a voice by appointing Mary Ann Martin, owner of Roland Martin's Marina and knowledgeable about Lake Okeechobee issues. Roger Hatton, from a venerable ranching family, would offer representation from agriculture.

For Mr. Huck's seat, one applicant stands out. Former Florida House Speaker Richard Pettigrew, a lawyer, served as co-chairman in the 1990s of the Governor's Commission for a Sustainable South Florida. Mr. Pettigrew also specializes in land use and environmental law.

Ms. Meeker's seat covers an area from St. Lucie to Monroe counties but usually goes to a Treasure Coast resident. The field of 24 includes a stellar candidate in Tom Bausch, a two-term Sewall's Point commissioner who has a record of advocacy on behalf of the St. Lucie River, which is supposed to benefit from the U.S. Sugar deal. Then there's Callery-Judge Grove General Manager Nat Roberts, who has run a Palm Beach County citrus grove that he wants to convert into a small town. He could provide the farm viewpoint if Mr. Hatton isn't on the board.

The sugar deal is far from done. Gov. Crist owes South Florida, especially Hendry County, full representation at this critical time.

