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### Seize The Sunshine, Save the Land

01/04/2010  
Miami Herald - Online, The  
Editorial

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OUR OPINION: cf,gtm Faltering economy can be good for the environment if leaders act smartly

While the economic slump has had a negative effect on almost every aspect of life in South Florida, it has given our natural world a breather. State and local leaders should take advantage of the hiatus in development to protect more of Florida's wild places and make Floridians' lives greener.

So far, they have gnashed their teeth over the lost property tax revenue from the tanked housing market and shown absolutely no inspiration in securing more undeveloped land to preserve for future generations. Instead, they should be making lemonade out of recessionary lemons.

For example, when the residential and commercial real-estate markets crashed, the push to move Miami-Dade County's Urban Development Boundary lost all credibility. Not that it had much to begin with, since the county's own planning staff found there's plenty of developable land east of the boundary. The Miami-Dade County Commission, however, stubbornly insists on encouraging proponents of UDB expansion to try yet again.

While new development is stalled, the Miami-Dade Commission -- and other local governments -- should stop bemoaning the drop in revenue and think more creatively. They can begin with a reexamination of their land use plans -- the blueprints for future growth. They should consider changes to the plans to promote sustainable development -- by conserving water, building up -- instead of out -- where practical, rewarding green projects and encouraging high-density redevelopment along transit corridors. These include the anticipated bullet train from Orlando to Miami and a proposed commuter train through coastal cities in Palm Beach, Broward and Miami-Dade counties.

The downturn also lowered the price of real estate, creating a big opportunity for state and local land conservation acquisition programs to buy tracts at fire-sale prices. The only problem is that the Legislature and Gov. Charlie Crist diverted the trust funds that pay for these programs in order to cover part of the state budget shortfall. State land purchases will come to a screeching halt in 2010 if these programs aren't refunded.

Legislators must restore funding to the land preservation trust funds. The money comes from a documentary stamp tax on real-estate transactions, which are picking up. To shirk this duty is to short-change Floridians' future quality of life.

Last year the state Senate approved a renewable-energy bill that would promote development of solar and wind power technology, but intense wrangling among major stakeholders made its passage in the House dicey. In the end,

House leaders added a provision allowing oil and gas drilling off Florida's coast, and the measure appropriately died.

The Legislature should revisit renewable energy again this year. Florida is far behind other states, notably California, on developing renewable energy. It's the Sunshine State, after all, and it ought to be exploiting this by pushing for more solar power grids. There are federal stimulus dollars for states that craft viable renewable energy programs, and while Florida interests have received several grants, the state should compete for more.

As to oil drilling off our coast, House leaders are again pushing it -- a foolhardy policy. Florida stands to lose more than any other state if global warming trends aren't reversed soon. Our coastline will be one soggy mess as the oceans steadily rise. We can say goodbye to much of our tourism industry and coastal living as we know and enjoy it. Hurricanes and their tidal surges will be worse than ever. We should be at the forefront of the movement to wean the nation off using energy from fossil fuels, which produce carbon dioxide, the worst of the greenhouse gases.

On the bright side of Florida's environmental picture, in 2009 the Obama administration funneled a half-billion dollars toward Everglades cleanup. The result is several groundbreaking on long-stalled projects vital to the massive project. Gov. Crist spearheaded a drive to purchase 73,000 acres from U.S. Sugar Corp. that will someday be converted into reservoirs and pollution treatment marshes.

The challenge now is to keep up the momentum between the cleanup's often contentious partners -- the state of Florida and the federal government.

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## **EDITORIAL Seize the sunshine, save the land cf,gtm Faltering economy can be good for the environment**

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01/04/2010

Poten & Partners

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## Crist's political Teflon wearing thin

01/03/2010

Bradenton Herald

BOUSQUET, STEVE

TALLAHASSEE — Charlie Crist's final year as governor begins like no other: with perilous poll numbers, his optimism worn thin and his shell of political Teflon deeply scratched.

After two years of governing Florida by shrewdly gauging the prevailing political winds, Crist strayed off course as the economy spiraled downward in 2009, his nice-guy image no longer effective as a balm for frustrated Floridians.

He miscalculated the danger of his "man hug" with President Barack Obama in support of the Democrats' stimulus package. He signed a no-new taxes pledge only to raise taxes weeks later to balance the state budget. And the biggest contributor in his campaign for U.S. Senate, Fort Lauderdale lawyer Scott Rothstein, was charged in a \$1.2 billion Ponzi scheme.

By year's end, his Republican Senate rival, Marco Rubio, had gained ground as a conservative alternative.

"It's been a rough patch, and certainly some of it's self-inflicted. No question. I mean, that happens. Nobody's perfect," Crist said in an interview with the Times/Herald. "But you learn from that, I think."

Crist acknowledged "it's certainly possible" that his intense focus on raising millions of dollars as a Senate candidate diverted attention from his duties as chief executive of the nation's fourth-most populous state.

"I'm not always on my game. None of us are," Crist said. "But I feel very good about where I am now, and self-assured and confident about where we need to go and what Florida needs to do. I'm very confident in our administration. Things are going well at the office."

Florida's fickle

Crist's difficulties underscore the hazards of governing in volatile times, the fickleness of Florida's electorate and the perils of populism and bipartisanship.

Quick with a warm smile and warmer handshake, the 53-year-old Crist has led a charmed political life as a state senator, education commissioner, attorney general and now governor. In the early years, approval ratings for the Republican from St. Petersburg soared in the 70s.

But by October 2009, there was a stunning turnabout. A Times/Herald/Bay News 9 poll showed his job performance

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was viewed more negatively (55 percent) than positively (42 percent) by Floridians.

Just a year ago, Crist appeared politically invincible as he harbored ambitions of heading to Washington.

He had emerged as a national figure after making a surprise endorsement that helped John McCain win Florida's Republican primary and, ultimately, the party's nomination for president. A vice presidential short-lister, Crist soaked up national media attention but remained far enough away from McCain's campaign to avoid major criticism when the Arizona senator became the first Republican to lose Florida in more than a decade.

Newly married to New York socialite and businesswoman Carole Rome, Crist spent the days just before 2009 hunting for Christmas gifts in the rural North Florida antique mecca of Havana. There Crist ran into a local who paid him such a compliment that he pulled a reporter aside and made her repeat it.

"I believe he's a closet Democrat," Shirley Aaron said.

"I'll take that as a compliment," Crist said. "We have, in Florida, Republicans and Democrats and independents, but we're all Floridians first."

Crist had a different response a year later when asked to respond to someone calling him a closet Democrat.

"I'm a Republican. I think I'm a pragmatic conservative and a Republican," Crist said. "I hope we have a party that has sort of a Jack Kemp view that you need to have a big tent to be successful."

The 'man hug'

The most enduring moment of Crist's year came Feb. 10 when he appeared on stage with the president in Fort Myers to endorse and urge congressional approval of a \$787 billion stimulus package. The federal money was a must for Crist and his fellow Republicans in the Legislature because it allowed the state to avoid unpopular tax increases or major spending decreases.

Crist stiffly embraced Obama on stage. The so-called "man hug" infuriated conservatives and could prove to be the defining image that costs Crist a seat in the U.S. Senate. Crist insists he showed the proper respect for Obama.

"The Obama embrace was the worst 15 seconds of his political life," said Rick Hartley, the Republican state committeeman in Jacksonville's Duval County. "Northeast Florida is very conservative and people will just not let go of that. But they should. He did what he felt was necessary."

Under fire from Rubio, Crist waffled. He denied he endorsed and supported the stimulus plan, and later reversed his reversal. Crist also did an about-face on returning political contributions to the now-defunct Rothstein Rosenfeldt Adler law firm at the center of a Ponzi-scheme inquiry in Broward County.

Days before the Rothstein scandal broke, Crist called for a statewide grand jury to investigate corruption. Then his handpicked Republican Party chairman, Jim Greer, came under fire over allegations of mismanaging party money. And U.S. Reps. Lincoln and Mario Diaz-Balart of Miami unexpectedly withdrew their Senate endorsement of Crist with little explanation just three days before Christmas.

His position worsening, Crist recently began dialing back the optimism in favor of speaking negatively of Rubio. But Crist never says the name of the former House speaker from West Miami.

"It really doesn't matter to me what the scoring of political points might accomplish. I think that's very important to my opponent," Crist said.

Falling in the polls

But Rubio's technique is working. He's rising in the polls as Crist falls, in part because of the legacy of the governor's plans to fight global warming or restore civil rights for some ex-cons — positions anathema to many conservatives.

"They're going through what every party goes through after a loss — a cleansing and purifying phase — and they're looking at him and saying, 'Who the hell are you?' " said Democratic strategist Steve Schale, who managed Obama's successful Florida campaign and is now advising state Sen. Dan Gelber, a Miami Beach Democrat running for attorney general.

Echoing GOP critics, Schale said Crist has been too much of a populist, basing too many policies on what was in vogue. He leapt from issue to issue, often without any clear focus beyond what he repeatedly says is a desire to look

out for his "boss, the people."

As a result, Crist hasn't had a make-or-break issue that marked his tenure, the way education did for former Gov. Jeb Bush . Many of his proposals, from health care to the economy to property tax cuts, have been scaled back or remain unfinished. On climate change, he turned his back when it became unpopular in his party.

Critics on the right and left have cast Crist as a quitter, noting he is the first governor to not seek a second term since a state Constitutional change in 1968 allowed governors to do so.

"Charlie is a very likable, respectful friendly politician," said Barney Bishop , executive director of the business lobby Associated Industries of Florida. "But I think people wanted more than just cheerfulness. They want somebody who will change what's going on."

The governor's closest adviser and former chief of staff, U.S. Sen. George LeMieux, said it will take time for Crist's accomplishments to be fully appreciated. He cited the downsized purchase of U.S. Sugar land for Everglades restoration and high-speed and commuter rail projects.

"These are things that will take a long time to bear fruit," said LeMieux, whom Crist appointed to a U.S. Senate vacancy in August.

Crist is already promoting the rail package as a success. He also cites a decline in violent crime and takes credit for giving state universities the leeway to increase tuition as a way to retain faculty members. But even LeMieux, whom Crist called his "maestro" for leading his successful 2006 governor's race in a year when Republicans were clobbered nationally, might be a liability. By picking his friend to warm the coveted seat, Crist drew charges of cronyism.

#### Soaring unemployment

When Crist took office in 2007, the unemployment rate was 3.3 percent — less than a third of what it is now as more than 1 million Floridians can't find work. One in every 705 Florida homes was in foreclosure when he took office. Now the foreclosure rate is 1 of 165, according to RealtyTrac data service.

Even Crist's staunchest critics say many of Florida's woes are largely beyond his control. But they question whether Crist did what he could when he could. When the economy deteriorated, Crist paid visits to regional unemployment centers and held roundtable talks with veterans and real estate agents, but he didn't propose and implement policies to halt the tide of foreclosures and layoffs.

"It's nice to empathize and feel their pain, but people expect elected officials to do something and make their life better," said Bishop of Associated Industries, which opposes Crist's regulatory and insurance policies.

Facing uncertainty as he embarks upon his final year as governor, Crist still shows glimpses of his trademark optimism that once charmed Florida voters.

"All in all, I think it's been a good year — a good year in challenging times," Crist said. "These are tough times. It sure hasn't been dull, to say the least, by any stretch."

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