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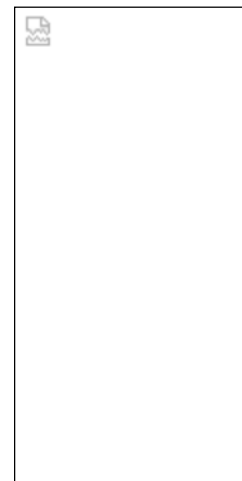
EDITORIAL: Fair vote on U.S. Sugar deal

Palm Beach Post Editorial

Wednesday, April 29, 2009

Gov. Crist continues his attempts to stack the South Florida Water Management District board, which will vote next month on his proposal to buy a heaping dose of U.S. Sugar.

When the board voted 4-3 in December to pay \$1.34 billion for 180,000 acres, the seat representing the Glades had been empty for nearly six months. The vacancy occurred the day Gov. Crist announced the original purchase. The Glades' representative, Malcolm "Bubba" Wade, resigned because he is a U.S. Sugar vice president.



U.S. Sugar deal



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It has been more than 10 months, and Gov. Crist still hasn't made the appointment. It's not as if he's been idle. Why, just this week, Gov. Crist reappointed Deanna Murphy to the Alligator Point Water Resource Board in Franklin County. He's about to name his second appointee to the Palm Beach County Commission. Those appointments couldn't wait. The Glades, fearing devastation from the U.S. Sugar deal, obviously could and still can.

That is, as long as Gov. Crist wants to be entirely sure that his buyout would pass. As it was, two of his appointees voted against the deal in December. Gov. Crist no doubt feared that a Glades-area representative would reject the deal, resulting in a 4-4 deadlock that would have killed the purchase.

Now, the governor may have a way out of this dilemma. Board member Paul Huck, a lawyer who recused himself from the U.S. Sugar vote because of a professional conflict, resigned more than a month ago. Neither the water management district nor the governor's office announced his departure. Mr. Huck, a former Crist aide, cited the U.S. Sugar acquisition for his decision, saying that the issue is so big that he wanted to be replaced by someone who can participate in the vote.

More likely, Gov. Crist wanted someone in that seat whom he could trust to vote for the deal. The governing board is scheduled to consider on May 14 the governor's scaled-down buyout of 72,500 acres for \$533 million. With a fifth vote in favor, assuming no switches, it wouldn't matter who represents the Glades.

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On Tuesday, the district welcomed \$250 million in stimulus money, including \$96 million for Everglades work. Everglades projects are moving. A full board, including a Glades-area representative, is critical. Without one, the deal comes off as more about Charlie Crist than the Everglades.

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