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## EDITORIAL: Prevent political stall-ball

Palm Beach Post Editorial

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There was a lot right about the people Gov. Crist picked last week for the South Florida Water Management District board. But there was something terribly wrong about when the governor chose them.

Joe Collins, engineering manager for Tampa-based conglomerate Lykes Bros., fills the seat vacated 13 months ago by Malcolm "Bubba" Wade Jr., a vice president of U.S.

Sugar. Mr. Wade resigned when Gov. Crist announced that the water district was buying U.S. Sugar, a deal that now has the district buying just some of the company's land.

Crist delayed one South Florida choice for an unacceptably long 13 months.

Mr. Wade lives in U.S. Sugar's hometown of Clewiston. For more than a year, while the district debated a transaction that would profoundly affect that area, the residents had no representation. They had no advocate to jawbone the state into developing a plan to replace the jobs. There was no shortage of qualified applicants. Gov. Crist just didn't want to risk picking someone who might oppose the sale.

Gov. Crist waited four months to fill the other two vacancies. Gladys Perez, a lawyer who worked for Gov. Crist and Gov. Jeb Bush, takes a Miami-Dade

County seat that has been vacant since March. Indiantown developer Kevin Powers fills the Treasure Coast seat of Melissa Meeker, who stayed on after announcing that she didn't want another four-year term after hers expired in March.

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Mr. Collins attended the district's first "water summit" in 2007 and has served on other committees examining ways to preserve Florida's most valuable resource. Lykes Bros. also wants to stake out a future in the renewable energy business. Ms. Perez worked on Everglades issues in Tallahassee. Mr. Powers is the son of former board member Timer Powers. It's incredible to think that barely two years after Mr. Bush left office the board needs a development perspective. If Mr. Powers follows his father's example, the district will get a balanced, sensible viewpoint.

Still, the 16-county South Florida Water Management District is the most important public agency in this part of the state. What the governing board positions lack in compensation - they're unpaid - they make up for in power. But the governor has no deadline for filling board vacancies. Governors must appoint judges within 60 days of receiving names from the screening committee, but the thousands of other appointments are on the governor's timetable.


That should change, at least for appointments to the five water district boards. Just as the shot clock in college basketball keeps coaches from stalling and ruining the game, a deadline would keep governors from refusing to fill vacancies for political reasons. If 90 days is too short - applicants need time to apply and be screened by the governor's staff - the Legislature could make it 120 days or 180 days.

Only confirmation by the Senate is required for water district board members. With the Legislature having finished its annual session, even that won't be an issue until March. Judging by Gov. Crist's work schedule, pressing business didn't delay these appointments. Politics did.

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