

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0906

December 15, 2008

The Honorable Charlie Crist
Governor, State of Florida
The Capitol
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

Dear Governor Crist:

I write you today to share my interest in the upcoming proposal for the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) to purchase the land holdings of U.S. Sugar to foster the restoration of the River of Grass. I know these are historic times for the Everglades, the State, and local residents and I commend you for your hard work and dedication to this prospect.

As you well know, the State of Florida has taken the lead in Everglades restoration while federal funding support levels have historically lagged. I supported the override of the President's veto of the Water Resources Development Act, which finally put the federal government on the road towards the 50-50 partnership envisioned by the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP). Your continued support of Florida's Everglades is a testament to your efforts on behalf of our State, and I am very proud to have had the opportunity to work with you to break the logjam that has stymied the restoration of the River of Grass.

Today, I also wanted to take the opportunity to share concerns that have been raised to me by the local communities affected by the SFWMD buyout proposal of US Sugar's land holdings. During my tenure as Mayor of Orange County, I had first-hand experience of the impact these types of decisions have on local businesses and rural areas when farms were bought out to help clean up Lake Apopka. The buyout of US Sugar's farming operations will have lasting consequences for the residents of the Glades. US Sugar, the largest sugar producer in the country, directly employs 1,700 people locally in the Clewiston area. According to a study conducted by the University of Florida, the buyout would have an annual impact of over 9,000 lost jobs and yearly lost revenues of over \$1.5 billion for the State. The ripple effects are felt not just by the direct employees, but the banks, car dealerships, and related businesses that have depended on the strength of Florida's vibrant agriculture industry.

I know you are aware of these direct impacts to the communities of the Glades region along Lake Okeechobee, which are among the most economically distressed in the State. It is my hope and request that before any final proposal is agreed upon by the State that a long-term economic recovery plan will be laid out and presented to the communities most impacted by the US Sugar buyout.

I salute your commitment and vision to provide sheet-flow back to the Everglades because of the immense environmental benefits it would bring. However, during these very

difficult economic times, I believe that a long-term recovery plan is essential to the success and recovery for all involved in this momentous endeavor.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Mel Martinez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mel" and last name "Martinez" clearly distinguishable.

Mel Martinez
United States Senate

Cc: Michael W. Sole, Secretary Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Carol Ann Wehle, Executive Director South Florida Water Management District
Mali Chamness, Mayor City of Clewiston, Florida