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What they think My Word: Thom Rumberger

Turn your telescope around

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For a proud city like Orlando, home to the headwaters of the Everglades, it's beyond disappointing to hear the gnashing of teeth and rending of garments over the state's decision to go ahead with the purchase of more than 180,000 acres from U.S. Sugar ("We think: The state gave away too much in deal with Big Sugar," Friday, Orlando Sentinel).

Clearly, your Editorial Board has its collective eye planted firmly on the wrong end of its telescope, continuing to view the purchase and process with a myopic, warped perspective. Turn it around, and you will see the situation a lot more clearly.

Your editorial relentlessly focuses upon the cost today, while utterly ignoring the opportunity we now have to save the billions of dollars piecemeal restoration will undoubtedly cost. You failed to mention the environmental benefits the purchase represents: the removal from production of the phosphorous-soaked land poisoning our drinking water, killing our animals and polluting our precious lakes, rivers and streams.

You failed to mention the economic benefits Floridians will enjoy, especially those communities that have been all but held hostage by Big Sugar, stifling their growth and continuing to cause misery. Restoring America's Everglades means revitalized tourism and a Lake Okeechobee brought back to life, not back-pumped from the sugar fields teeming with every contaminant known to man.

These are part of the cost/benefit ratio that cannot be put on paper, but which all figure into the \$1.34 billion offer. That it figures to be higher than the pure acreage value today is to miss the point; losing this opportunity now most certainly means we will never have a financially viable option for restoring America's Everglades, cleaning and preserving our water supply and moving the region forward economically.

The pieces are now in place. Gov. Charlie Crist has supplied the vision. All that's left is generating the will by all involved to remove Big Sugar from the equation once and for all.

Thom Rumberger is chairman of the Everglades Trust.

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