

# State officials must show more leadership in addressing water concerns, sea level rise

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As state legislators converge on Tallahassee, the human tendency is to deal with immediate pressures and to overlook the bigger challenges just out of sight.

Let's start with this statistic: Florida is set to add almost six million new residents in almost 20 years, reports the University of Florida.

Many of these residents will be concentrating in a few areas along the coast.

So there are two huge challenges facing the state:

1. Do we have enough water?
2. Are we prepared for the impact of sea level rise?

The answer to both questions is a big no.

The state is having difficulty finding water for growth in Central Florida, thus the calls to tap the St. Johns River.

As for sea level rise, the governor and Legislature have taken a head-in-the-beach attitude while flooding on sunny days is already a regular occurrence in Miami. Locally, it won't take much sea level rise to impact the historic areas of St. Augustine.

As this page has repeatedly stressed, Florida needs to take a businesslike, risk management approach to these challenges.

Let there be no doubt: If sea levels start impacting coastline communities, insurance protection will be gone or overly expensive. The next step will be a drop in home values, causing a ripple effect to the entire state's economy.

None of these threats will suddenly happen overnight, which is a danger in a way. Without a crisis, democracies often don't act.

But the leaders of Florida need to start calling the alarms and demanding that the state begin planning for future water crises and sea level rise.

***PUTTING TRUST BACK***

*While they are at it, legislators ought to do a better job spending funds approved by Florida voters for water and land conservation.*

*Amendment One was passed with a landslide 75 percent support from the voters.*

*Only a legislator would think that some of the funding was meant to go to existing operating and administrative costs.*

*Land purchases that support the environment, called Florida Forever, need to receive a lion's share of the funds.*

*We almost hate to call these "trust" funds, because the Legislature has destroyed the meaning of the term.*

*It is beyond comprehension that the governor and Legislature do not fully support trust funds that reliably produce jobs.*

*The annual raid of funds for transportation and housing, for instance, costs the state good jobs in hard-hit sectors.*

*The Sadowski Trust Fund was set up to help produce affordable housing in the state. It has worked remarkably well with a broad coalition of business, government and nonprofits.*

*Yet every year the funds are raided. There is some justification for this during desperate economic times, but not now.*

*Floridians need affordable housing. The construction sector needs jobs.*

*Use the trust funds the way they were intended.*

## **INCENTIVES FOR JOBS**

**Gov. Rick Scott has led an impressive rebound of Florida's economy. And he is right to seek incentives for new businesses to come and for current businesses to grow.**

**The fact is that business is the main engine for the state.**

**It's important, however, that incentives are smart, that they protect the taxpayers and yield new jobs.**

**Scott, for instance, has proposed sales tax reductions on manufacturing equipment and equipment sales. The manufacturing sector produces good, high-paying jobs. This is a good move.**

**The First Coast Manufacturers Association endorses a permanent sales tax exemption.**

**One local business paid \$5,000 on one piece of equipment, according to a news release.**

**By saving money on equipment, businesses can afford to add new jobs, with a ripple effect on the economy.**

**Scott has said that his proposals are entirely tied to jobs. Critics call them "corporate welfare." Some legislators worry that there isn't enough money.**

**There is a simple solution. Phase in the tax cuts, tie them to jobs actually produced and then review the program annually. If it's working well, increase the funding. If not, go back to the drawing board.**

## **FOCUS ON PORTS**

**One key to Florida's economy involves ports. The state has 15 seaports. Jacksonville's port is viewed as a primary economic driver for the future.**

**With that in mind, State Rep. Lake Ray has submitted several bills that ought to help ports, both statewide and locally.**

**Since Ray entered the Legislature he has made ports his specialty. In those seven sessions, more than \$1 billion has been secured for Florida's ports, he notes.**

**A key focus for the coming session is to improve the state's logistics centers, those zones that move freight from ships to rail and highways.**

**Jacksonville, for instance, could use a rail line from the Blount Island shipping area that moves goods swiftly to centers in the Baldwin area. That also would remove trucks from the Northside.**

**Ray also would like to see funding meant for the Transportation Trust Fund actually go there and not be swept into general revenue.**

**He also proposes a bill that would set aside fees for certain freight, trade and channel projects such as deepening the Jacksonville port.**

**This would take effect two years out in order to avoid upsetting plans of the current legislative leadership.**

**As they say, politics is the art of the possible. But before we can enjoy huge triumphs, it's important to first achieve small victories that can be built upon.**