

Get past platitudes on water supply

September 12, 2018



The Sun today, September 12, 2018 suggests that voters learn the candidates' attitude toward our water problems which are grave. Actually, they are more serious than even the Sun suspects. We heartily echo this suggestion – find out what the candidates have actually done for water. In most cases the answer is: NOTHING.

No names are given but between DeSantis and Gillum, there can be no contest. The fact that DeSantis is the Republican candidate because of Trump's endorsement tells it all. In the interest of industry and making money, Trump has methodically and consistently dismantled and removed all protections from our environment and water resources, and we would expect his golden

boy to do the same. Rick Scott has done even worse for the environment in Florida. The damage that Trump and Scott have caused to our planet will take decades to overcome. Scott must be prevented from doing further damage by keeping him out of Washington.

On a local level, those investigating only a tiny bit will see that of those running, Merrilee Malwitz-Jipson, Marihelen Wheeler and Ken Cornell immediately stand out as three who have worked to protect our water, long before it was popular to do so. Malwitz-Jipson has been immersed in these issues since at least 2007, if not earlier, and is a powerhouse for our environment.

In the upper reaches of the Santa Fe, Paul Still and Stasia Rudolph are also candidates who care for the environment.

Read the original article here in the Gainesville Sun.

Comments by OSFR historian Jim Tatum.

-A river is like a life: once taken, it cannot be brought back-

Posted at 2:01 AM

It's September in an election year in Florida, and suddenly everybody cares about water.

GOP gubernatorial nominee Ron DeSantis and his Democratic opponent, Andrew Gillum, both cite water and the environment as top issues. U.S. Sen. Bill Nelson and his challenger, Gov. Rick Scott, both claim credit for Everglades restoration and cleanup efforts in the Indian River Lagoon.

But which candidates really have a track record to back their

talk? And where are the details of their plans to secure Florida's water supply and protect the lakes, rivers and coastline that form such an integral part of our quality of life? These are the questions voters should be asking.

The urgency of these issues extends beyond the top of the ballot to legislative and even local races, and transcends partisanship. The state's water supply is crucial to our future. The threat is seen in the algae blooms and devastating red tide that's killing sea life along the Gulf coast.

One of the biggest hazards is the stress being placed on the Floridan Aquifer, the vast network of underground caves that hold the state's freshwater drinking supply. Sea level rise, pollution and overconsumption are all taking their toll, putting access to relatively inexpensive water in jeopardy. This, in turn, puts Florida's future at risk.

Over the past 20 years, there have been plenty of task forces and reports outlining the magnitude of the problem. What's been missing is action commensurate with the threat. And while some of the needed changes are behavioral – for example, convincing Floridians they don't need heavy fertilizer applications to maintain green lawns – others will be expensive.

One of the major threats to the underground water supply: Failing septic systems that could number in the hundreds of thousands, leaching pollutants like nitrogen into the water supply.

The effects can be seen in the water that bubbles in Florida's freshwater springs. Recently, plans to protect and restore major springs were put on hold after being criticized as woefully inadequate and riddled with errors. But even in their current state, these plans carry a collective price tag in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

The springs are harbingers of the aquifer's health. As they falter, officials across the state will face the prospect of municipal well fields succumbing to contamination and salt-water intrusion.

The other big challenge: sea level rise. People can argue about the cause, but the impacts are already manifesting. South Florida is seeing significant flooding problems in areas that never flooded before, and Miami-Dade voters approved a \$400 million tax increase last year to begin to deal with the impacts. A 2014 study estimates that the state might need more than \$1 trillion in projects by 2100 to cope with rising seas.

Florida voters can't afford to let candidates dodge water issues with platitudes. They need to know what solutions the candidates support – and how they plan to pay for them. Examine candidates' records, and see if they are prepared to match their talk with action.