

Jane Castor may have a fight on her hands over Tampa's 'toilet-to-tap' project

July 21, 2019



Tampa Mayor Jane Castor

Once again we see the topic of [deep well injection](#) coming up in Tampa. Happily, Mayor Castor will not get her way for now, but the issue will surely return.

The national Environmental Protection Agency's Class I (industrial and municipal disposal wells) are found only in Florida.

Why? Well, it is already blatantly apparent that Florida is unwilling and/or unable to take care of its water resources, to the point they are severely damaging their number one industry,

tourism. Since this fact in itself is very revealing, we could mildly suggest our leaders are either 1) stupid, or 2) controlled by industry.

Take your pick: one, two, or both. Number three looks pretty good.

The truth of the matter is that geologists do not know what happens when liquids are injected into our aquifer. They may guess, and some may have vested interests in their recommendations, but they do not know what will happen some years down the road.

Playing guessing games with something as important as our aquifer is not the right of individuals, corporations, or municipalities. We can't help but think that this is like throwing our trash into the river: "out of sight, out of mind." How convenient.

Read the original article here in the [Tampa Bay Times](#).

Comments by OSFR historian Jim Tatum.

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

Jane Castor may have a fight on her hands over Tampa's 'toilet-to-tap' project

Tampa's mayor pulled a funding request related to the wastewater reuse project Thursday before council could vote it down.

Tampa Mayor Jane Castor has made some popular moves early on. But her decision to sidestep a fight over the city's 'toilet-to-tap' program may have avoided a fight for now. [OCTAVIO JONES | Tampa Bay Times]

By [Charlie Frago](#)

Yesterday

TAMPA—Could Tampa Mayor Jane Castor's first big battle with City Council be over a program to turn sewage into drinking water?

First the facts: only highly-treated reclaimed water, 50 million gallons of which are currently legally dumped into Tampa Bay, be injected into the Florida Aquifer and then pulled back up to be dumped into the Hillsborough River and adjacent canals. Tampa said the resulting drinking water would be safe. Opponents, including the Sierra Club, the League of Women Voters and, perhaps, several new council members, say environmental questions remain and wonder why the city needs to proceed with a \$350 million project without vetting other options.

On Thursday, the issue surfaced again as the Castor administration pulled a \$610,000 request for public outreach for what the city dubs the "Tampa Augmentation Project" or TAP and critics sneer as "toilet-to-tap."

In late June, the council had deadlocked about authorizing the money. Council members John Dingfelder, Orlando Gudes and Guido Maniscalco voted against it, forcing a new vote Thursday with opponent Bill Carlson, absent for the June 27 vote, poised to send the request down in flames.

Late Wednesday, Castor's chief of staff Dennis Rogero called Carlson to say the mayor was going to come back in late August or early September with a more comprehensive look at increasing

the city's water supply.

Carlson applauded the move, which he had pushed for behind the scenes.

"We need to insert integrity, transparency and accountability into this process," Carlson told the Tampa Bay Times Thursday morning before the meeting.

Castor spokeswoman Ashley Bauman emailed a statement.

"As water shortages and restrictions become more common in cities across the country and world, we believe that securing our drinking water supply for the next forty years is a cornerstone in making Tampa and our region resilient," the statement read. "We will continue to work with the community and members of council to find the best process to ensure Tampa's water supply is sustainable. There is no reason taxpayers should have to spend additional money to purchase water when we release 50 million gallons of purified water into the bay a day."

Castor has been in New York City all week attending a series of events hosted by philanthropist Michael Bloomberg.

Gudes was talking to a Times reporter minutes before Thursday's meeting when Castor called him to say she was pulling the item. Gudes has become widely considered to be the key swing vote on the seven-member council. The first-term member represents the city's only majority-black district covering much of East and West Tampa, including downtown.

He said he had concerns about the lack of outreach being done so far. And he wants to learn more about the other options, he said, which include buying water from Tampa Bay Water, the regional utility to which Tampa, St. Pete and Hillsborough, Pasco and Pinellas counties belong.

Last month, Tampa Bay Water's board nixed a request by Tampa for more time on a \$1.6 million request to help pay for a feasibility study. The city withdrew its request, said board member Darden Rice, after board members asked for more access and oversight to some of the data.

On Thursday, Rice, who has led the charge against the project, worrying that it could lead to higher water rates for St. Petersburg residents along with environmental consequences for the region, gave her version of events.

"Tampa wanted another year and to limit ability for TBW to evaluate their reports. TBW said no, we're sticking to our original offer. Tampa abruptly withdrew consideration for the \$1.6m that was on the table. Essentially, Tampa traded transparency for money. That is what happened," Rice tweeted.

The next fight? Castor is due to bring her first more than \$1 billion budget to council on Aug. 1. Carlson and others have already signaled they're not inclined to vote for much wastewater reuse funding on its current track.

Castor needs at least one of the four opponents' votes to pass her budget.

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