

SB 2080 Should Be Vetoed

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An editorial in the *Gainesville Sun* outlines many reasons SB 2080 should not become law. Read on for the article. The original editorial appeared in the *Gainesville Sun* Friday, June 12, 2009 and can be seen [HERE](#).

Editorial: Veto bad water management bill

An awful bill that would strip Florida's five water management district governing boards of all water permitting authority and put it exclusively in the hands of the executive director of each district remains in limbo more than a month after being passed unanimously in both houses of the Legislature.

Senate Bill 2080 has yet to make its way to Gov. Charlie Crist's desk, so there still is hope the governor will veto this public policy outrage. Once it does arrive, Crist has 15 days to either sign it, veto it or do nothing and let it become law through gubernatorial inaction. Crist should veto it. It flies squarely in the face of the long-standing principles of open government in Florida and puts the power to determine who gets our water, how much they get and under what conditions in the hands of five bureaucrats.

Not only does the bill neuter the governing boards of permit decision-making power, it doesn't allow board members to

"intervene" in any permit application process. As a result, there is no chance for public opposition; no chance for citizen or board examination of a permit's merits or impact. There is no chance for any appeal – except by the permit seeker if it's

denied. Only then does the governing board have any say. Even then, the public is not allowed to participate.

SB 2080 was not always so offensive. For most of the legislative session, it was noncontroversial.

But it became distinctly odorous in the final days of the Legislature when Sen. J.D. Alexander, the powerful Senate budget chairman and a Central Florida land baron and developer, slipped in an amendment stripping the boards of their permitting authority. It was done so out of sight that few lawmakers were aware of the amendment – hence, unanimous approval in both chambers.

The measure runs so patently counter to the idea of open government, and its 11th-hour insertion into the overall bill is such an obvious and shameless gift to the growth industry, that Alexander initially denied any knowledge of the amendment. Problem is, his name was on it.

Crist fancies himself a champion of both the environment and transparency in government. SB 2080, at least the Alexander amendment, runs roughshod over both.

Crist last week abandoned the environment and smart growth management when he signed SB 360 into law, effectively dismantling much of Florida's growth management policy in the process. That wrong-headed decision by the governor gives us pause for concern, especially given SB 2080's slow crawl to the governor's desk.

Water has always been Florida's future. That reality is truer today than ever. Turning Florida's water permitting decisions over to five bureaucrats who can make deals with developers behind closed doors with no public participation and little

fear of reprisal is bad enough. What that could mean to our water supply, though, is even worse.

Crist should call for SB 2080 to be put on his desk pronto and veto it immediately. There's no reason to wait.