

The Florida Senate

Senate President Office — Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 22, 2013

CONTACT: Katie Betta, (850) 339-7087

SENATOR NEGRÓN ANNOUNCES FOUR ACTION ITEMS AS SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE EXPLORES SHORT-TERM SOLUTIONS TO END LAKE OKEECHOBEE RELEASES

Stuart, Fla. — As the Florida Senate Select Committee on Indian River Lagoon and Lake Okeechobee Basin (IRLLOB) continues an 8-hour public workshop to explore short-term solutions and alternatives to reduce or eliminate the ongoing releases from Lake Okeechobee, Select Committee Chair, Senator Joe Negrón (R-Stuart), announced four action items the Select Committee will investigate as it works to produce recommendations for the full Senate.

"First, the 2008 risk assessment, used by the Army Corps of Engineers to determine the release schedules, needs to be reviewed. We need to take a look, reevaluate, regroup, make sure the assessment is based on the latest evidence, balancing the risk of overflow against the certainty of what has happened in our communities," said Chair Negrón.

"Second, I'm committed 100 percent to looking at where we can store water before it comes in to our community. Water storage is job number one we aren't waiting months or years. Let's see where we can store it and how much it will cost," continued Chair Negrón.

"Third, we will legally evaluate how the declaration of a state of emergency would impact Florida's ability to work with the federal government to address the ongoing releases," said Chair Negrón. "And fourth, at the suggestion of our Vice Chair, Senator Montford, we recognize the tremendous impact of septic tanks. We agree we all have a responsibility to the environment, and we will investigate how the problem can be addressed, if, and only if, we can do so in a manner that is completely consistent with the rights of private property owners."

Chairman Negrón announced the above action items following six hours of input from panels of experts in science, engineering, agriculture, and water management, local elected officials and members of the public.

"The problems caused by ongoing releases from Lake Okeechobee have a ripple effect on the environment, our economy, and the health of our friends and neighbors — including those to the North, South, and West of the lake," said Senator Joe Negrón (R-Stuart), Chair of the Senate Select Committee on IRLLOB. "To address the various aspects of this serious problem, we assembled several panels of experts in science, engineering, agriculture, and water management, and reserved more than one third of today's meeting for input from members of the public. By giving all stakeholders a seat at the table, our Select Committee can better determine what can be done at the state level to improve the current situation."

Senate President Don Gaetz charged the Select Committee on IRLLOB with investigating policies, spending, and any other governmental activities affecting water management in the Indian River Lagoon and Lake Okeechobee Basin. The select committee will prepare a report to be submitted by November 4, 2013, to the Senate Committees on Appropriations, Environmental Preservation and Conservation, and Agriculture.

"We know there are short-term actions available, and we now have several substantive proposals to consider," said Chair Negrón. "The next step is to develop recommendations for legislative action which we hope will provide relief to these communities as soon as possible."

"Our economy and way of life are dependent on the waters surrounding our coastal communities," said Senate Majority Leader Lizbeth Benacquisto (R-Ft. Myers), who serves as a member of the Select Committee on IRLLOB. "I commend Chair Negrón for assembling today's panels and for dedicating time for committee members to hear directly from those affected by the current releases. I'm also grateful to many of our constituents who traveled from Florida's West Coast to share their concerns and comments with the Select Committee. Our work does not end today, and I encourage citizens to continue providing input as we work toward finding solutions to protect our communities."

The Select Committee Workshop included testimony from United States Congressman Patrick Murphy (D, FL-18) and Secretary Herschel Vinyard of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection.

Ernie Barnett, Interim Executive Director, South Florida Water Management District, and Colonel Alan Dodd, District Commander, United States Army Corps of Engineers provided comments on the history of water policy in the Lake Okeechobee Region and described the current situation as it relates to the responsibilities of their respective agencies.

Senators also heard testimony from a panel of experts who provided technical and scientific details on the current situation. Experts included: Tom Van Lent, Ph.D., Senior Scientist, The Everglades Foundation; Brian Lapointe, Ph.D., Research Professor, Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute of Florida Atlantic University; and, Drew Bartlett, Director, Division of Environmental Research and Restoration, Florida Department of Environmental Protection. Additionally, Roland Ottolini, Director, Lee County Division of Natural Resources provided her expert perspective on water policy issues affecting Floridians on the West Coast.

Two separate afternoon roundtables included testimony from a variety of stakeholders in the local community who offered a number of innovative ideas and solutions. The first roundtable included: Kevin Henderson, Evergreen Engineering; Mark Perry, Executive Director, Florida Oceanographic Society; Commissioner Jacqui Thurlow-Lippisch, Town of Sewall's Point; and,

Eric Draper, Executive Director, Audubon Florida. The second roundtable included: Tom MacVicar, President, MacVicar Consulting; Bubba Wade, Jr., Senior Vice President of Corporate Strategy and Business Development, United States Sugar Corporation; Fred Fanizzi, General Manager, Quail Creek Plantation; and, David Hille, Chairman, Cabbage Inc.

Members of the Florida House of Representatives as well as a number of local elected officials were also recognized to discuss short-term solutions. Those who offered testimony include: County Commissioner Sarah Heard, Chair, Martin County; County Commissioner Tim Zorc, Indian River County; County Commissioner Chris Dzadovsky, St. Lucie County; Representative Gayle Harrell (R, District 83); Representative Larry Lee (D, District 84); Representative Debbie Mayfield (R, District 54); Representative MaryLynn "ML" Magar (R, District 82); and, Mayor Kevin Ruane, City of Sanibel.

The remaining time was dedicated to public testimony, where members of the public had the opportunity to present ideas to the Select Committee. Those testifying included the founders of River Kidz, Evie Flaugh and Naia Mader, among others.

Details concerning the next meeting of the Senate Select Committee on IRLLOB will be announced shortly. The Senate will begin regularly scheduled committee weeks in September.

For more information on the Senate Select Committee on Indian River Lagoon and Lake Okeechobee Basin, please visit the Select Committee website via http://www.flsenate.gov/copy_s11101/.

###

Disclaimer: The information on this system is unverified. The journals or printed bills of the respective chambers should be consulted for official purposes.
Copyright © 2000-2013 State of Florida.