

**10. OLD BUSINESS**

a. Water Quality Issues

5. Letter dated April 21, 2006 from Senator Mel Martinez

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FOREIGN RELATIONS

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0906

April 21, 2006

The Honorable Carla B. Johnston  
Mayor  
City of Sanibel  
800 Dunlop Rd.  
Sanibel, Florida 33957

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RECEIVED BY  
OFFICE OF THE CLERK  
U.S. SENATE

Dear Mayor Johnston:

Thank you for sharing your concerns about the environmental health of Lake Okeechobee and its surrounding estuary system. I appreciate hearing from you and would like to respond to your concerns.

Lake Okeechobee is vital to Florida's environmental health and to the sustainability of our communities. However, the combined effects of a thriving agricultural sector, the challenges of a fast growing population, and another unprecedented hurricane season have increased the stress on Lake Okeechobee's environmental conditions and on its levee system.

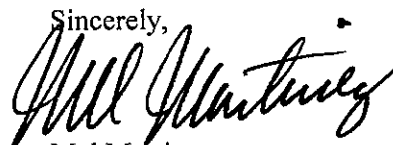
Under Federal law, the state water authorities must discharge water before it undermines the integrity of the levee system. However, the current layout of the water management system constrained the discharges to be directed through the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries, which in turn put incredible environmental pressure throughout these ecosystems.

I am well aware of the negative impact this situation has in our communities, and I believe a strong state and federal partnership will aid in finding a solution. At the Federal level, I have joined Senator Bill Nelson in urging the Senate leadership to bring the Water Resources Development Act (S. 728) to the floor for final consideration and a vote. This bill would authorize a number of critical projects to address several ecological problems, including those in the Indian River Lagoon, and water quality improvements in Lake Okeechobee.

Additionally, I have been a strong supporter of funding for the Modified Waters Delivery Project that will restore natural water flow southward to Florida Bay. This important part of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) will relieve Lake Okeechobee and its surrounding estuary system from more frequent water discharges, which will improve the overall health of the Everglades and our waterways.

I appreciate hearing from you and will keep your recommendations in mind, as I continue to work with my Senate colleagues to carry on the Florida tradition of fighting to preserve and restore our ecological treasures. Do not hesitate to contact me with any additional comments or questions.

Sincerely,



Mel Martinez  
United States Senator

MM/vcm