

THE FLORIDA SENATE
SENATOR JEFF ATWATER
President

July 15, 2010

The Honorable Larry Cretul, Speaker
Florida House of Representatives
420 The Capitol
402 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1300

Dear Mr. Speaker:

Over the last 90 days, we have had the privilege of speaking with those devastated by this oil catastrophe, meeting with business owners struggling to keep their doors open, personally walking on our beaches, and working with frustrated local government officials and private citizens who are seeking to protect their property, secure their livelihood and respond to this oil spill.

Recently I commissioned the Senate's Select Committee on Florida's Economy to review ideas and recommendations to, among other things, remove regulatory impediments to local response efforts, assess the need for waivers for professional assistance, improve the claims compensation process, and strengthen future litigation possibilities. The Select Committee has been conducting hearings and gathering data throughout the Panhandle for just such a purpose.

As we have suspected, these are very complex issues with far reaching ramifications. We must ensure our actions assist, not impede, Florida's response and recovery from this disaster. Floridians will not be well served by hastily drafted legislation designed more for political consumption than meaningful economic relief. Instead, I firmly believe that we should be dedicating every resource at our disposal, sparing no effort, to deliver substance for the citizens of Florida.

There is currently no clear guidance on the claims process and there are different procedures for individuals, businesses and governments. This confusion may be further exacerbated when the Federal government takes over the distribution of BP dollars and the claims resolution process as they have indicated that additional guidelines will be forthcoming over the next few weeks. Ill advised and poorly conceived legislative action might very well impede the speedy resolution of claims and make things more difficult for the citizens of Florida.

July 15, 2010

Page 2

Although a capping device was recently installed and is currently being tested, we have no idea of the ultimate size or duration of the current crisis nor do we have a full understanding of the economic impact on our State. With over seventy-five percent of the State's population residing in the thirty-five counties along Florida's coast, we cannot be tempted to enact legislation that might foreclose options in parts of the State outside of the Panhandle.

Thus far, BP has not provided solid data on losses, damages, and claims, nor is the long term impact on the economies and cultures of the region completely understood. To fully grasp the implications of all this will take well designed studies which, if not carefully crafted, could jeopardize reimbursement or litigation in the future. I believe it would be prudent to continue to monitor these efforts, see what direction they take, and work in concert with them.

Unfortunately, in the interim, the people of Northwest Florida do not have the luxury of time. What I have been hearing is a clarion call to define a comprehensive strategy and deliver the first stages of that plan without delay. This is our opportunity and I am prepared to focus all of the Senate's resources, day and night if necessary, to deliver this within thirty days. The Select Committee is committed to this objective.

As you and I, and our respective staffs, have begun preparing for next week's special session, we have all acknowledged that the real opportunity to affect change in the Gulf is with specific, targeted legislative actions that materially address the needs of the citizens and businesses in the area. We have already expended a great deal of our time and talent preparing responsive and responsible legislation. Attached please find a communication from our Select Committee Chair, Senator Gaetz, outlining a series of recommendations regarding the process and suggested next steps. I share his belief that over the next thirty days a Joint House-Senate Select Committee could fully explore the issues and develop a legislative package that truly meets the needs of this emergency.

Therefore, a special session during the last week of August or first week of September would be well positioned to make the statutory changes that would assure real immediate economic relief in the Gulf while maintaining our options for economic recovery in the future.

I know you share many of these perspectives and would welcome your thoughts on this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeff Atwater". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jeff Atwater
President

Encl.