

Letter to the editor: Crist should replace water district board

Charles de Garmo
Sewall's Point

December 25, 2006

I sent my letter to Santa the other day, and besides a new flats boat, I only had one other item on the wish list: that our new governor, Charlie Crist, will live up to his pre-election promise to be a governor of the people.

The first thing he can do is insist that every new car sold in Florida have turn signals.

The second thing he could do is replace the current South Florida Water Management District's board of governors with a group that represents the people and, most importantly, the water.

The current board of governors is a travesty rife with conflicts of interest. How can honest decisions be made with members like Bubba Wade, senior vice president of U.S. Sugar, and Nicolas J. Gutierrez Jr. Esq., who is on every board in the world that has the word "sugar" included in its name?

Recently, lawyer David Guest of Earth Justice won a decision against the South Florida Water Management District's policy of pumping polluted water from agricultural areas back into Lake Okeechobee without federal permits. The federal judge found it was a violation of the Clean Water Act.

Of course, the board of SFWMD will vote to challenge the decision since it is only taxpayers' monies that it uses for legal fees.

But what really galls many is the board's decision to meet behind closed doors to discuss the obvious appeal. That's right, SFWMD — a publicly funded organization — is meeting behind closed doors to make decisions that involve your tax dollars, without public input and with Big Sugar, which benefits the most from the back-pumping policy, represented on the board by a U.S. Sugar vice president and a sympathetic lawyer.