

PURRE chairman meets with incoming lieutenant governor

By Emilie Alfino

ealfino@breezenewspapers.com

People United to Restore our Rivers and Estuaries (PURRE) brought its education campaign to Lt. Gov.-elect Jeff Kottkamp (R) and other elected officials last week, presenting its agenda to garner support for PURRE's positions.

"I think the future lieutenant governor was looking to be educated about what's going on and what we need to do," PURRE Chairman Mike Valiquette said. He added that the meeting also was part of PURRE's efforts to "get through to" Gov.-elect Charlie Crist (R).

"We're trying to make a difference by meeting with people," Valiquette said. "There was nothing to be solved at that meeting. It was good to talk with them and just sit and chat." Valiquette said he explained the issues and told the politicians what PURRE believes South Florida needs to protect its water quality. "I don't think the lieutenant governor-elect was aware of any of that stuff," Valiquette said.

In addition to Kottcamp, the meeting included Kottcamp's Lee County Director Larry Ringers, Florida State Representatives Gary Aubuchon (R-Dist. 74) and Nicholas Thompson (R-Dist. 73), Lee County Commissioner Frank Mann, and Sanibel City Councilman Jim Jennings.

"We couldn't get with the candidates during the election season to say much about water issues," Valiquette explained. "Now they're in transition, and we have contacted them to steer them on the right path. They all take money from sugar."

High on PURRE's list of priorities was who would be appointed director of Florida's Department of Environment Protection, but Valiquette said the meeting took place too late for that, as the appointment was made the day after the meeting. He remains hopeful that whoever was chosen is favorable to the environment.

Valiquette also presented PURRE's views on:

- other DEP positions and appointments to the Department of Community Affairs, as well as a review of the performance of the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) director and staff;

- the need to immediately appoint at least one person from Lee County to sit on the SFWMD governing board and eventually restructure that board to have representatives from all nine counties located fully within the SFWMD watershed area;
- having DEP and SFWMD agency directors answer directly to the lieutenant governor to provide for continued oversight and accountability;
- enforcing the Clean Water Act and the Outstanding Florida Waters Rule as they relate to Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) of pollution and nutrients entering the waterways of Florida; and
- enacting legislation to require all new large-scale residential and commercial developments to control both wastewater and storm water runoff within their properties for treatment before the water is allowed into the watershed and rivers.

Valiquette presented the group with a history of the water problems as they relate to special interest groups, agriculture and domestic water needs, and municipalities. Most importantly, he presented possible solutions.

Valiquette said he felt very satisfied that Kottcamp left the meeting well educated on the issues and ready to help in the critical effort to find solutions to the pollution of South Florida and the Caloosahatchee River and its estuary.

“We don’t know at this point what to expect, but they did vow to keep in contact,” Valiquette concluded.