



MEMORANDUM

AGENDA ITEM #VII.B

DATE: JANUARY 22, 2018
TO: COUNCIL MEMBERS
FROM: STAFF
SUBJECT: CORRESPONDENCE AND ARTICLES

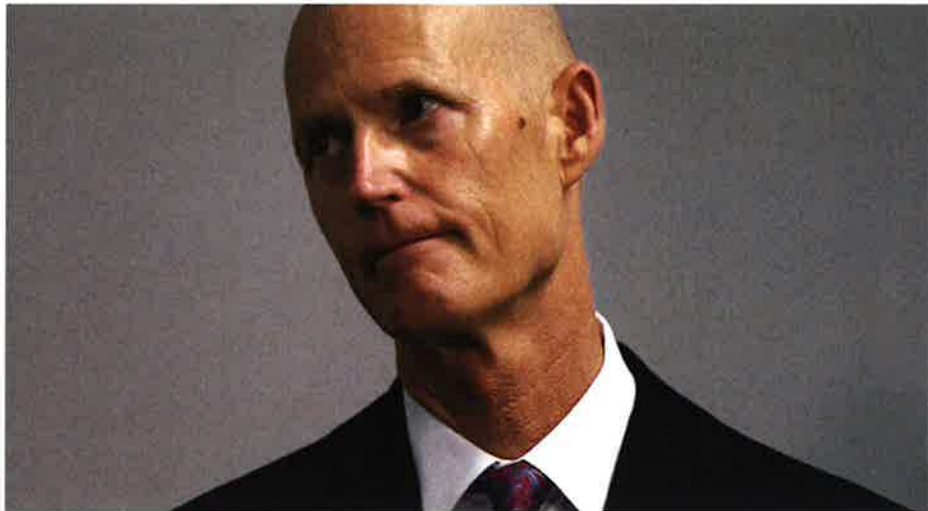
Recommendation

For information only.



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POLITICO



The latest instance of Amy Baker's analysis tossing cold water on Gov. Rick Scott's economic optimism came last week during a meeting to discuss low-income food assistance programs. |AP Photo

Legislative economist — again — tosses cold water on Scott's rosy economic narrative

By [MATT DIXON](#)

12/19/2017 05:08 AM EST

TALLAHASSEE — The rosy picture Gov. Rick Scott described at nearly every public appearance last week was again dinged by Amy Baker, the state's top legislative economist, whose analysis of Florida's economic rebound has in the past given ammo to the governor's political foes.

Baker's analysis is most often on display during often little-noticed public meetings of state economists, but it has already been used by Democrats to try to muddy the waters as Scott prepares a likely run against three-term Sen. [Bill Nelson](#), Democrats' only statewide elected official.

Though she does not mention Scott directly, Baker's main takeaway has been that the economic rebound orchestrated since Scott took office in 2011 is characterized by a decreasing unemployment rate but lacking in producing coveted, high-paying manufacturing jobs.

The latest instance of Baker's analysis tossing cold water on Scott's economic optimism came last week during a meeting to discuss numbers related to the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and low-income food assistance programs.

Baker noted the state's low 3.9 percent unemployment rate is in large part due to the growth of low-wage hospitality jobs — not the housing boom-driven manufacturing jobs that boosted the state's economy when the unemployment rate bottomed this low in the mid-2000s.

"This unemployment rate compared to the last time we saw this unemployment rate as part of the housing boom are not economically the same thing," she said.

After the meeting, she told POLITICO she was specifically talking about the state's tourism-fueled economic rebound.

"Tourism has masked a lot of problems with construction because it is going so strong," Baker said. "But with tourism comes lower average wages."

Baker also pointed to the state's 59 percent labor force participation rate, a measure of those in the job market. The number was at nearly 64 percent in January 2007, when the unemployment rate was nearly 3.8 percent. If someone is not actively looking for work they are not included in the unemployment rate, which can lower that figure.

"The labor force participation rate is much lower now — that by itself can suppress the unemployment rate so that the economy looks like we're close to operating at full employment, when we really aren't," Baker said.

It's a nod to the fact that Florida's economy has been creating jobs, but many come from low-wage sectors tethered to the state's booming tourism industry. The last time the state saw such a low unemployment rate, it was in the midst of the housing bubble that sent the state's economy spiraling when it burst.

"Single-family starts are expected to reach 163,600 units, surpassing last year's historical high," read a 2005 long-range fiscal analysis of Florida's economy.

Scott has long used the state's economic indicators as his go-to talking-points, ticking off the data in response to nearly any type of question, or making them the focal point of most public events organized by his office.

His office pushed back against the idea that Florida's economy is anything but on fire.

"There is no doubt that Florida's economy is booming," said McKinley Lewis, a Scott spokesman. "We've gone from losing more than 800,000 jobs in the four years before Gov. Scott took office, to adding more than 1.4 million new private-sector jobs."

He noted the "Florida economy is the strongest it has been in more than a decade," which is the last time Florida's unemployment rate was near current levels.

It's not the first time a comment or legislative presentation from Baker has presented Florida's economy in a different light than Scott on the stump.

In November, Baker told the Senate Commerce and Tourism Committee that even with the state's low unemployment rate, 36 of the state's 67 counties have lost jobs since 2007. Most of those counties were in rural areas of the state.

Democrats weaponized that statistic by launching "Rick's Recession," a website attacking the governor's economic record funded by the For Our Future Action Fund, a liberal group with both a super PAC and 501(c)4. The group also uses economic data from the Florida Chamber Foundation and a host of media reports, some of which touch on past Baker presentations.

The super PAC arm has raised \$3 million so far this election cycle. Of that amount, more than \$2.2 million came from AFSCME, a powerful labor union that will have Scott in its crosshairs next year.

Alexandra Glorioso contributed to this report.

South Florida business leaders add muscle to call on climate change | Editorial

Sun Sentinel Editorial Board

DECEMBER 23, 2017, 4:30 PM

It was a hopeful sign to see business leaders join a sold-out crowd of government, academic and community leaders at last week's 9th Annual Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Summit.

It was hopeful because the challenge of climate change — no, let's not call it that. Let's call it sea level rise. Oh, wait, we can't call it that, either? Flooding? Can we agree we're seeing floods like never before? — is so political.

And generally speaking, the business community skews right. And Republican leaders are loathe to talk about climate, er, flooding, because the next question is, what are we going to do about it? And that gets at ending our nation's dependence on fossil fuels, which means new government regulations, which — and they're right about this — can be costly for businesses. And with so many people thinking — wrongly so — that this is not a problem we will face in our lifetimes, it's just easier to ignore the whole thing.

Remember, Republican Gov. Rick Scott refuses to acknowledge climate change, even after meeting with a group of climate scientists three years ago. Though he's stopped saying "I'm not a scientist," he won't let state employees use the terms "climate change" or "global warming" in official correspondence.

And in May, Republican President Donald Trump decided to withdraw the United States from the Paris Agreement, which is moving the world toward a goal of limiting the rise of global temperatures. Trump has called climate change a hoax and is pushing the use of more coal.

So with the nation more politically divided than ever, it was good to see South Florida business leaders back an agreement to help make the business case for recognizing and addressing a problem of global proportion.

For with greater involvement from the business community, there's a better chance of attracting the financial and political muscle we need to prepare for rising waters.

And make no mistake, the water is rising.

The sea level in South Florida rose about 8 inches during the past century, according to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

But here's the scary part. It's projected to rise 3 to 7 inches by 2030 — and 2 feet by 2060, and maybe more. All four South Florida counties — Palm Beach, Broward, Miami-Dade and Monroe — have baked that two-foot increase into plans for future development.

"Let's look at what's going on and stop worrying about the politics," Broward County Commissioner Chip LaMarca, the only Republican on the nine-member commission, said during a panel discussion. "In June, there was a 15-inch rainfall at Sawgrass Mills mall. They had to shut the mall down. There was a \$30-million impact from a rainfall."

The Greater Fort Lauderdale Chamber of Commerce and the Broward Workshop are among the business groups lending their support to this regional collaborative, formed in 2009 to address the threat headed our way. The first meeting attracted a few dozen people. This year's meeting filled the Broward County Convention Center.

"We are really late to the dance," Dan Lindblade, the chamber's president and CEO, said at the summit. "I look at this as a legacy issue for us."



Business leaders from a host of fields — including construction, real estate, hospitality and health care — agreed to back recommendations, not mandates, for building “economic resiliency.”

They also agreed to recruit more chambers of commerce, regional councils, economic forums and other business groups to endorse a “collaboration for regional economic resilience.”

Raising roads, improving drainage systems, changing development standards and lowering pollution emissions are among the measures called for in the four counties’ Regional Climate Action Plan.

The [online, interactive plan](#) lets business owners, residents and government officials get a customized to-do list of ways to prepare. Suggestions include raising the base elevation of buildings, preserving more open spaces to store water, and incorporating solar and other renewable energy into new construction.

“The development industry doesn’t complain about resilience requirements in construction standards,” said Debbie Orshesky, a development lawyer with Holland & Knight, during a panel discussion. “New construction isn’t the problem. It’s everything else. The majority of (our community) was built in the ‘90s, if not in the ‘40s and ‘50s. It’s the roads around them, the sewage system, the drainage. That’s the issue we have to focus on.”

Let’s hope Orshesky is right, that developers won’t fight new requirements to harden buildings, though experience tells us otherwise because of increased costs. Plus, as Fort Lauderdale well knows, new construction has added to the problem of over-loaded drainage and sewage pipes. Nevertheless, with more people headed our way who will need housing — and the forecast for a rising water table — she’s right about today’s roads, sewage and drainage systems needing attention.

Already, rising seas are lapping at our feet in South Florida. Periods of extreme high tides, called king tides, overwhelm seawalls and push ocean water onto streets, sidewalks and yards on days when there’s not a cloud in sky. And it’s going to get worse.

“The truth is harsh,” said James Donnelly, chairman of the Broward Workshop, a group of business CEOs. “But we have to be careful of how we communicate that truth. It’s going to have to be a well-managed, well-communicated message.”

Donnelly is right. We don’t want to scare everybody. But we do need to wake people up to prepare for the water headed our way.

And with the business community joining the call, we stand a better chance.

Editorials are the opinion of the Sun Sentinel Editorial Board and written by one of its members or a designee. The Editorial Board consists of Editorial Page Editor Rosemary O’Hara, Elana Simms, Andy Reid and Editor-in-Chief Howard Saltz.



Miami Citizens Become Scientists to Study Rising Seas

December 08, 2017 5:50 AM

Steve Baragona



Rising seas driven by climate change are threatening coastal cities around the world. The Southern U.S. city of Miami is already feeling the effects. Every autumn, when tides are at their highest, residents contend with flooded streets.

MIAMI —

It's a sunny Saturday morning in Miami, and Kiran Bhat is crouching ankle-deep in puddle water, watching the level creep up a measuring tape.

At the bottom of the puddle is a storm drain. It's supposed to convey rainwater off the street and into Biscayne Bay nearby.

But as the oceans rise with climate change, the opposite is happening more and more often. When tides are at their highest, salt water flows up through the drains in low-lying neighborhoods across the Miami area. At its worst, flooding turns streets into impassable streams.

It's a symptom of climate change that's expected to get worse in the coming decades.

Bhat recently moved to the region with his wife, who was born and raised here.



Sea level rise threatens Miami and coastal cities around the world. By 2060, the city could see tidal flooding almost every day.

"I'm starting to put down roots here as well," he said. "Miami's a beautiful place. We don't want it to be impacted by sea level rise in the way that the projections are putting out there."

Reality check

While tidal flooding currently happens just a few days each year, "by 2030, we could be seeing it 30 to 40 days a year," Keren Bolter, climate and policy analyst with the South Florida Regional Planning Council, said. "And by 2060, we could be seeing it almost every single day at high tide.

"It's a wake-up call," Bolter added. "It's a reality check of what the future will be every day."

That's why Bhat and 74 other volunteers are splashing through puddles across the city this morning, collecting data to help scientists understand how rising seas will affect their hometown.

When the waters rise, cities need to know street by street who and what is at risk. And they need to know what combinations of conditions turn streets into streams, and which just leave salty puddles.



Tidal flooding in Highland Village, North Miami Beach. As tidal flood waters rise, among the things that city officials and scientists need to know is whether the water poses a health risk.

Plus, they need to know if floods pose a health risk. The rising waters could carry nasty bacteria from septic systems or pet waste, or toxic chemicals that wash off streets and driveways.

Collecting all that data requires a lot of manpower. That's where Tiffany Troxler's platoon of volunteers comes in.

"You simply can't cover the number of sites that we're working on today with the research infrastructure that we have at our disposal," said Troxler, director of the Sea Level Solutions

Center at Florida International University.

Citizen scientists

Before sunrise, the citizen scientists gather for doughnuts and training. They learn a few simple techniques, then spread out across the city.

As the tide rises, peaks and falls, volunteers collect data on how deep the floodwaters get. They check the salinity to be sure the water is from the bay, not just backed-up rainwater. And they sample for chemicals and bacteria.

But there's more to the exercise than manpower. Troxler says these outings are a great way to get people thinking and talking about what sea level rise will mean for them and their communities.



Tidal flooding in the Shorecrest area of Miami. About 75 volunteers collect data on which streets flood and when and how badly.

"Even for myself, I don't think I really appreciated how urgent the issue of sea level rise was until I saw the water coming out of the drain," she said. "And it just doesn't stop."

Many of the volunteers are FIU journalism students, recruited by a fellow professor with the inducement of extra credit.

"It's either this or write a report," said FIU senior Steffi Reyes.

The experience has been an eye-opener for classmate Rosanna Oviedo.

"I've probably seen (the flooding), of course, but I haven't paid attention because I didn't know what it was," she said. "The sea comes, and you get flooding in the middle of the street. So, yeah, now we know."

Aside from the students, many of the volunteers know the issues. But Troxler said they can help spread the word just by being out in the neighborhoods.

“Someone’s out walking their dog, and they’re curious about what’s going on, and then you engage in a conversation about what’s happening there,” she said. “That in effect allows us to connect with people we might not otherwise be able to reach.”

Flooding does not always happen as they expect. This morning was predicted to be the highest high tide of the year. But the puddle Kiran Bhat stood in never got above ankle level, in a neighborhood that’s among the most flood-prone in Miami.

With each outing, Troxler learns a little more about how tides, weather and other factors play out on the streets of Miami, information that will be more and more important as the seas continue to rise.



Steve Baragona

Steve Baragona is an award-winning multimedia journalist covering science, environment and health.

He spent eight years in molecular biology and infectious disease research before deciding that writing about science was more fun than doing it. He graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill with a master’s degree in journalism in 2002.

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Miami Herald



Unused train track corridors are being converted into paved, multiuse trails for pedestrians and non-motorized vehicles throughout the state as part of Florida's \$25-million-per-year SUN Trail program.

Miami Beach

Planned South Beach trail part of larger regional and statewide project

By Jesse Scheckner

South Florida News Service

December 21, 2017 04:20 PM

UPDATED December 21, 2017 04:56 PM

State officials have earmarked \$3 million to create a pedestrian and bicycle path in South Beach, part of a larger project to connect all of Miami Beach's neighborhoods, itself part of a statewide plan for such trails.

Upon completion, the project will create an uninterrupted paved trail for pedestrians and non-motorized vehicles from South Pointe Park, at the southernmost tip of South Beach, northward along the shore to the city limits at 87th Terrace. According to city documents, the budgeted money is part of the 2018 Shared-Used Nonmotorized Trail budget.

The trail is the first major development in the Atlantic Greenway Network, one of several unconnected trail systems in Miami-Dade County. They will be developed with funds for the SUN Trail, a long-term program launched last year to create a vast circuit of non-motorized byways throughout the state.

"This project will provide safer opportunities for bicyclists and pedestrians," Miami Beach City Manager Jimmy Morales wrote in a [letter](#) to the mayor and city commission this summer.

To date, the greenway network is the most expensive SUN Trail-related construction in the county.

The goal of the SUN Trail, according to Florida Department of Transportation [documents](#), is to create a connected circuit of trails throughout the state. The project is funded through a recurring \$25 million annual budget derived from new vehicle registration fees.

“We are not aware of any state having something similar where it’s such a comprehensive state network with recurring funding every year,” FDOT Chief Planner Jim Wood said. “It’s many hundreds of miles and represents projects from all over the state, so it’s a large network and there is no horizon date for when it would be completed.”

Florida Greenways and Trails Foundation President Dale Allen said the idea for a large scale project began in 2011. He and members of his organization started to meet with elected officials to let them know about the multitude of unconnected regional trails built and maintained by local governments.

Their efforts at the time focused on what will become the Coast-to-Coast Connector, a corridor linking communities across the center of the state between St. Petersburg and Titusville.

Another trail, the St. Johns River-to-Sea Loop, will link communities between Titusville, St. Augustine, Palatka and DeBary, according to state documents.

“We showed them that an incredible opportunity existed [and] that if we closed seven gaps between 14 existing trails we could create, for the first time ever, a long-distance trail, completely off-road, all the way across Florida,” he said.

As the idea gained momentum, Allen said, other groups became involved and offered support, including MetroPlan Orlando, the Central Florida MPO, Bike/Walk Central Florida and the East Coast Greenway Alliance, a nonprofit organization advocating for a 3,000-mile protected biking and walking route from Florida to Maine.

“The more success we have and the more trails we put into the ground, the more valuable the project becomes,” said Paul Haydt, Florida coordinator for the ECGA. “Trails are a big part of urban redevelopment, and in Florida in particular you have a lot of the older cities that were really big in the ‘50s and ‘60s and a lot of those downtowns are now abandoned as cities sprawl. The benefits are pretty widespread.”

SUN Trail legislation received bipartisan support when it passed in 2015, according to Greenway.org. The bill was sponsored by Sen. Andy Gardiner, R-Orlando, who was serving the last year of his term.

At a reception for the Florida Greenways and Trails Foundation on Nov. 3, 2016, Gardiner said he began the process of establishing the SUN Trail knowing he would depend on others to see it completed.

“This’ll make a difference for our state,” he said in video recorded during the event posted on the front page of fgft.org. “If you’re under 30 [and] you’re looking for where to move and raise your family, these are the types of things people will remember.”

Florida and Maine are the only two East Coast Greenway states with more than 100 miles of protected trails completed, with Florida just six miles shy of crossing the 200-mile mark, according to Greenway.org.

Allen said the investment state leaders have committed to will soon make the Sunshine State the frontrunner in alternative long-distance travel options.

“Florida is about to become the leader in the United States of this whole effort,” said Allen. “It’s nothing short of breathtaking.”

Read more here: <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/community/miami-dade/miami-beach/article191088604.html#2#storylink=cpy>

Groups win round in court over FPL's Turkey Point pollution



[Susan Salisbury](#)

Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

5:08 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 28, 2017 [Local business](#)

FPL's Turkey Point plant's cooling canal system, shown here, is the subject of a federal lawsuit. Contributed.



A federal lawsuit asserting that [Florida Power & Light violated](#) the Clean Water Act due to contaminated water discharges at its Turkey Point nuclear plant is set to go to trial next year.

The Southern Alliance for Clean Energy, Friends of the Everglades and Tropical Audubon Society claimed a win after Miami-based U.S. District Judge Darrin Gayles' Nov. 21 denial of FPL's motion to dismiss the case. The trial is scheduled to begin May 29.

The setting of trial date comes just weeks before state regulators are scheduled to decide if FPL customers will be charged for the costs of cleaning up the groundwater pollution at the site.

READ MORE ABOUT THE FEDERAL LAWSUIT OVER TURKEY POINT'S DISCHARGES

The plant near Homestead includes two nuclear reactors that are cooled by a 2-mile-by-5 mile unlined canal system that is polluting the Biscayne Aquifer as well as the surface waters of Biscayne Bay, the lawsuit states. The Biscayne Aquifer supplies drinking water to more than 3 million South Floridians, including customers of Palm Beach County Water Utilities.

On average about 600,000 pounds of salt seep from the canals into the groundwater every day, and a too-salty plume has migrated underground at least four miles west.

“We are pleased with the judge’s ruling and look forward to our day in court. Once again, FPL has attempted to obstruct legal efforts to scrutinize their illegal behavior that has caused repeated and continuous violations of the Clean Water Act by operating an open industrial sewer at Turkey Point,” said Stephen Smith, SACE’s executive director.

“FPL’s imprudent actions have led to historic and ongoing discharges to the surface waters of Biscayne Bay that impact water quality and public health and safety. FPL needs to take scientifically-sound, aggressive action to address the ongoing pollution and repair the damage that their Turkey Point facility has caused,” Smith said. “Continuing to rely on this failed cooling system is nothing short of utility malpractice.”

In FPL’s Motion to Dismiss, and at a Nov. 16 hearing, FPL witnesses stated that the 2016 Florida Department of Environmental Protection Consent Order and the 2015 Florida Department of Environmental Resources Management Consent Agreement were a bar to the lawsuit.

Asked to comment on the lawsuit, FPL spokesman Peter Robbins said, “SACE has zero credibility, especially given its recent failed attempt to mislead the Florida Public Service Commission, the media and the public. We are not responding to their latest desperate attempt to get publicity.”

Robbins was referring to a motion SACE filed Nov. 1 with the PSC in a separate matter related to Turkey Point over a memo that purported to show that DEP and FPL conspired to withhold information from SACE. The motion was withdrawn Nov. 2 after SACE determined it already had the information.

“They were caught filing a legal motion based on a massive lie,” Robbins said. “They then scurried to withdraw the motion once the fraud was exposed.”

On Dec. 12 the PSC is slated to decide whether FPL can charge customers for a \$200 million-plus cleanup of groundwater contamination from the Turkey Point cooling canal system. The cleanup expected to take a decade began in 2016. A hearing on the issue was held in October.

Witnesses for the Office of Public Counsel and others at the PSC hearing stated that customers should not have to pay to clean up the pollution they claim was caused by FPL’s poor management decisions.

FPL witnesses at the PSC hearing said the company has operated the canal system in full compliance with all permits and it was not until 2009 to 2013 after increased monitoring, that state agencies said corrective action was needed.