

Representative Charlie Crist

Florida's Thirteenth District

Testimony before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy & Water

March 8, 2017

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Kaptur, and Members of the Subcommittee,

It is a great honor to appear before you today. As you may know, this is my first chance to testify before an Appropriations Subcommittee. For me, it is a special opportunity because your former colleague and former Chairman of the Full Committee - and my good friend, Bill Young - served with you for so many years. During his time in Congress and on the Committee, he did so many great things for our nation, our state, and our community.

Many of those projects live on today and I want to talk about a few of them.

First is the Pinellas County Shore Protection Project. The Army Corps of Engineers, the State of Florida, Pinellas County, and our local communities have been tremendous partners in maintaining our 20 miles of coastline to protect the people and property along it. Much of the support for this project was generated by the Committee, for which I am grateful. And I am here to ask for your continued backing. The funding you provide for the Corps is critical in delivering the resources Pinellas County needs for the periodic placement of sand on our beaches. Beach nourishment projects not only protect critical public and private infrastructure, but are a great economic generator for our entire region.

The Pinellas County beach nourishment project has three distinct segments. One of them - Sand Key - has qualified for funding due to recent damage from Hurricane Hermine. The other two segments are also in need of nourishment; and the State and local sponsors have the funding necessary to pay their share of the full project. It makes sense to provide the Corps with the needed resources to fully fund these projects in their Work Plan and construct all three segments in the fall. This will protect my community - the most beautiful district in the country in my opinion - and, perhaps most importantly, it will give the taxpayers the best bang for their buck because it is most efficient to construct all three segments at the same time.

A second request I would make of the Committee is to help us finish a project Congressman Young started back in 2002. The seven members of our Tampa Bay Area Congressional delegation are sending you a letter asking the Committee to help us break through a bureaucratic deadlock that has stalled construction of Port Tampa Bay's congressionally authorized Big Bend Channel navigation project. It will set the standard for public private partnerships by turning a 20 percent federal stake in this project into a \$55 million economic development initiative that creates 8,000 jobs for the surrounding region.

Port Tampa Bay has already invested \$30 million in landside infrastructure for the growing Port Redwing maritime complex. However, it will never realize its full potential to serve large cargo ships until this project is completed to provide for a deeper and wider channel. The Big Bend Channel directly connects with Tampa's main federal shipping channel and is integral to the

movement of commodities through the Port to the I-4 corridor, Florida's fastest growing part of the State.

Port Tampa Bay has forged an innovative coalition of public and private sector partners to finance the dredging project. The Port and its partners have committed to provide 80 percent of the total cost to the project. In recognition of the need and tremendous value of this project, the Committee designated it as a "New Construction" start in the 2003 Consolidated Appropriations Resolution (Public Law 108-7). Between Fiscal Years 2003 and 2006, the Committee provided a total of \$17.5 million in construction funding; and as recently as 2014, the project received an Army Corps of Engineers Work Plan allocation as an ongoing project and appropriated construction funds remain available.

Regretfully, because of an internal policy shift at the Army Corps of Engineers, the project designation was abruptly changed to a "New Start" in 2015 because none of the previously appropriated construction funds, much of which has been reprogrammed away from the project, had been used for physical construction.

My Tampa Bay Area colleagues and I are not requesting any funding for this project. Instead, we are seeking language in the Fiscal Year 2017 bill you are finalizing to clarify for the Corps that if construction appropriations remain available for an authorized navigation project in 2017, then no "New Start" decision shall be required to initiate construction of such a project. This would allow available funds to be allocated for these projects, for these projects to compete for additional Work

Plan funding, and for these projects to be eligible for inclusion in future budget requests as ongoing work.

Your former colleague Congressman Bill Young started this Big Bend project more than 14 years ago. And with your help, we can honor him this year by helping Port Tampa Bay see it through to a successful conclusion.

Third, I want to briefly mention my strong support of the Everglades restoration program in Florida. The Everglades is one of the most biologically diverse ecosystems in the country – home to dozens of threatened or endangered species and the source of drinking water for one-third of our State. I am incredibly grateful for the consistent backing by this Subcommittee for America's Everglades over the past decade, and I ask that it continue. We are finally seeing visible restoration progress – the Kissimmee River, improvements to the Herbert Hoover Dike, restoration of Picayune Strand, construction of the C-44 Reservoir, and the bridging of Tamiami Trail – but there is much left to do. I am proud that in my service as Florida's 44th Governor we helped advance many projects and critical land purchases that are paying dividends today. Now, as a Member of Congress, I am committed to working with this Subcommittee and our entire Florida delegation to continue our bipartisan work to restore the Everglades, our precious River of Grass.

And finally, a small community on Boca Ciega Bay in Pinellas County - the City of Gulfport - is engaged with the Army Corps of Engineers on a Continuing Authorities Program (CAP), Section 103 study of their small municipal shoreline. I urge the Subcommittee to appropriately fund the Section 103 CAP program, as well as all CAP programs, so that Gulfport may continue its work

with the Corps and move into construction of a project that will benefit the community. The CAP programs are excellent resources for local governments - particularly given the time and expense of engaging with the Corps on a full-blown study and project - and therefore deserve the Subcommittee's strong support.

Thank you for your time and your attention to these issues. And thank you for allowing me to testify before you today. I appreciate your work on behalf of the Congress and our Nation.