



U.S. Senator Bill Nelson FLORIDA

August 11, 2017

From the desk of Helen Miller...

Continuing Independent Scientific Review of Everglades Restoration Progress

On July 27, Senator Nelson sent a bipartisan letter with 13 Florida Members of Congress to National Academy of Sciences (NAS) President Marcia McNutt in support of continuing the congressionally mandated Committee on Independent Scientific Review of Everglades Restoration Progress (CISRERP) biennial reports. Over the years, CISRERP reports have proven a valuable tool in showing progress on Everglades restoration projects, providing an independent scientific assessment of ongoing restoration efforts, and noting where adjustments are needed. Congress mandated the reports in the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2000 -- the bill that authorized the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan.

Asking Trump Nominees to Protect Scientific Integrity

On July 26, at a Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation hearing, Senator Nelson, who serves as Ranking Member, questioned nominees to the Department of Commerce, the Federal Railroad Administration, and the Maritime Administration. He asked the nominee to lead the Federal Railroad Administration in efforts to improve the safety of the more than 3,000 railroad crossings in Florida. He also asked the nominees to commit to ensuring that scientists throughout the Department of Commerce are able to speak freely and honestly about their scientific work without fear of political interference. To view the hearing, visit <https://www.commerce.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2017/7/nomination-hearing>

Ensuring the Corps' Neutrality During *Florida v. Georgia*

On July 26, Senator Nelson joined Senator Rubio and the entire Florida Congressional delegation in sending a bipartisan letter to President Trump requesting that the President ensure the Army Corps does not take sides in *Florida v. Georgia* Supreme Court case regarding Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint (ACF) water apportionment. Senator Nelson has a long history of advocating for Apalachicola Bay's need for more water and improved management of the ACF basin. In 2014, the State of Florida sued the State of Georgia in a Supreme Court case, requesting a cap on Georgia's water use. The Supreme Court appointed a Special Master, Ralph Lancaster, to review the case. On February 14, 2017, the Special Master issued his report, which concluded that Florida demonstrated real environmental and economic harm. However, the Special Master recommended that Florida's request for a cap on Georgia's water use be denied since the Army Corps, which was not a party in the Supreme Court case, still maintains ultimate control over water flows in the ACF.

Increasing Awareness of Estuaries Across the U.S.

On July 24, Senator Nelson joined Senator Whitehouse and 27 other Senators in introducing S.Res. 230, a bipartisan resolution designating the week of September 16 through September 23, 2017, as “National Estuaries Week,” to increase awareness of the need to protect and restore estuaries across the United States. Estuaries provide important habitat and spawning grounds for many endangered and threatened species of fish and wildlife, as well as flood protection, shoreline stabilization, nutrient filtration, and storm buffers for coastal communities. There are four designated National Estuary Programs in Florida: Charlotte Harbor, Indian River Lagoon, Sarasota Bay, and Tampa Bay. The resolution passed the Senate by unanimous consent on August 3.

Protecting Florida’s Fisheries

On August 1, at a hearing of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, Senator Nelson, who serves as Ranking Member, spoke about the importance of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act to the sustainability of our nation’s fisheries. Florida, which has long been heralded as the fishing capital of the world, boasts more sport fishing records than any other state or country in the world, and delivers hundreds of millions of dollars worth of commercially harvested seafood to households and restaurants across America. To view the hearing, click

here: <https://www.commerce.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2017/8/reauthorization-of-the-magnuson-stevens-fishery-conservation-and-management-act-noaa-and-council-perspectives>

Addressing Florida’s Climate Issues

On August 1, Senator Nelson participated in a tele-town hall with nearly 3,000 Floridians who called in to discuss environmental issues in Florida. During the hour-long call, Senator Nelson spoke about what Floridians can do to mitigate the effects of climate change, ongoing efforts to restore the Everglades, the threats posed by offshore oil drilling, and the toxic algae blooms in Lake Okeechobee.

Keeping the Federal Courthouse in Panama City Open

On July 29, Senators Nelson and Rubio sent a letter to the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals in support of the Northern District of Florida’s Board of Judges’ appeal for an exemption to keep the Federal Courthouse in Panama City open. Earlier this year the Board of Judges decided not to renew the courthouse’s lease due to safety and security concerns, instead opting to find new courthouse space. However, Panama City does not have a permanent judge and therefore does not qualify for a new courthouse or funds to renovate an existing one. By not renewing the lease, the Panama City docket will be handled in Pensacola and therefore will cause undue travel burdens on jurors and constituents who conduct business with the court.

Closing Big Oil Tax Loopholes

On August 2, Senator Nelson joined 21 other senators in introducing S. 1710, the Close Big Oil Tax Loopholes Act of 2017. The bill would repeal certain tax subsidies and tax deductions for the “Big 5” oil companies—BP, Exxon, Shell, Chevron, and ConocoPhillips—and would raise an estimated \$22 billion in revenue over ten years according to the Joint Committee on Taxation.

Senator Nelson was an original cosponsor of identical legislation in the 113th and 114th Congresses.

Protecting DREAMers

On July 27, Senator Nelson signed a letter to President Trump requesting that he protect the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, which protects DREAMers— unauthorized immigrants brought to the United States as children—from deportation and provides them with work authorization. The letter highlights the many contributions DREAMers make to U.S. communities and the economy, and expresses appreciation for President Trump’s commitment to maintaining DACA since taking office.

Improving Education Assistance for Veterans

On August 2, the Senate passed S. 1598, the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017, also known as the “Forever GI Bill,” to improve upon the Post-9/11 GI Bill. This bipartisan bill, cosponsored by Senator Nelson, makes several updates to the Post-9/11 GI Bill to ensure veterans have access to high quality education. The bill provides full benefits to recipients of the Purple Heart, extends the Yellow Ribbon program to family members of individuals killed on active duty, expands eligibility for non-traditional training programs in technological fields, and eliminates the requirement to use benefits within 15 years of leaving the service.

Expanding Veterans Care

On August 1, the Senate passed S. 114, a bipartisan compromise bill to expand veterans access to healthcare, based on legislative text endorsed by Senator Nelson. The bill appropriates \$2.1 billion for continuation of the Veterans Choice program, improves Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) hiring practices so that it can recruit and retain greater numbers of qualified health professionals, and authorizes 28 major medical facility leases, including seven in Florida. The bill authorizes outpatient clinics in Daytona Beach, Gainesville, Jacksonville, Ocala, and Lakeland and outpatient mental health clinics in Gainesville and Tampa.

Honoring Sailors aboard USS Forrestal

On July 27, Senator Nelson joined his colleagues in introducing of S.Res. 234, a bipartisan resolution honoring the 50th anniversary of the devastating fire aboard the USS *FORRESTAL*. On July 29, 1967, *FORRESTAL* was conducting combat operations in support of the Vietnam conflict when an accidental trigger of on-board munitions started a fire that left 134 sailors dead and 161 injured. The resolution commemorates the incident, honors the sacrifice of those killed and injured, and applauds the efforts of the sailors who eventually extinguished the fire.

Reforming the Veterans Appeals Process

On August 1, the Senate approved H.R. 2288, the Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017. Senator Nelson is a cosponsor of S. 1024, the bipartisan Senate version of this bill, which reforms the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits appeals process to give veterans more options in appealing denied claims and addressing the current appeals backlog.

Urging Tougher Sanctions on Venezuelan Regime

On August 3, Senator Nelson sent a letter to President Trump, urging him to impose tougher economic sanctions on the Venezuelan regime, including a ban on at least some imports of

Venezuelan crude and crude products, after Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro moved ahead with efforts to re-write Venezuela's Constitution attempting to make himself dictator.

Stopping Aid to Terrorists

On August 3, Senator Nelson became a cosponsor of S. 1697, the Taylor Force Act. This bipartisan bill places restrictions on U.S. foreign assistance to the Palestinian Authority (PA) until the U.S. Secretary of State can certify that the PA has ceased payments to convicted terrorists—and their families—who have targeted Israeli and U.S. citizens.

Supporting Bills to Combat Human Trafficking

On August 2, two bills cosponsored by Senator Nelson aimed at combatting human trafficking were unanimously passed by the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation. At the committee's meeting, Senator Nelson stressed the importance of working together to combat human trafficking, especially in Florida, which is ranked third in the nation for cases reported. The No Human Trafficking on Our Roads Act (S. 1532) would increase the penalty for any commercial driver's license holder convicted of certain kinds of human trafficking. The Combating Human Trafficking in Commercial Vehicles Act, S. 1536, would create a human trafficking prevention coordinator and establish a human trafficking advisory committee at the Department of Transportation (DOT). It would also increase outreach and education efforts at DOT. To view the hearing, visit <https://www.commerce.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2017/8/executive-session>

Protecting Consumers from Insurance Fraud

On August 3, the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, Subcommittee on Consumer Protection, Product Safety, Insurance, and Data Security, held a hearing titled "Insurance Fraud in America: Current Issues Facing Industry and Consumers." Senator Nelson discussed the issue of fraud propagated by insurers on consumers and reiterated his efforts to work in a bipartisan manner on healthcare legislation to improve the lives of American families. To view the hearing, visit: <https://www.commerce.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2017/8/insurance-fraud-in-america-current-issues-facing-industry-and-consumers>

Calling for a Review of Airline IT Outages

On August 3, Senator Nelson sent a letter to the Comptroller General of the United States asking that the Government Accountability Office look into airlines' information technology system outages. The letter requested the Comptroller General to review the number of flights delayed or cancelled, the number of impacted passengers, recovery time, and the causes of these outages, as well as the outages' effect on consumers, many of whom lose a significant amount of time and/or money when systems go down.

Preventing Phone Scams

On August 3, the Senate unanimously passed S. 134, the Phone Scam Prevention Act, introduced by Senators Nelson, Fischer, Klobuchar, and Blunt. This legislation builds on Senator Nelson's Truth in Caller ID Act, which was signed into law in 2010, and provides law enforcement with additional tools to crack down on new forms of phone scams. The bill also would direct the Federal Communications Commission to make information about current tools and technologies that protect against phone scams available to consumers on a centralized website.

Enabling Drug and Medical Device Research and Approval

On August 3, Senator Nelson voted in favor of H.R. 2430, the FDA Reauthorization Act, a bill to reauthorize the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) user fee programs that funds the agency's drug and medical device reviews. The reauthorization, which passed the Senate by a vote of 94-1, will allow the FDA to collect user fees from drug companies, medical devices, and biosimilar biological innovations in exchange for reviewing and approving some of these products, so that Floridians can have access to better drug and medical technology.

Lowering Drug Prices for Medicare Patients

On August 1, Senator Nelson became an original cosponsor of S. 1688, to allow the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to directly negotiate prescription drug prices with drug companies under Medicare Part D. The bill would allow the government to negotiate directly with pharmaceutical companies, allowing it to leverage purchasing power to pay less for drugs and ensure Floridians on Medicare Part D can get prescriptions drugs for a reasonable price.

Finding Drug Treatments for Rare Disease Patients

On August 2, Senator Nelson became a cosponsor of S. 1509, the Orphan Products Extension Now Accelerating Cures and Treatments (OPEN) Act. The legislation incentivizes drugmakers to repurpose drugs to treat rare diseases, including pediatric cancers. Ninety-five percent of rare disease patients have no treatments approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Most rare disease patients are prescribed treatments off-label, at times with little clinical evidence and variable effectiveness. The OPEN ACT requires sponsor companies to establish that their drugs are designated to treat a rare disease from the FDA, building a pathway for new treatment options for rare disease patients.

Memorializing Snooty the Manatee

On August 3, Senator Nelson introduced S. 1747, the Florida Manatee Research and Recovery Act. The bill would require the Secretary of the Interior to carry out research, mitigation, and recovery activities specific to the Florida manatee population, including the establishment of competitive research grants, taking into consideration recommendations from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the Marine Mammal Commission. The bill addresses the need to keep monitoring, analyzing, and assessing Florida manatee population demographics, health, causes of mortality, and life history parameters with range-wide population surveys due to effects of poor water quality, disease, food availability and limitations, human activity, and climate change. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently decided to downgrade the manatee's Endangered Species Act listing from endangered to threatened.

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