

**Melsek Rebuttal**  
September 20, 2011  
By Commissioner Ray Judah

After reading Lee Melsek's recent commentary concerning Clerk of Court Charlie Green, it is apparent that the good old boy network is alive and well in Lee County. Mr. Melsek's attempt to discredit my reputation and integrity is reminiscent of his days as a journalist with a penchant for misrepresenting the facts and making sweeping accusations without a shred of truth.

In 2003, Mr. Melsek and Mr. Green worked in tandem to create a dark cloud over the Lee County Board of County Commissioners' (BOCC) decision to purchase Gulf Utility and Gateway Waste Water Treatment Plant (WWTP.) Melsek and Green alleged that Lee County paid too much for the utilities. Their insinuation that fraud was involved in the transaction led to an FBI investigation of the purchase. After a monumental expenditure of taxpayer dollars, the FBI found no wrongdoing, and the County Commission was exonerated.

The BOCC acquired Gulf Utility (later known as Gulf Environmental Service System) and Gateway WWTP to provide an economy of scale to our Lee County Utility system, regionalize waste water services, and expand infrastructure to accommodate rapid population growth and demand. Gulf Environmental Service System was acquired by Lee County in 2003 for \$57.2 million and is currently valued at \$114.5 million. The number of single family homes served when acquired was 18,000 and there are currently 27,000. Gateway WWTP was purchased in May 2003 for \$4.9 million, with a current value of \$35 million. The number of single family homes served when acquired was 2,500 and there are now 4,300.

Mr. Melsek attacked the credibility of Lee County's Conservation 2020 Advisory Committee as "loaded with special interest real estate and development folks." To the contrary, the success of the Conservation 2020 program is largely attributed to the hard-working, conscientious volunteers who represent a wide cross section of our community. I would imagine that longstanding members of the Conservation 2020 committee, such as respected environmental advocates Dr. William Hammond, John Cassani, Cullum Hasty and the late Joann Fowler, would take great exception to Mr. Melsek's derogatory comments.

The specific issue Mr. Melsek referenced, concerning property owned by the late Frank D'Alessandro that was recommended for purchase by the Conservation 2020 committee in 1998, was resolved when the County Attorney's office required any committee member with a potential conflict of interest to file a full disclosure form per Florida Statutes.

Mr. Melsek's insinuation that I am to blame for the degradation of our environment over the last 20 years doesn't even pass the straight face test. As co-founder of the Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed Land Trust and staunch advocate of the Conservation 2020 program, I have helped lead the effort to acquire more than 65,000 acres of environmentally sensitive land to protect our precious water resources, recreational open space and critical wildlife habitat.

I have also been heavily engaged in the ongoing dispute with the powerful sugar industry to protect and restore the Caloosahatchee and coastal estuaries from excessive releases of polluted water from Lake Okeechobee. Furthermore, my longstanding commitment to environmental stewardship has resulted in being awarded Conservationist of the Year from the Florida Audubon Society in 1984 and 1996, and Florida Wildlife Federation in 2007. In 2003, *Gulfshore Life* named me "Champion of the Environment" and I was the 2011 recipient of the Everglade Coalition's James D. Webb Award, which annually recognizes a public servant making an outstanding contribution to the Everglades.

Mr. Melsek blatantly lied, alleging me as the “leader 10 or so years ago in a rush to hand over more than half of pristine Bowditch Point on Fort Myers Beach to a hotel developer.” In fact, Mr. Melsek stumbles over his own dishonesty as he, himself wrote an article in The News-Press on April 3, 1997 reporting Commissioner Judah was “inclined to reject land swap deal” pertaining to Bowditch Point.

There are those who choose discord. For more than 20 years, I have dedicated myself to progress and positive solutions for the people of Lee County.