

# The Florida House of Representatives

## Office of the Speaker

**Larry Cretul**  
**Speaker**

### MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Members, Florida House of Representatives  
**FROM:** Larry Cretul, Speaker  
**DATE:** July 15, 2010  
**RE:** Message from President Atwater

Today I received a message from the Senate President, a copy of which is attached along with my response. I agree fully with President Atwater that we are not ready to legislate with respect to the oil spill.

To that end, I have instructed our staff to work with the Senate staff to finalize the process and the dates for a special session no earlier than September.

Accordingly, you can expect your stay to be very short next week but in the coming weeks you can expect to be recruited for numerous legislative efforts to identify and craft solutions to problems related to the oil spill.

Attachments



## The Florida House of Representatives

### Office of the Speaker

Larry Cretul  
Speaker

July 15, 2010

The Honorable Jeff Atwater, President  
The Florida Senate  
Suite 409, The Capitol  
404 South Monroe Street  
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1100

Dear President Atwater:

I am in receipt of your letter dated today, suggesting a joint committee and special session in the coming weeks. I am glad we agree that productive legislation addressing the Gulf oil spill cannot be enacted during next week's scheduled special session. Our duty is to dispose of executive proposals responsibly. Rushing to amend the constitution at the last possible moment because of an accident hundreds of miles from our jurisdiction does not typify deliberation and responsible legislation.

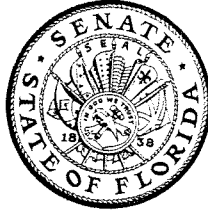
As you and the citizens and legislators of the Panhandle know well, Floridians are suffering along the Gulf Coast from the BP Oil spill. I have followed with interest the work of Senator Gaetz' committee. I assure you that the House is also actively exploring the nature of the injuries, the nature of the federal and private responses, and all suggestions for state response that may require legislation. I believe we can cooperate as we prepare legislative proposals to be considered at a reasonable time. I have asked my staff to work with the Senate staff to resolve the details of the appropriate process and dates for a special session.

Consequently, I am committing the full resources of the House to the full exploration of any and all responsible legislation likely to aid Florida's survival of and recovery from the oil spill. I am also ready, willing and able to join you in calling a special session to convene as early as September, as soon as we can identify those subjects upon which we can act in order to responsibly improve our state's health.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Larry Cretul".

Larry Cretul  
Speaker



**THE FLORIDA SENATE**  
**SENATOR JEFF ATWATER**  
*President*

July 15, 2010

The Honorable Larry Cretul, Speaker  
Florida House of Representatives  
420 The Capitol  
402 South Monroe Street  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1300

Dear Mr. Speaker:

Over the last 90 days, we have had the privilege of speaking with those devastated by this oil catastrophe, meeting with business owners struggling to keep their doors open, personally walking on our beaches, and working with frustrated local government officials and private citizens who are seeking to protect their property, secure their livelihood and respond to this oil spill.

Recently I commissioned the Senate's Select Committee on Florida's Economy to review ideas and recommendations to, among other things, remove regulatory impediments to local response efforts, assess the need for waivers for professional assistance, improve the claims compensation process, and strengthen future litigation possibilities. The Select Committee has been conducting hearings and gathering data throughout the Panhandle for just such a purpose.

As we have suspected, these are very complex issues with far reaching ramifications. We must ensure our actions assist, not impede, Florida's response and recovery from this disaster. Floridians will not be well served by hastily drafted legislation designed more for political consumption than meaningful economic relief. Instead, I firmly believe that we should be dedicating every resource at our disposal, sparing no effort, to deliver substance for the citizens of Florida.

There is currently no clear guidance on the claims process and there are different procedures for individuals, businesses and governments. This confusion may be further exacerbated when the Federal government takes over the distribution of BP dollars and the claims resolution process as they have indicated that additional guidelines will be forthcoming over the next few weeks. Ill advised and poorly conceived legislative action might very well impede the speedy resolution of claims and make things more difficult for the citizens of Florida.

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Although a capping device was recently installed and is currently being tested, we have no idea of the ultimate size or duration of the current crisis nor do we have a full understanding of the economic impact on our State. With over seventy-five percent of the State's population residing in the thirty-five counties along Florida's coast, we cannot be tempted to enact legislation that might foreclose options in parts of the State outside of the Panhandle.

Thus far, BP has not provided solid data on losses, damages, and claims, nor is the long term impact on the economies and cultures of the region completely understood. To fully grasp the implications of all this will take well designed studies which, if not carefully crafted, could jeopardize reimbursement or litigation in the future. I believe it would be prudent to continue to monitor these efforts, see what direction they take, and work in concert with them.

Unfortunately, in the interim, the people of Northwest Florida do not have the luxury of time. What I have been hearing is a clarion call to define a comprehensive strategy and deliver the first stages of that plan without delay. This is our opportunity and I am prepared to focus all of the Senate's resources, day and night if necessary, to deliver this within thirty days. The Select Committee is committed to this objective.

As you and I, and our respective staffs, have begun preparing for next week's special session, we have all acknowledged that the real opportunity to affect change in the Gulf is with specific, targeted legislative actions that materially address the needs of the citizens and businesses in the area. We have already expended a great deal of our time and talent preparing responsive and responsible legislation. Attached please find a communication from our Select Committee Chair, Senator Gaetz, outlining a series of recommendations regarding the process and suggested next steps. I share his belief that over the next thirty days a Joint House-Senate Select Committee could fully explore the issues and develop a legislative package that truly meets the needs of this emergency.

Therefore, a special session during the last week of August or first week of September would be well positioned to make the statutory changes that would assure real immediate economic relief in the Gulf while maintaining our options for economic recovery in the future.

I know you share many of these perspectives and would welcome your thoughts on this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeff Atwater". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jeff Atwater  
President

Encl.



## THE FLORIDA SENATE

### SELECT COMMITTEE ON FLORIDA'S ECONOMY

*Location*

111 Senate Office Building

*Mailing Address*

404 South Monroe Street  
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1100  
(850) 487-5494

Senator Don Gaetz, *Chair*

Senator Jeremy Ring, *Vice Chair*

*Professional Staff:* Elizabeth Moya, *Staff Director*

Senate's Website: [www.flsenate.gov](http://www.flsenate.gov)

## MEMORANDUM

**To:** President Jeff Atwater  
**From:** Senator Don Gaetz, Chair, Select Committee on Florida's Economy  
**Subject:** Recommendations Regarding Economic Issues Pertaining to Oil Spill  
**Date:** July 15, 2010

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Mr. President,

Thank you for your sense of urgency regarding the economic consequences facing the people of Northwest Florida. In particular, I appreciate your directing the Select Committee on Florida's Economy to assess these economic issues and, within the scope of authority of the State, begin developing solutions that will help residents of the Gulf Coast recover from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

As you know and under your direction, the Senate Select Committee on Florida's Economy met for a public workshop on Monday, July 12 2010 in Pensacola, Florida. After four hours of testimony from economists, business groups, the tourism industry, local governments, and individuals whose lives and livelihoods are being so disastrously affected, there was no doubt that the people of coastal Northwest Florida are in need of significant action by their state government. Economists and business organizations have begun to quantify the economic impacts to employers and employees and local governments have expressed the need for additional authority, additional resources, better planning and a more rational claims process to fulfill their responsibilities in this crisis.

The Select Committee, working closely with your staff, is developing a series of specific legislative recommendations to address the economic pain and suffering of our Gulf Coast, including property tax relief, unemployment compensation tax relief, advocacy for businesses and individuals within the claims process, consolidation of governmental claims to assist local governments, expansion of the bridge loan program for affected businesses, tolling of permits

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during a declared state of emergency, local option oil spill clean up planning, professional licensure exchange in times of crisis, and other forms of relief.

We have not exhausted the good ideas that may help Northwest Florida or other parts of the state which might be affected by the oil spill. A number of the proposals on which we are working are close to ripe for legislative language while others require careful analysis with affected parties to ensure we achieve our purposes. The Select Committee was fortunate to be joined by five House members during the workshop in Pensacola. Their contributions to discussions were very helpful and underscored the critical importance of involving the House of Representatives in a joint effort to arrive at policy and legislative language likely to gain approval from both houses.

I respectfully recommend that the Senate Select Committee be expanded into a Joint Select Committee, including our House partners, to be charged with completing the task of defining and addressing the economic issues associated with the oil spill. Such a Joint Committee could work closely with the staffs of both Houses and with the Speaker and yourself, meet frequently as necessary, and develop a broadly-supported plan to promote economic recovery within the state's authority to do so..

It is unfortunate that the timing and call of next week's special session did not take into account the economic aspects of the oil spill. Sadly, the clock has tolled on that opportunity. Therefore, I respectfully request that a Joint Select Committee be given all of the resources of the House and Senate to develop a package of legislative proposals over the next 30 days. In that way legislators and the public could know our direction and our destination prior to a special session in early September. It is my view that we could present a solid legislative package to Speaker Cretul and to you within 30 days.

Thank you for your continued leadership on this issue. The Select Committee looks forward to your direction.

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OFFICE OF THE  
SENATE PRESIDENT