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## Putnam Says Florida Needs Statewide Water Policy

**Safe water supply necessary for state to survive, he says**

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LAKELAND | Florida's economy is improving faster than other states on several fronts, according to Florida Commissioner of Agriculture Adam Putnam.

Putnam spoke Tuesday morning at a Community Leader Forum sponsored by Gray Robinson law firm.

But lack of a statewide water policy and the threat of the greening disease to citrus could hamper that.

"The state bird, the construction crane, is back on the Miami skyline," he said.

Real estate sales are up, he said, and all this comes following "The End of Florida" predictions of five years ago during the economic crises and the construction downturn.

"Today, people are back, the state of Florida has balanced its budget every year and is now projected to have a billion surpluses for this budget cycle," Putnam said.

"That's leadership," Putnam said, noting the state is back because of a team effort of its government and business leaders.

"New York can't say what I just said about the progress on their state. Ohio can't say what I just said about the progress of their state. Illinois can't say what I just said about the progress of their state. And Lord knows California can't. So there is a difference in leadership," Putnam said.

Among the issues Putnam's office will ask of Gov. Rick Scott and the Legislature during this session, which begins March 4, is for a statewide, but flexible, water policy, he said.

"From day one (when he first ran for the Legislature in 1996), I have talked about water policy. If you don't know you are going to have a safe and sustainable water source to support all your environmental and business needs, you won't survive," he said.

"Water is the biggest long-term issue facing Florida. It is inseparable from the three pillars of the state's economy. It is inseparable from agriculture, inseparable from tourism and it is inseparable from construction," he said.

"If you don't know that you are going to have a sustainable high quality source of



SCOTT WHEELER | THE LEDGER

Florida Commissioner of Agriculture Adam Putnam speaks during a Community Leader Forum sponsored by Gray Robinson at the Lakeland Yacht and Country Club in Lakeland on Tuesday.

water to support all environmental and economic initiatives, then Florida ceases to exist as we know it," Putnam said. "Water is the thread. Why do people want to be on the lake? Why do they want to be on the river? Water binds us together and so we have put forward what I believe is a strong proposal for a state water policy."

First, he said, Florida's water policy has to be flexible.

"The idea of average annual rainfall in Florida is purely a mathematical notion. It can't be a public policy planning tool because you might get eight inches of water in four months and then it stop for four months. So it needs to be flexible enough to recognize you have drought conditions and you have abundance conditions," he said.

"And I'd much rather have the problems that come with abundance than scarcity because that is what the American West is dealing with now," he said.

Putnam said the emphasis on water in the past 25 years has mainly been focused on South Florida and the Everglades.

"But if you didn't have the Everglades in Florida, people would be talking about our first magnitude springs," he said.

Central Florida, he said, has to find 2 million gallons of water a day to support growth and the little town of Apalachicola in the North, with its important oyster industry, has to worry not about septic tanks nor pollution, but about water being cut off at its border.

Putnam said such a water policy for the various needs and various geographic areas of the state must be long term. It won't be solved in a single session of the Legislature, he said.

In addition to his proposed water policy this year, Putnam said two major issues will be nutrition, particularly in schools' meals programs, and a strong, more dependable energy policy.

During a question and answer period, Putnam said greening is the most serious disease ever to affect Florida citrus and that the state has about two years to find a way to fight it before small and medium groves could be out of business.

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