

Florida's Universities are Poised to Help Businesses and Agencies Address Threats & Opportunities Associated with Climate Change and Sea Level Rise

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In several news articles last week, the Florida Center for Investigative Reporting reported that the Florida Department of Environmental Protection had been ordered not to use terms "climate change" or "global warming" in any official communications. These reports were based on public records and discussions with former DEP employees and consultants.

It is unfortunate that in a state that is highly vulnerable to the effects climate change, especially sea-level rise, that our state agencies are not allowed to even speak of climate change. We should be learning what we can do to mitigate and prepare for climate change impacts on our state's economy and natural resources. Not acknowledging climate change at even the most basic level of being able to talk about it will not hold back the seas from invading our coastlines, which is a major economic resource in the state of Florida. This is really baffling to those of us in academia! We could make the suggestion to stop speaking the word "cancer" in the interest of all our loved ones who suffer from this crippling disease, but that would not make the cancer disappear.

Instead, we should be developing the best scientific information and developing technologies needed for solutions to the added challenges and opportunities that we face in Florida's economy and natural resources.

Florida's university scientists and leaders get this. Our Florida universities have world-class researchers who are working on these problems across all sectors and disciplines. This includes understanding Florida's unique climate and its anticipated changes, sea level rise, and the implications of these changes on water resources, energy, infrastructure, development, agriculture, and natural resources among others.

The universities have created a state-wide consortium of eight universities to form the Florida Climate Institute (FCI) that brings together an impressive and diverse range of expertise. We are ready and willing to offer our expertise to interface with businesses and entrepreneurs who recognize, as Richard Branson and Paul Polman recently pointed out, "that there is money to be made in taking climate change seriously"*.

Much more can be done in Florida than is currently being done by our universities, state and local agencies, and businesses working together to develop promising solutions that would evolve from such collaboration.

In addition to making an investment in our infrastructure and coastal economy, we need to consider our credibility and reputation in educating and attracting bright young minds in the state of Florida, both within and beyond the walls of academic institutions, who will develop the tools to tackle the challenges of climate change in new innovative ways. It is important that the public know that the FCI is a major asset in Florida and it is eager to help.

* <http://www.cnn.com/2015/02/19/opinion/branson-polman-climate-business/>