

## **Democratic Leadership Needed on Advocating for a Sustainable Future**

*Hal Stern*

On December 14 and 15, the Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Leadership Summit held its ninth annual meeting in Fort Lauderdale. The Summit is an annual conference held jointly by the four counties that comprise the Compact—Monroe, Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach. This year, 600 people attended the sold out conference. For some perspective, there were 50 participants at the first conference in 2007 (last year's summit was canceled because of Hurricane Matthew). This year's conference brought together business leaders, politicians, government officials and the engineering community to review current efforts to address climate change and sea level rise in our communities.

There were several takeaways from the Summit. All of the speakers recognized sea level rise as a major threat to Florida and Floridians. Business leaders are taking sea level rise into account in their business plans. Insurance companies and bond rating agencies are starting to adapt their pricing based on the fact that sea level is rising. Local elected officials spoke about how sea level rise has become an issue they are starting to address in terms of budgets and long range infrastructure planning. At this most basic level, all agreed that local governments do not have the financial resources or tax base to address these issues alone and that the state and federal governments need to be significantly more engaged in this process.

Our Party's platform calls for Environmental Justice for All Floridians. The platform calls for greater investment in renewables, opposition to fracking and any additional gas or oil pipelines through environmentally sensitive areas, increased recycling and moving away from the use of plastics. We need to take action to advance policies that will promote the Party's platform and work to create a more sustainable future.

We should be advocating for a more aggressive environmental agenda on the local level. Municipal and County regulations need to take climate change and our responsibility for causing climate change into account. Palm Beach County and the municipalities in the County need to work more closely together and with our colleagues to the south to enact regulations and ordinances that promote sound environmental policies. The four Compact counties represent a significant portion of the State's population and economy. Our local leaders should explore how we can work better together to move the environmental agenda forward.

We need to be alert to what is happening in Tallahassee. The legislative session begins on January 8. There are several bills pending that will impact the environment both positively and negatively. We have seen how public opinion can shape the debate over important issues in Washington. We can have a similar impact in Tallahassee.

Finally, and most importantly, the most effective way to advance our Party's platform is to elect more Democrats to the State House and to elect Democrats as our next Governor, Chief Financial Officer and Commissioner of Agriculture. And, of course, we need to re-elect Bill Nelson to the US Senate and defeat Republican members of Congress throughout Florida in order to stop the Trump Administration's efforts to eliminate environmental laws and regulations. Just today (January 4) the Trump Administration decided to permit offshore drilling off the Florida coast. These efforts to roll back 40 years of environmental progress will not stop

unless we make it stop.