

A legal(?) conflict of interest at SFWMD

Posted on [September 22, 2011](#) by [Tom](#)

Joe Collins, the chair of the South Florida Water Management District Governing Board since last March, is a vice-president of Lykes Brothers, one of the state's biggest and wealthiest corporations. The district wants to pay his employer \$4.9 million to store water temporarily on their land. Sounds like a clear conflict of interest, doesn't it?

The Florida Commission on Ethics thinks so, calling it "plain" that this situation is a conflict of interest for Chair Collins. However, Florida ethics law allows such a conflict of interest if it is disclosed and if the "business entity" is the "only source of supply" for the needed commodity. That is the legal situation in which having an employee of Lykes Brothers as chair has placed the district.

Mr Collins will have to decide if continued service on the governing board, in light of this conflict of interest, is desirable. Does it make sense for a board member's employer to receive \$4.9 million from the district and also vote to lay off 134 staff members?

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■ *Tom* September 24, 2011 at 8:29 am

I have to add that Eric Draper, Ex. Director of Florida Audubon, is a strong supporter of both the contract with Lykes and Joe Collins as chair: <http://www.newspress.com/article/20110924/OPINION/109240321/Guest-opinion-Support-water-storage-Joe-Collins>

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