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The Property Tax Amendment and Water Infrastructure

HJR 1F on the November 3 ballot would raise the non-school homestead exemption to \$150,000 in 2027 and \$250,000 in 2028, which county leadership estimates could cut the county budget by roughly \$50 million once fully in place. Do you support this amendment? If it passes, how do you expect the revenue reduction to affect the county's support for water utilities, Lagoon monitoring, and water quality improvement projects? If you intend to protect those water programs, how specifically would you make up the shortfall, and which other services or staff positions would you reduce?

I support meaningful tax reform, but I do not support the property tax amendment as currently written. It was developed quickly and without thorough analysis of its fiscal impact on Florida's 67 counties. There is also no clear contingency plan to address the resulting revenue shortfalls.

If the amendment passes, public safety and core infrastructure would remain my highest budget priorities. Lagoon restoration and water-quality projects would likely face cuts. In that event, I would support holding countywide workshops with broad public participation so residents from every part of the county can help set funding priorities and identify where reductions must occur.

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Sustaining Restoration Under Funding Pressure

Much of our local restoration relies on layered and non-guaranteed outside funding (EPA National Estuary Program dollars, competitive NOAA grants, the state Indian River Lagoon Protection Program, and water management district contributions). If state and federal funding are severely cut, how will you keep research and restoration moving for the Indian River Lagoon ? Would you support a dedicated, recurring county funding source to insulate these projects from state or federal shortfalls?

I support establishing a dedicated, recurring county funding source for the Indian River Lagoon, similar to Brevard County's Save Our Indian River Lagoon (SOIRL) half-cent sales tax. Any such initiative should include public workshops and be placed on the ballot for voters to decide. Outside grants are unreliable, and we need consistent local resources to continue meaningful Lagoon improvements. This funding could also help provide grants to convert more homes from septic systems to sewer.

Understanding Our Local Waters

The St. Johns River Water Management District's 2025 monitoring showed a significant rebound in Lagoon seagrass coverage after years of decline. What is your understanding of the current water quality issues facing the Indian River Lagoon and Blue Cypress Lake, and do you read the recent seagrass recovery as a reason to sustain current spending and effort, or to ease off? Beyond funding, what concrete county-level measures would you champion to restore and maintain the health of both water bodies?

The recent seagrass rebound reported by the St. Johns River Water Management District is encouraging news, but it is not a reason to ease off. Recovery remains fragile after years of decline driven by excess nutrients from septic systems, stormwater runoff, and other sources. Both the Indian River Lagoon and Blue Cypress Lake continue to face water-quality challenges that require sustained attention.

I support continuing strong efforts and investment. Beyond funding, I would champion practical county-level measures including accelerating septic-to-sewer conversions and advanced septic upgrades, expanding stormwater treatment and living shoreline projects, strengthening local monitoring and enforcement, partnering with the water management district and municipalities, and supporting targeted habitat restoration. Consistent, focused action is the best way to protect and build on the progress we are seeing.

Future Water Supply and Utility Expansion

What is your assessment of Indian River County's long-term potable water supply, and how do our existing and expected future utility operations (both wastewater and potable) affect the county's overall water resources? What specific expansion of county utilities do you believe is necessary both to meet future demand and to restore our water resources, including the planned connection of legacy septic systems to central sewer?

Indian River County's long-term potable water supply is adequate for current needs but requires careful planning to meet future growth without over-stressing our resources. Existing and future utility operations directly affect the health of the Indian River Lagoon and other water bodies. Continued reliance on septic systems contribute to nutrient pollution, while responsible utility expansion can help protect and restore water quality.

I support targeted expansion of county utilities focused on connecting legacy septic systems to central sewer, improving wastewater treatment capacity, and ensuring water infrastructure keeps pace with demand. A dedicated, recurring funding source could really get this done. Growth must be tied to available infrastructure so we can meet future needs while protecting our water resources.

Annexation and City–County Collaboration

The recent Sebastian Pines and Cresswind annexations approved roughly 1,512 homes on former agricultural land. Because Sebastian operates no water or wastewater utility of its own, both developments will rely entirely on the county's system under an interlocal agreement. How will you navigate situations where a city approves major density increases that the county is ultimately responsible for serving? Do you believe the current interlocal agreements give the county enough leverage, and if not, what specific changes would you pursue? Where else do you see tangible opportunities for the cities and county to work together?

Having served 15 years on the Sebastian City Council, including as Mayor and Vice Mayor, I understand both city and county perspectives on growth and infrastructure. Cities and the county generally agree on more than 85% of issues, and that shared foundation makes productive collaboration possible. When a city approves major density increases that rely on county utilities, early and transparent coordination is essential. I will work to strengthen interlocal agreements, so the county has clearer leverage on capacity, timing, and cost-sharing before large projects move forward.

If current agreements fall short, I will partner with municipalities to update them, so the county is not left absorbing unexpected demand without adequate planning or funding. My existing relationships with county commissioners and regional leaders will help facilitate these discussions.

Beyond utilities, cities and the county should continue working together on Lagoon protection, stormwater projects, road improvements, public safety, and shared services that deliver better results for residents while controlling costs.