There was little reason to expect much from Governor DeSantis. The GOP candidate for Governor was expected to be Adam Putnam, the Agriculture Commissioner. Instead, due to Trump's personal intervention, Ron DeSantis snagged the nomination. DeSantis pledged to "reduce bureaucracy, eliminate unreasonable regulations and crack down on lawsuit abuse." He called himself the #1 conservative in Florida. Admittedly, he did have some environmental-sounding pledges on his website:

- Protect our coasts by stopping toxic discharges from Lake Okeechobee and by storing and cleaning polluted water south of the Lake
- Defend Florida's coastline through beach restoration and flood mitigation
- Restore the Everglades

Writing on this blog before the election, however, I was skeptical of these pledges: "Considering that his lifetime score from the League of Conservation Voters is 2%,", I wrote, "I have my doubts about how environment-friendly these pledges really are." I was definitely not alone in this view.

But as it turns out, DeSantis really did mean to stand behind these pledges, as he was soon to prove. Shortly before taking he office, he wrote an op.-ed in which he said he would keep his campaign promises by prioritizing environmental issues such as water quality, the state's "red tide," and Everglades restoration. Upon taking office, he issued a sweeping executive order with five key provisions: (1) $2.5 billion over the next four years for the Everglades (a $1 billion increase); (2) establishment of a Blue-Green Algae Task Force to deal with algae blooms; (3) a directive to the South Florida Water Management District to immediately start the next phase of the Everglades Agricultural Area Storage Reservoir Project; (4) creation of an Office of Environmental Accountability and Transparency charged with organizing and directing integrated scientific research and analysis to ensure that all agency actions are aligned with key environmental priorities; and (5) appointment of a Chief Science Officer to "coordinate and prioritize scientific data, research, monitoring and analysis needs to ensure alignment with current and emerging environmental concerns most pressing to Floridians." DeSantis also created an Office of Resilience and Coastal Protection to help communities prepare for the effects of sea level rise.

DeSantis appointed Tom Frazer as the new Chief Science Officer. Frazer, a marine biologist, had previously been the director of the University of Florida's school of natural resources and environment. In that he capacity he wrote that the seven

major environmental challenges for the next century are human population growth, providing food and fiber, providing and conservatively using basic materials, transition to renewable energy systems, pollution prevention and cleanup, biodiversity, and climate change." Notice the final entry on the list. It's not surprising to learn that the head of an environmental institute believes in the seriousness of climate change, but such a person could never have been appointed by other notable Republicans such as Trump or DeSantis's predecessor (Rick Scott, now in the U.S. Senate).

DeSantis has also given support to recent efforts by the state's leading utility to expand the use of solar power. "I am supportive of programs that will provide Floridians with greater access to affordable, clean energy which will help propel the State to a healthier future," he said, continuing that "[w]e live in the Sunshine State and solar energy is a natural resource that should be seriously considered."

It remains to be seen whether DeSantis will stay the course on these environmental issues and whether he will ever openly acknowledge the need to limit carbon emissions in order to protect Florida from climate change. But he has already broken away from the GOP's general opposition to environmental protection. Apart from whatever may be his personal convictions, this may reflect the sheer visibility of Florida's environmental problems. In South Florida, sea level rise is already enough of a problem to make climate believers of some GOP mayors and congressional representatives. The algae problems are obvious to any observer and directly impact the state's tourism industry. And Florida's water problems are also apparent. Sometimes it's hard to ignore what your own eyes are telling you, much as people may try.