

TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT LETTER July 15, 2019

Governor DeSantis, I urge you and the Florida legislature to investigate the Gulf Coast Triumph Committee and demand an audit of how they are spending, or more like not spending, the \$1.5 billion dollars from the Deep Horizon Oil Spill Fund. They have not been honest with us, and with other applicants, and have wasted a year and a half of our lives and exhausted our resources energy trying to answer their incomprehensible application. We worked day and night for a year and a half, only to learn that Gulf Specimen Marine Lab and Aquarium never had a chance from the beginning.

At the encouragement of Triumph staff, Gulf Specimen Marine Lab jumped through interminable hoops, filling out their highly repetitious and arduous application. We attended numerous meetings around the panhandle, repeatedly receiving advice from their staff, only to be turned down flat. The reason: the 19 permanent jobs that we were going to produce for our 4.9 million dollars over a four year period wasn't enough for them. Let me say that I support Triumph funding the FSU Marine Lab to study the declining oyster populations. Theirs is one of the few proposals that comply with the original guidelines of using oil spill money to help the bay, rather than develop jobs that had nothing to do with the inflicted environmental damage.

But when I asked Triumph's economist, Dr. Rick Harper, how he justified an \$8 million grant that only employed seven permanent scientists, with the remaining employees being post doctorate fellows, graduate research assistants, technicians and local people in temporary positions, he exploded, "How dare you compare your tiny, piddling, insignificant Gulf Specimen, to the great and powerful Florida State University, who is going to restore the oyster population, and bring back the health of Apalachicola Bay, which will bring billions into the economy."

I reminded him that we developed the fishery for rock shrimp and bulldozer lobsters in the 1970's and the cannonball jellyfish industry in the 90's which put millions into the local economy. I also reiterated that we supplied the National Cancer Institute with marine life that helped develop anti-cancer and anti-Alzheimer drugs, and that we provide marine life to over 1300 scientific and educational institutions which have resulted in over 500 scientific publications. But nothing I could say or do would make any difference. Dr. Harper insisted that it was all about the numbers, and it didn't matter that the FSU Center for Economic Forecasting, and the well-known economist Dr. Leonard Elzie, helped us prepare our application and projections.

Triumph says it wants to generate jobs, but they refused to consider that over the past 56 year of continuous operation, we have a proven track record of getting our volunteers, interns and former employee's good paying jobs, which we supported with stacks of letters and testimonials. Triumph claims they support education, yet they have chosen to disregard the fact that over 20,000 students from 250 regional schools routinely come to Gulf Specimen on field trips. They ignored the fact that Joel Sartore of National Geographic's PhotoArk declared that Gulf Specimen is a world class environmental education center and has photographed several hundred marine invertebrates and fish at our facility.

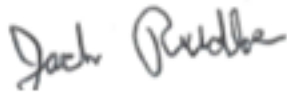
I was told that the Board thinks Gulf Specimen lacks a public purpose and funding it would only benefit the Rudloe family. If the thousands of children visiting and learning at our laboratory, our sea turtle conservation programs, and the work we do in environmental education isn't a public purpose, what is? I am proud of the fact that we have built our organization out of nothing, with little funding from anyone, but we need funds to advance, and to meet the goals that Triumph espouses. I complained on the Triumph's meeting on June 20, 2019 at the Wakulla County School Board, that they had led us led astray with their false encouragement of asking us, and others, to submit Committee's a full proposal, when in fact they had no intention of funding us. Triumph was collecting applications simply to provide cover for their organization. While it appears that it was a fair and equitable process, that they were

selecting proposals from a pool, they were in reality simply using our proposals to pad the pool so they could select their favorite organizations.

I wasn't the only one fed up with their bait and switch tactics. Escambia County School Board turned down their \$3.1 million grant for technology, which they had spent a year developing and was told they were going to be funded. The school board had signed off and Triumph added new conditions, not discussed before, at the meeting. "It's just not the way Escambia County School District does business," Michelle Taylor, director of the county's workforce education program, told the Triumph board on June 20. "We negotiated. We had a contract. I'm sorry. If you're going to add things constantly, how can anyone operate in an agency where you make changes at will? That's just not how we do business."

She had the guts to walk out on the committee. I think the tax payers of this state should do likewise. And all those who have been jerked around by Triumph Gulf Coast should join together in a class action lawsuit against them.

Jack Rudloe



Jack Rudloe
President
Gulf Specimen Marine Laboratories, Inc.
P.O.Box 237
222 Clark Drive
Panacea, Florida 32346
PH: 850-984-5297
FAX:850-984-5233
Website: www.gulfspecimen.org
Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/GulfSpecimenAquarium/>