

Elise Bennett: As I was reading it, the first thing I was thinking is, this is what we have been saying from the start.

And I just thought, you know, thorough planning—that is what these environmental laws that we were trying to enforce and still are trying to enforce are all about. It's just common sense to plan before you move forward. And while this report was more focused on fiscal efficiency and effectiveness, it really does extend in terms of all kinds of other waste, including the waste of our clean water and our public lands and our biodiversity that supports our livelihood here in Florida .

**Meghan Bowman: I spoke to the report author Heather McLeod, and she said the detention center in South Florida was state run. How does that impact the case?**

Elise Bennett: That is something else I noticed was the description in this document of exactly what the relationships were between DHS and ICE and the state of Florida, and I think you know, even if we look at the facts that are in this report, I'm not sure that it fully clarifies.

On page nine, it says ICE also did not enter into any agreement or contract authorizing the operation of this detention facility in the Everglades. And I thought what was interesting about that. I had two observations. The first one is it specifies ICE didn't enter an agreement. That's very specific, and it doesn't rule out what the evidence we've uncovered shows, which is that Secretary Noem's office, Department of Homeland Security, was working directly with the Florida Attorney General's Office and the Florida Department of Emergency Management, and making these deals to make this facility run, just because ICE, a subsidiary of DHS, didn't enter a formal contract, which is how I read this report, doesn't mean that there wasn't an agreement at the higher levels.

So, to me, you know, I don't know that this report really, you know, ends the conversation on what happened, and I also strongly believe that there is still more evidence to uncover to truly understand how this dastardly project came to be. This entire facility was stood up through opacity and obfuscation, moving quickly, hiding information about what was happening, you know, and frankly trying to get ahead of the courts.

**Meghan Bowman: So we see the report found there wasn't enough planning. A lot of money was spent and ultimately wasted. Along with that, Alligator Alcatraz was the sole recipient of the FEMA grant through a partnership with DHS does that make a difference at all?**

Elise Bennett: To make it clear at this point, we know now it is a federally funded project, and so I think that is important to highlight. I think the fact that the development of this program intended solely to fund Florida. The fact that that began as early as April 2025 is really interesting to me as well. We knew that there were conversations going on before mid June when Florida and DHS started standing up this facility, but April is quite a you know that is quite early, and I think is also evidence that there were conversations about this facility long before June. There probably is evidence of what they were agreeing to do, what they were, how they were going to carry this out, because ultimately at the end of the day, the purpose of this facility was to further federal immigration policy. So I find that really interesting, and it says to us that there is potentially months worth of evidence that we're going to want to see to understand how this project came to be, and that will also inform the court's understanding of the federal government's role in this project, which unquestionably was outsized.

And then one other thought. The fact that later they asked to add on Baker Correctional Institution. I am very interested to figure out when that was and to put that on the timeline, because I think one thing we have definitely seen with this project is as soon as we filed our challenge for failure to comply with federal laws, that's when we began to see a backtracking, a rewriting, a reframing of what this project was, who was in charge. You know, when they came out the gate, this is an ICE facility. This is DHS's facility. We're partnering with Florida. We're going to pay for it all. As soon as our case was filed, suddenly, no, no, this is the state of Florida's facility. Florida could use it for anything. They don't have to use it for immigration. And I think, you know at the end of the day, once we have all of the evidence before us, what we're going to see is that is just not true.

**Meghan Bowman: Yeah, at least a billion dollars went towards building, operating, and then taking down the detention center, and still more to come because they have a lot of people to continue to pay. If that money, instead of building the detention center, was put into say Everglades restoration, what kind of a difference could that have on the region? Just to**

**kind of put it into perspective, what could money like that do for the region?**

Elise Bennett: It would be earth shattering. It would make such a huge difference. And I was actually thinking of it. You know, endangered species are on the front of mind right now and in the news. And I was thinking about if that kind of money was put towards species conservation and landscape recovery. I mean, it would. I mean, we could take species off the endangered and threatened species list at light speed.

So many of our environmental problems come from a lack of funding and staff support, and to think that instead of this money going to something as worthwhile as that, that supports the fabric of life that keeps all of us healthy and happy, and that makes Florida and the United States such a beautiful place to live. If we were spending billions of dollars on that, you know, our lives would be better. But instead, it's going into the pockets of these contractors to provide, you know, services in a place where there never, ever, ever should have been a prison.

**Meghan Bowman: All right, November 3, the election is coming up. Donald's and Jolly are both running for governor. As you know, this facility was sort of DeSantis's kind of pet project, right? Donald's has voiced on record his support for the detention center. Depending on what happens, if it's a jolly win or a Donald's win, do you think the change in administration could kind of tip the scales in the case at all, or or not really?**

Elise Bennett: The center as a 501(c)(3), we can't opine on the election itself. But I can say this, I do think Florida's environment is a critical issue here in the state. People care so deeply about it. We can point to so many things that say that people understand and care about the environment here, and so I think it is critical issue. And my hope would be that people pay very close attention to the details, not just the broad promises, not I love the trees, but actually what candidates are going to do. I think if folks you know keep those issues in mind, Florida could go in a much better direction, frankly.