

Miami Herald

Citizens needs independent watchdog

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The readers' forum

Citizens needs independent watchdog

Gov. Rick Scott was correct to recommend an Inspector General for Citizens management and internal affairs.

Chief Financial Officer Jeff Atwater was also on the mark requesting that an independent Inspector General report directly to the Financial Services Commission (FSC), which is composed of Cabinet members and the governor.

In his letter to Gov. Scott, Atwater acknowledged the segment of the market Citizens occupies, including “policy and claims administration to bond financing,” and he succinctly sums up what’s at stake if Citizens isn’t aptly overseen.

“Citizens stakeholders have a right to know that the resources of the corporation are being deployed appropriately, and that the management team conducts itself in a responsible manner. This can best be achieved by our direct oversight of an independent Inspector General.”

It is for these reasons that the Citizens Inspector General, the watchdog, should also be charged to keep an eye on external threats; the ones that may be costing stakeholders hundreds of millions more than bar dancing and hotel room upgrades by employees.

A blog that I write that can be found at <http://johnsonstrategiesllc.com> has exposed how much litigation is filed against our state insurer by only a dozen law firms. It provides information that begs for more public scrutiny — the kind that only the governor, Atwater and the entire Cabinet can provide. Ask yourself how much of Citizens’ surplus is being depleted?

Are private insurers swarmed by lawyers in this way?

And, what about the involvement of public adjusters and their connection with these same law firms? Citizens has reams of data showing how much they may be costing Floridians in the form of assessments and higher premiums as well.

Whether it’s driven by law firms, public adjusters or employees, Citizens’ costs matter, and whatever drives them needs to be fully explored by an Inspector General.

After all, as Atwater said in his letter to Gov. Scott, Citizens’ stakeholders have a right to know.

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