

Lobbying for Public Education

BY CAROL LERNER, POPS CHAIR

Four members of Protect Our Public Schools (POPS) Manasota spent all of Tuesday, March 12 intensely lobbying members of the Florida legislature urging them to pull back from making twin catastrophic decisions to both further privatize and militarize public education in Florida by passing two sets of bills, one that would create a direct voucher program and the other that would allow the arming of classroom teachers. The POPS activists urged pro-public education legislators to launch the fight of their life against these bills.

Florida Senate Bill 7070 and its House companion bill 7075, both authorize a direct voucher program funded out of general revenue. The proposed voucher program is called the Family Empowerment Scholarship program and is very similar to the Opportunity Scholarship Program passed by the Florida legislature in 1999 under the leadership of then Gov. Jeb Bush and declared unconstitutional by a district judge in 2000 and then by the Florida Supreme Court in 2006. The current bills, with the House version being larger and more draconian, could take as much as \$2-billion out of the education budget over 10 years and would fund so-called scholarships for families with incomes as high as nearly \$100k per year. Close to 80% of the private schools taking vouchers are religious schools, some of them fundamentalist religious schools that teach creationism and deny science. Governor DeSantis has made it clear that passing a voucher bill is a top priority and the Education Commissioner Richard

Corcoran had made it abundantly clear that he is on board with his earlier comments that “all of education should be voucherized.” With the legislative outcome pretty much sewn up now that both bills were voted out of committee with a large margin, including two Democrats in the House Education Committee in favor and one abstaining, the only obstacle to implementation could be the courts but with DeSantis’ recent picks for the Florida Supreme Court where he replaced 3 liberal judges who had aged-out with three conservative judges, the final outcome is pretty much assured.

The Senate legislation (7070) is also part of a larger omnibus bill, parts of which are positive, like the expansion of Community Partnership Schools and other parts that should be defeated like the teacher bonus bill, an improvement over the past bill that based the bonus on SAT and ACT scores, but a bonus bill rather than a permanent increase in the salary of all educators with a return to the step system and full tenure rights.



POPS members joined UU Justice and Indivisible members from around the state for an orientation prior to lobbying their legislators. Photo credit: Carol Lerner

The other bill of concern is Senate Bill 7030 (with no House companion bill at the time of this writing) the School Safety and Security Bill which will put guns in the hands of classroom teachers after a short training. In Senate hearings, Sen. Bill Montford (D-Tallahassee) warned that this bill shifts the “mission of public education from being one of teaching to one of “law enforcement.” A top school security expert, Curt S. Lavarello told a recent POPS forum on Guns and Schools: One Year After Parkland, that the idea of arming teachers is ludicrous and dangerous. He cited a study of police officers in New York City that showed between

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Bay Vision: Show Us the Money

BY CATHY ANTUNES

<https://thedetail.net>

When it comes to achieving a big goal, good intentions are not enough. Commitment is essential. Commitment is what separates doers from dreamers. Planning for the City of Sarasota’s future Bayfront Park - the public’s 53 waterfront acres which include the greening of the Van Wezel parking lot - has now moved beyond the “vision” stage into the “make it happen” stage. Historically, this is where big plans in Sarasota can go very wrong.

We’ve seen big promises when it comes to public-private partnerships before.

The Benderson Rowing Park non-profit, SANCA (Southwest Aquatic Nature Center Association), said

they would raise \$22 million to construct a boathouse, grandstand and finish tower in time for the 2017 World Rowing Championships at the rowing park. Instead of SANCA raising that \$22 million, a second non-profit, the Benderson Foundation, funded the \$5 million finish tower just in time for the event. The rowing park still lacks a boathouse and grandstand.

In 2009, as part of their stadium deal, the Orioles promised to raise \$10 million to construct a Cal Ripken Youth Academy out at Twin Lakes Park. This was the sweetener, the game-changing project that was going to “re-invent spring training”. Kids playing with the pros, a great economic engine that would fuel our local economy! Today there is no Cal Ripken Youth Academy. Taxpayers funded the stadium but didn’t get the baseball academy they were promised in return.

Vision is great, but without a commitment vision doesn’t materialize. Commitments which have teeth are SMART - Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-Bound. Both the rowing park and Cal Ripken Youth Academy were promises, not commitments. The contracts regarding both had no teeth. Promises made were not enforceable.

Enter the Bayfront Park Conservancy agreement. A 53 acre bayfront park is a great idea. Estimates for the cost of the envisioned Bayfront Park - with softened shoreline, transformation of the Van Wezel parking lot into green space and a new performing arts hall - are up to half a billion, or \$500 million dollars. Love the vision. But in ceding



control or management of the public’s 53 acres to a private conservancy, the contract currently being hammered out between the BPC and the City of Sarasota should answer the fundamental question: Why does the City need the BPC? What tangible value are they bringing to the table? That value - which would include a commitment to effective fundraising - must be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound. Right now it isn’t. Among other problems, there is no dollar amount specified that the BPC will bring to the table, and no associated deadline.

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Detert Calls for Redistricting before 2020 Census

BY RACHEL BROWN HACKNEY,
EDITOR & PUBLISHER

SarasotaNewsLeader.com

The last time the Sarasota County Commission adjusted the boundaries of the five districts of its members was in June 2011, in response to the findings of the 2010 U.S. Census.

This week, Commissioner Nancy Detert suggested that the board not wait until the data come in from the 2020 Census to modify the districts again. Her reason? The Single-Member District Charter amendment that won approval of voters on Nov. 6, 2018.

Beginning with the 2020 County Commission elections — which will occur before the next Census figures are final — a voter will be able to cast ballots only for County Commission candidates who live in the same district within which the voter resides. The process will be the same for primaries as for the general election.

Previously, in a General Election, any voter could cast a ballot for a commission candidate in each district race, regardless of where the voter or the candidate lived.

Sarasota Alliance for Fair Elections (SAFE) conducted a citizen-initiated petition drive to gain enough voter signatures to place the proposed Charter amendment on the Nov. 6, 2018 General Election Ballot. The Single-Member District measure won approval of 59.84% of the voters who marked the question on their ballots, Sarasota County Supervisor of Elections Office records show.

Detert, Commissioner Michael Moran and Chair Charles Hines all were elected in November 2016 to four-year terms. Hines must step down in 2020 because of term limits. However, Detert and Moran will be eligible to run again. Detert, who lives in Venice, represents District 3; Moran, who lives in Sarasota, represents District 1.

On Feb. 26, Detert told her colleagues, “We should probably look at redistricting our own districts, just because of the balance in population. There’s a pretty noticeable disparity.”

Even though redistricting will occur in the state after the next Census has been completed, she continued, “I don’t think that we legally need to wait ... It’s just something that I feel we need to do, just so that we all serve as close to an equal [number] of people as we can.”

Hines then asked County Attorney Stephen DeMarsh about the authority the Sarasota County Charter gives the board in regard to redistricting. “The commission can redistrict whenever it wants,” DeMarsh replied, though it must do so in response to U.S. Census results.

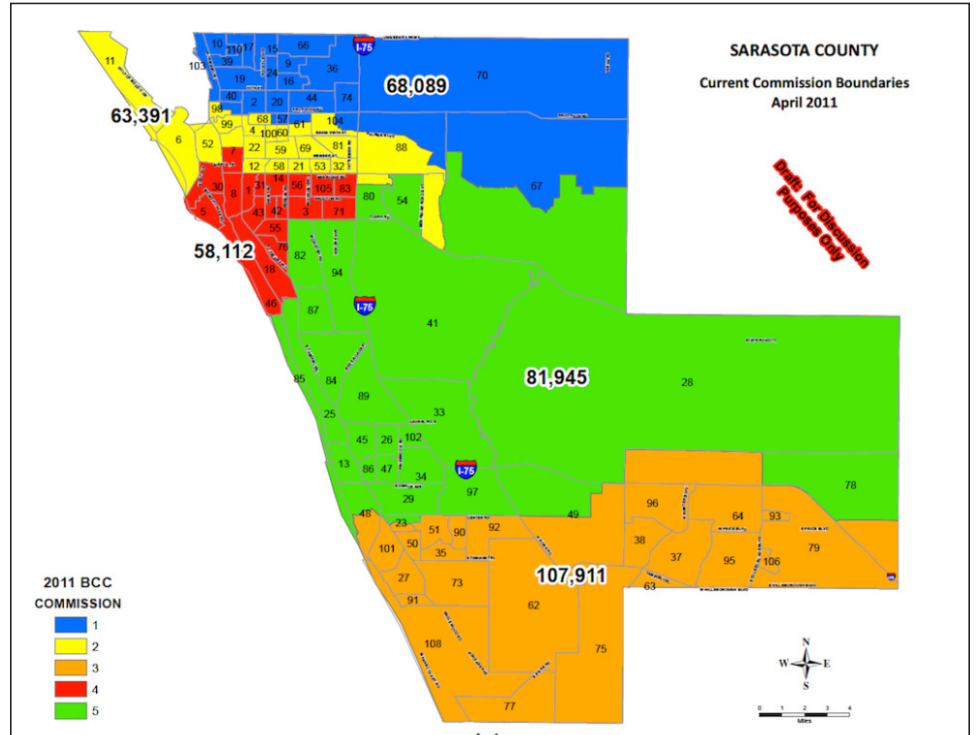
Hines then asked that staff look into how long the process would take, as well as the expense and “the best time to do it.”

In response to a Sarasota News Leader question, county Media Relations Officer Drew Winchester wrote in a Feb. 28 email that the last time the County Commission approved redistricting was on June 8, 2011. The board conducted the second of two required public hearings that day.

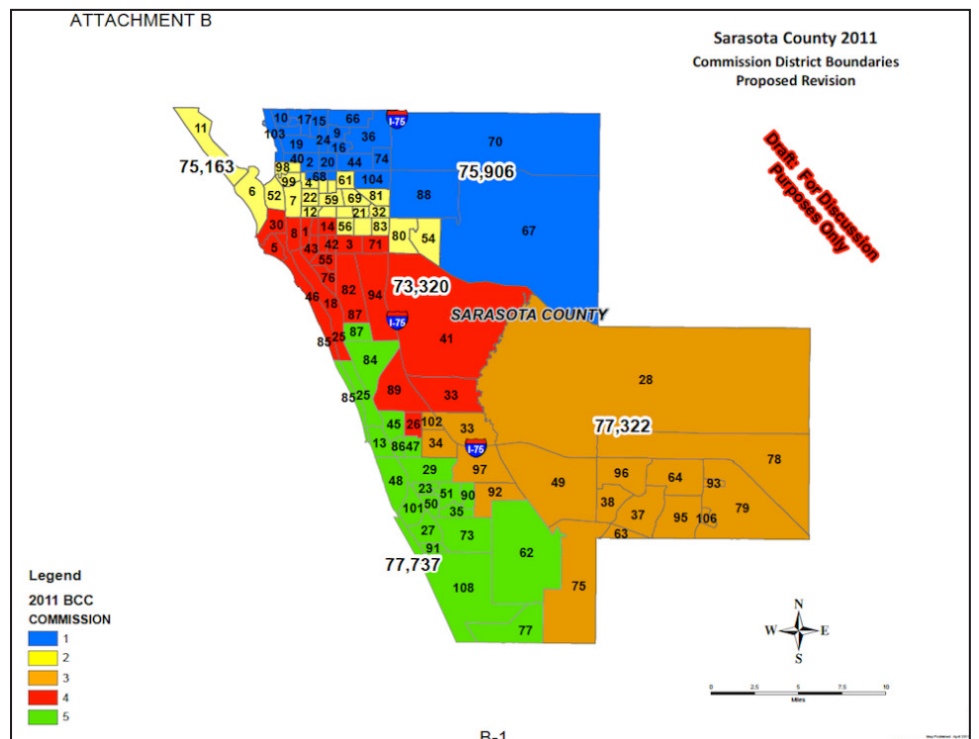
This is the graphic the County Commission considered in June 2011 for the revision of its district boundaries before it redrew them. Image courtesy Sarasota County.

Winchester provided a map of the population of each of the five districts in April 2011. He was not able to give the News Leader current population data in time for the publication deadline. However, on Feb. 5, in response to a News Leader question, Rachel Denton, communications and voter outreach manager for the Sarasota County Supervisor of Elections Office, provided the following figures for the number of voters in each commission district:

- County Commission District 1: 57,353.
- County Commission District 2: 61,755.
- County Commission District 3: 66,030.
- County Commission District 4: 64,238.
- County Commission District 5: 73,769.



Map 1: County Commission Boundaries prior to redistricting in 2011.



Map 2: County Commission boundaries following redistricting in 2011.



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Implementing Ranked Choice Voting in Sarasota

BY DIANE DESEMBERG

In 2007, Sarasota voters passed a ballot initiative concerning the election of Sarasota City Commissioners. 77.6% of the voters favored eliminating the extra runoff election and using a single instant runoff instead. We now call such a method of voting Ranked Choice Voting. That was over ten years ago, and I have yet to cast my vote for City Commissioner using ranked choice voting (RCV).

Many of us in Sarasota were looking forward to designating our first, second, and third choices in a City Commission race. It seemed more efficient than holding two elections and also allowed voters to express their choice with far greater precision. Sarasota would be using a system that would provide relief from the spoiler effect that upsets many of our state and federal elections. For candidates, it promised even more. It is hard enough work to raise the money needed to run a campaign and spend untold hours knocking on doors to introduce yourself. But to have to do it twice is daunting for many candidates. All in all, there was lots of excitement in the air as voters looked forward to the first RCV election. We are all still holding our breath waiting, eleven years later.

So what's the hold up? RCV was not immediately implemented, because our voting equipment could not handle an RCV election. However, in 2015, Sarasota County updated our voting systems to use equipment that is now RCV-compatible. Not only that, the State of Maine recently completed the first statewide RCV elections using the same equipment that we use in Sarasota. So, the fundamental equipment issue has been addressed. But there are still a few bureaucratic details left to iron out.

The State of Florida is the final arbiter concerning voting systems. They set up the requirements that must be met, test voting systems, and issue the final certification. To date, the Secretary of State's office has been unwilling to clearly state that a ranked choice voting system would meet with its approval. It has not issued a set of testing guidelines for an RCV voting system. In line with that, no voting system specifically designated

Sarasota City Commission Flavors			
Rank flavors in order of choice	1st Choice	2nd Choice	3rd Choice
Mint Chocolate Chip	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Chocolate Almond Swirl	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Honey Vanilla	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

for RCV has been submitted to the State for certification. So we are hovering somewhere in nowhereland with respect to the State of Florida.

Fortunately, in Florida, municipalities have the power to define their local election practices, as long as they don't run afoul of Florida's Constitutional stipulations. The voters have passed a charter amendment outlining the process of electing the City Commissioners. So, what is left to do? The Sarasota City Commission must pass an ordinance that provides specific direction for ballot and recount procedures. The ordinance would lay out ballot instructions and design guidelines for RCV ballots. Since Florida recount regulations do not effectively mesh with ranked Choice Voting, the ordinance would need to include an RCV recount provision to add to the rules already in place at the State level. This ordinance need only be passed by a majority vote of the City Commission.

A last decision that must be made prior to the implementation of RCV in Sarasota is the actual method of tabulating the final winner of an RCV election. Vote tabulation is more complicated than the current process and may involve multiple rounds of vote counting. It can be done manually as they have done in the City of Minneapolis, using people and spreadsheets. It can be done by a software module developed by the voting equipment manufacturer as they have done in the State of Maine. It can be done by an independent stand-alone module created by an independent organization. Or, as a retired software developer, I could sit down tomorrow and write a quick script to do the job. Although I officially retract that last offer; it is now time to

move forward with one of the other options.

RCV has some distinct advantages over the runoff elections in use in Sarasota today. With RCV, a voter can vote for their favorite candidate as their first choice, and vote for a candidate that is more likely to win as their second choice. If their first choice doesn't have enough support, their vote goes to their second choice. It is already a proven method for choosing local government officials in twelve cities in the U.S. As many as nine cities will use RCV for the first time in 2019. In Maine, the voters are choosing their congressional representatives using RCV. Over fifty colleges and universities in the United States use RCV to elect some or all student government positions. And internationally, RCV is used in about fifteen countries. Is this the best system going? To answer that question, voters need to use different voting methods and compare how well they work. In Sarasota, voters have chosen to use ranked choice voting to conduct City Commission elections. It's time to honor the voters' wishes and start using ranked choice voting.

To let your City Commissioners know that it's time to implement Ranked Choice Voting, send an email to commissioners@sarasotagov.com.



RCV supporters appeared before the City Commission on January 16, 2018 to urge them to implement the Charter Amendment which passed in 2007.

What is a "Stand Down?"

Stand Downs are one day events providing supplies and services to homeless Veterans, such as food, shelter, clothing, health screenings and Veterans Affairs benefits counseling.



Veterans can also receive referrals to other assistance such as health care, housing, employment, substance use treatment, mental health counseling and other events coordinated with local VA Medical Centers and other providers.

FLVCS is a co-sponsor of the annual Sarasota "Stand Down" for our Veterans.

WHERE: Sarasota Fairgrounds
WHEN: 13 April, 2019, 8:00AM



Monthly meetings are second Mondays at 7:00PM at the Waldemere Firehouse, 2nd floor meeting room

Florida Veterans for Common Sense, Inc. is a non-partisan/non-profit 501(c)(4) corporation. Dues are 45.00 annually. Contact FLVeterans@aol.com.

Overview of the 2019 Legislative Session

Around 3,000 bills were filed at the start of the Florida Legislative Session. They include everything from ending a ban on smokable medical marijuana (HB7015/SB0182) to a bill prohibiting local governments from restricting a resident's ability to plant vegetable gardens on their property (HB0145/SB 82). Both of these bills have moved quickly through the legislature, with the Governor already signing HB7015/SB0182. But many of the proposed bills will never make it through committees, let alone to the Florida House and Senate floors for debate and vote.

The Florida Legislature is only constitutionally obligated to pass only one bill each session -- the budget. Governor DeSantis has proposed a \$91.3 billion budget for the fiscal year that starts July 1, as he seeks to increase money for education and water-quality projects and trim taxes. But the Governor's proposal is only a starting point for lawmakers, who will have their own priorities for state funding.

Anyone can follow a bill's progress through the Florida House and Senate websites. Each site has a tracking system, so you can get updates on multiple bills at once. In most cases, an issue needs to have a bill in the Florida House and a similar or identical bill in the Florida Senate in order to make any progress toward passage.

Here are some bills or issues you should pay attention to during this year's legislative session.

EDUCATION/SCHOOL SAFETY

Governor DeSantis and Senate leaders have outlined proposals that could lead to a major expansion of school choice, including the creation of a voucher-type program that would be directly funded with tax dollars. There is also a proposal to expand the school 'guardian' program to allow trained classroom teachers to be armed. Learn more in Carol Lerner's article in this edition of Critical Times.

SB 7070/HB 7075 School Choice (General Bill by Senate Education Committee/Rep. Jennifer Sullivan)

This bill pertains to various existing voucher programs, including creating a new one entitled the Family Empowerment Scholarship Program. Passage of this bill will greatly expand "scholarships" and increases eligibility to 300%

of the Federal Poverty Level for 2019-2020, increasing to 375% by 2022-2023. To put that into perspective, a family of four with an annual income of \$97,000 would now be considered in need and be eligible for a voucher.

SB 7030 - School Safety and Security -- This bill is commonly known as the "Guardian" bill and intends to arm teachers. Last Session a version of this bill passed but stated that teachers who "exclusively perform classroom duties" are ineligible to participate. The current version of SB 7030 eliminates that clause, thus allowing teachers to carry a gun into the classroom.

ENVIRONMENT

The environment is finally getting some attention from the legislature after algae blooms and ride tide impacted so many of our waterways and coastal areas last year. Governor DeSantis has proposed a \$625 million package that addresses Everglades Restoration and other water-related issues. Senator Joe Gruters has proposed a bill to fine municipal utilities for sewage spills, charging them \$1 for each gallon spilled or forcing them to spend \$2 on improving infrastructure. Rep. Will Robinson has proposed HB 85 that would require septic tanks to be inspected every five year (Sen. Gruters has sponsored the Senate version of this bill). You can read more about a local bill being proposed by State Rep. Margaret Good in this edition of the Critical Times.

HB 1291/SB 1762, introduced by Anna Eskamani in the House and Jose Rodriguez in the Senate directs the Office of Energy within the state Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to create a unified plan to generate 100 percent of Florida's energy from renewable sources by 2050.

LOCAL CONTROL

A legislative priority for many local governments, especially in charter counties like Sarasota, is to preserve 'home rule' – the ability of local government to make decisions that affect the people in their jurisdiction. The number of pre-emption bills filed in the 2019 legislative session is quite extensive. One such measure — House Bill 3, offered by state Rep. Michael Grant, R-Port Charlotte — has local governments particularly perturbed. Grant's bill

would prohibit local governments from enacting or imposing new regulations on businesses after July 1, 2019, unless the local governing body can publicly justify such requirements are essential to protect public health, safety, or welfare; that the regulations do not "adversely affect the availability of the business' services to the public"; and that the "least restrictive and most cost-effective regulatory scheme is being used." You can see a full summary of all the bills with municipal impact that have been filed as of March 15, 2019 at the Florida League of Cities website here: <https://www.floridaleagueofcities.com/advocacy/legislative-bill-summaries>.

Other bills making their way through the legislature include:

Dignity for Incarcerated Women Act (HB49/SB332) - Provides incarcerated women with necessary feminine hygiene products and restricts male correctional facility employees from conducting pat-downs, cavity searches and entering changing rooms or bathrooms.

Sanctuary Cities (CS/SB 168)

Whether a city or a county is a "sanctuary city" is largely up to interpretation. Gov. DeSantis made cracking down on illegal immigration and sanctuary cities a campaign promise.

Texting while driving (CS/SB 76)

Right now, texting while driving is a secondary offense in Florida. That means someone is cited for a traffic violation, and they were texting at the time of the violation, they can be cited for this too. This bill would make texting a primary traffic violation.

Tort Reform (HB 17)

Florida lawmakers passed sweeping changes to tort reform in 2003 that capped personal injury and wrongful death damages at \$1 million. The Florida Supreme Court invalidated that law in 2017. The court said the caps on non-economic damages in cases where malpractice resulted in death violated equal-protection rights, and that there was no proof that the caps actually reduced malpractice insurance rates. But now that Gov. DeSantis has remade the court with three new Supreme Court justices, lawmakers are trying again.

The Florida Flag Fish Act HB 737

**BY SEAN PATTON,
ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTANT
AND BIOLOGIST
www.stockingsavvy.com**

Margaret Good, one of our Florida House Representatives, has sponsored HB 737, a water quality bill based on Multimodal Biological Control. So what is Multimodal Biological Control and how does this impact homeowners?

Imagine you have a new development and a retention pond is dug behind your house, this is intended to store, slow, and filter stormwater while providing habitat to animals as a mitigation from environmental damage to the original property. These ponds are commonly known to be filled with invasive plants, nutrients, and algae that in order to look good require extensive herbicide use and maintenance. Herbicides kill the algae and often the invertebrates, fish, and beneficial plants present as well. The now decaying algae and nutrients then wash out into the bay where inshore

nutrient pollution can make Red Tide worse. Not to mention recurring harmful freshwater algae blooms, herbicide resistant algae, lack of usable habitat, poor water quality, increased maintenance costs, poor property values, and numerous other flaws with current herbicide focused management.

So what happens if you use a variety of native fish, invertebrates, and plants to target algae everywhere it grows in the pond? This has been shown to be more effective than any single biological control as the fish target different areas and compete with one another. You can even extend beyond just controlling algae and target midge flies, floating weeds, and submersed vegetation. One algae eating fish, the Florida Flag Fish is native only to Florida, has red and white stripes with a blue spot resembling our flag and is the face of the bill and its namesake, the Florida Flag Fish act. Nothing like fighting Red Tide with patriotic fish!

This is where the bill comes in, it will require developed areas to implement habitat restoration

to fix many of the problems that we currently use herbicide for. This will improve water quality, provide habitat, reduce maintenance, improve fishing and property values, and reduce erosion. The best part is the effects are permanent and the stocked animals will continue eating algae and keeping the pond clean and then feeding wading birds and otters. Should this method not be enough for things such as Hydrilla, a virulent invasive weed with no native herbivores then we use harvesting, biological controls, and herbicides. This bill is about using herbicides as a last resort not a first one.



Editorial: A Progressive Path Forward for Florida

BY MARK FERRULO, PROGRESS FLORIDA

For more than two decades, Florida's legislative and executive branches have been run by political leadership that worships at the altar of big money campaign contributions. They have pushed an agenda gutting local control of policy-making, gifting tax breaks to out-of-state corporations, rolling back investments in our neighborhood public schools, and eviscerating protections for consumers, working families and the environment. Enough. On the first day of the 2019 Florida legislative session, progressive lawmakers and advocates unveiled the "Sunrise Agenda", a bold path forward designed to benefit all Floridians – not just the powerful and politically connected.

The Sunrise Agenda recognizes that the focus of our state government must be on the people who make Florida work every day: people like our teachers, retirees, nurses, and small business owners.

There are five basic pillars of the Sunrise Agenda: our economy, our health, our students, our environment, and our people. SiX, the State Innovation Exchange, worked with progressive partners and public interest-minded legislators to craft the agenda. Taken together, the Sunrise Agenda is the foundation for a progressive platform that will build a Florida that works for every Floridian.

Florida's economy is doing great for some and not so great for many. The Sunrise Agenda calls for creating good jobs that support families, expanding opportunities, and ensuring we grow a fair and equitable economy for everyone. That's why we believe it's time to address low, stagnant wages and ensure equal pay for equal work. With Florida's growing housing crisis, it's critical that lawmakers stop raiding the affordable housing

trust fund. The Sunrise Agenda supports working families by ending unnecessary, dubious corporate tax breaks, and calls for building a world class, modern public transit system.

No matter where you live or what your income, every Floridian deserves the opportunity for a healthy life. The single most effective policy lawmakers could enact this year to increase access to health care



Rich Templin, Legislative and Political Director of the Florida AFL-CIO, speaks about the Sunrise Agenda's economic policies at a press conference at the Capitol.

is to expand Medicaid to working Floridians that currently fall into the coverage gap. Supporters of the Sunrise Agenda will champion efforts to stand up to powerful insurance and prescription drug lobbies and tackle our opioid crisis head-on. Additionally, we must promote reproductive freedom and trust women to make personal health care decisions including whether to have an abortion.

All our children, regardless of their zip code, deserve to have access to a world-class public education. The Sunrise Agenda looks to achieve this by raising teacher pay to the national average,

increasing the number of school nurses to keep students healthy, and expanding early childhood programs to ensure all children are ready for school.

Floridians share a special responsibility to protect our environment. Our health and economy are inextricably linked to clean water, clean air, and wild places. The Sunrise Agenda prioritizes combating climate change in order to protect Florida's beaches, coasts, and oceans, our natural treasures on the front lines of a warming planet. We must also ensure polluters pay to clean up their pollution and are no longer the ones writing the rules.

The Sunrise Agenda supports expanding nondiscrimination protections in the workplace, housing, and public accommodations to include LGBT Floridians. The agenda supports modernizing and better funding our election systems to make sure every eligible voter can register to vote without barriers and every ballot cast is counted. Our platform includes support for common sense gun violence prevention reforms, like universal background checks.

A growing prison population is economically unsustainable and morally unacceptable. We must reduce Florida's prison population and address racial disparities in our criminal justice system. The Sunrise Agenda also calls for a path to accessible education, work, family reunification, and citizenship for immigrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers.

It's time for a new day and a new direction for the Sunshine State. The Sunrise Agenda puts Floridians first, prioritizing our health, our economy, our students, our environment and our people. Let's do the work together now so we can wake up together to this Sunrise someday soon. You can learn more about the Sunrise Agenda by going to www.FLSunriseAgenda.com.

Lobbying for Public Education

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1998 and 2006, the average hit rate was 18 percent for officers in a gunfight.

Wearing bright red shirts that read "Defend Public Education," the POPS team was highly visible as it walked the halls of the statehouse. Our first stop was at Senator Joe Gruters office (R-Sarasota). As we entered the room, we ran smack up against a huge poster with individual photos of all the undocumented immigrants in Sarasota who had been deported by ICE. Sen. Gruters was very proud of this poster and his anti-Sanctuary City bill and seemed incredulous that we were critical of his stance. On education, Sen. Gruters said that he was a supporter of public education but also thought school choice including vouchers was a positive development and would be supporting the legislation. We then stopped at the office of Sen. Manny Diaz (R-Hialeah), head of the Senate Education Committee and the architect of SB 7070. He was not available to meet with us but his legislative aide talked to us, and while generally cordial, he was defensive about our concern with Sen. Diaz' conflicts of interest with Academica, the giant for-profit charter management company that employs Diaz as a six-figure paid administrator.

After a cordial meeting with an aide to Senate President Bill Galvano (R-Bradenton), we left for the House side of the statehouse where we met first with Rep. Margaret Good (D-Sarasota). She was excited to see us and told us that she missed being on the House Education Committee and had been removed from it by House Speaker Jose Oliva (R-Hialeah). The House Education Committee has largely been stacked with extreme supporters of education

privatization, she said.

We then decided to focus on legislators who have taken progressive stances on educational legislation. These legislators have co-sponsored bills that would strengthen public education in Florida, including HB 121 and SB 152 that would set a minimum salary of \$50,000 for instructional personnel as well as HB 1089 and SB 584 that would prohibit charter schools from operating as, or being operated by, a for-profit corporation or a for-profit educational management organization. First on our list was Rep. Carlos Guillermo Smith (D-Winter Park) but as he was detained in a committee hearing we had a good talk with a young intern. Rep. Smith is a co-sponsor of the bill to give Florida teachers a solid pay boost. Next we met with two strong public education advocates Rep. Joy Goff-Marcil (D-Maitland) and Rep. Anna Eskamani (D-Orlando). Both of these women were elected in 2018 and both are co-sponsors of HB 1089 that will essentially ban for-profit charter management companies. All of these legislators as well as Rep. Good were outraged about the idea of teachers carrying concealed weapons.



POPS members Rhana Bazzini, Fran Tulski, Robin Williams, Rep. Eskamani, Carol Lerner and Sharron Howard (UU Justice). Photo credit: Carol Lerner

Overall, the day was exhilarating but simultaneously depressing. It really became clear how much the Florida government is rigged. On the education bills, it is clear that everyone is on lockstep to fast track the legislation through as they have done with every other privatization-oriented bill. The outcome for public education this year does not look good, but there is hope in the long term. The people of Florida haven't given up. We were struck about how jam-packed the hallways and elevators were with real people fighting for real issues such as fire fighters lobbying for decent equipment to prevent cancer and other life threatening conditions, former felons wanting to make sure that their recently won right to vote is upheld and retired teachers like us, wanting to make sure that our grandchildren and their children can attend quality public schools.

Fogartyville

community media & arts center

Food and beverages are available
West Entrance at
525 Kumquat Court, Sarasota
For Tickets Call
1-800-838-3006

8pm Friday, April 5 \$12adv/\$15door

Revivalists with rock'n'roll hearts, GJSB's hard driving rhythms + catchy Old-Time tunes, sprinkled with gems from the Grateful Dead songbook, are sure to get audiences up and dancing.



7pm Sunday, April 7 \$18adv/\$23door

Danny Bacher

QUINTET

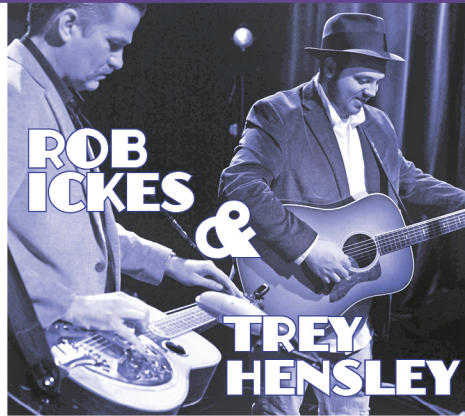


A fresh-face on the jazz landscape. His clean, crisp delivery is reminiscent of the true greats in entertainment. Special Guest **James Suggs** on trumpet

12pm-8pm Tuesday, April 9 **FREE CONE DAY!**
In Benefit for WSLR! **BEN&JERRY'S** APRIL 9, 2019 • 12-8... **St. Armand's Circle**

7pm Thursday, April 11 \$20adv/\$25door

Two uniquely gifted musicians, Rob Ickes is a Master of the resonator guitar, and Trey Hensley is a Flat-Pickin' PHENOM and singer; they will melt your hearts with Newgrass, Trads and originals. This show is bound to be a revelation to traditional music fans on several counts.



8pm Friday, April 12, \$20adv/\$25door

APPALACHIAN ROAD SHOW



Two of Bluegrass music's greatest talents, Banjoist & singer Barry Abernathy (Mountain Heart) and Mandolin master/vocalist, Newgrass legend Darrell Webb formed this new musical venture to honor the legends, lore, traditions, and the rich musical history of the Appalachian region.

8pm Saturday, April 13, \$20adv/\$25door

CAROL WELSMAN

Fluent in the Romantic languages, this World-class Jazz vocalist/pianist serves up a mix of American Songbook classics and original compositions in a style that ranges from sensuous & warm to infectiously energetic.



7pm Sunday, April 14 \$15adv/\$20door



ONE FOR THE FOXES

Dave Curley (RUNA), Tadhg Ó Meachair (Goitse) & Joanna Hyde (The Hydes) form an exciting & dynamic Trans-Atlantic trio that presents a rousing blend of Trad-Irish and American folk music, having already won over audiences on both sides of the ocean.

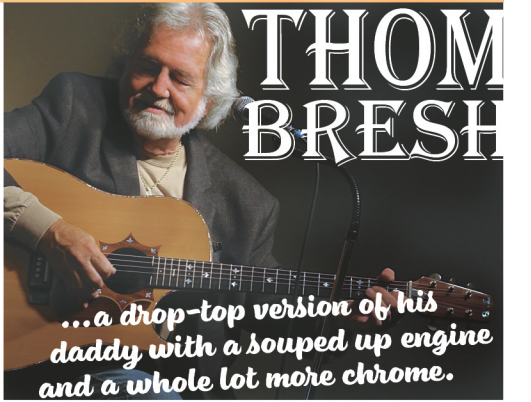
8pm Friday, April 19 \$12adv/\$15door



A comic genius, gifted pianist & American musicologist who defies easy classification. A 'Victor Borge of the blues', and the host of WMNF's *Rhythm Revival*, The Rev. is sure to take you on a musical journey with his blues trio.

8pm Saturday, April 20 \$15adv/\$20door

The Son of Country Legend, Merle Travis, Thom says, "The guitar is my first love, my partner in life. We grew up together and we'll most likely die together. Everything I've accomplished was with it. Every great moment in my career was because of it. Remember my heritage. To me, playing the guitar is not about licks & speed. That's only for the insiders. Playing it makes music and music is an emotion. Emotions are stimulated by feelings and sounds.. That works on everybody. When the sound and feel are right... Wow!"



7pm Wednesday, April 24 \$15adv/\$20door



Resonant Rogues

Steam-Punked Neo-Traditionalists, their carpet bags are full of crafty fresh songs from a variety of vintage folk styles, featuring vocal harmonies accompanied by a full band- accordion, guitar, banjo, fiddle, and upright bass. These are the NEW ROARING '20s.

7:30pm Thursday, May 2 \$15adv/\$20door



PHOEBE HUNT & THE GATHERERS

One of Rolling Stone's 'Top 10 New Country Artists you Need to Know' An accomplished songwriter skilled at taking seemingly disparate elements and pulling them together in a dazzling kaleidoscope of lush, coherent sounds & rhythmic patterns.

8pm Saturday, May 4 \$12adv/\$15door

PLENA ADENTRO

Born in the barrios of Puerto Rico, Plena's explosive rhythm is created by the 'Panderos' — handheld drums of different sizes/pitches and the Güiro, a ridged gourd played with a stick.



▶ Check-out our YouTube.com channel for highlights of our previous great shows. Look for "WSLR Fogartyville"

8pm Friday, May 10 \$20adv/\$25door

8pm Saturday, June 1 \$12adv/\$15door

RENESITO AVICH & FRIENDS*



"Mama ellos son de la Loma"
A native of Santiago, Cuba, Renesito is an award-winning singer, guitarist and percussionist. By age 15 he was touring all across Europe. More recently he was the '18 Florida Folklife Artist-in-Residence. The band is Avich on guitar/tres guitar/vocals, Mauricio Rodriguez on bass, Yassel Pupo on piano, Patricio Chino Diaz on percussion, and Otto D. Ferreiro on vocals.
*Wear your dancing shoes.

GRANT PEEPLES

A self-described "tree-hugger that watches NASCAR, he's a Buddhist with a gun under-the-seat," Grant Peeples is known for axe-sharp socio-political tunes, raucous down-right-irreverent humor and heart-gigging ballads.



+PASSERINE

Passerine's "AmeriKindGrass" style offers a fresh take on trad-folk, rock & bluegrass; as well as a repertoire of originals that range from sweet ballads to the edgier side of contemporary Americana.

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WEEKLY PROGRAM GUIDE

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Americana · Folk · Cajun · Acoustic · Bluegrass
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News · Public Affairs
World · Spiritual

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
12 mid.		Beats, Rhymes & Life Radio DJ Cellus	Lumpytunes! The Head Lump, Rob Demperio	Music Automated playlist	New Radio	Open A.I.R. Matt Dakan	
1 a.m.							New Radio
2 a.m.	Music Automated playlist	Midnight Special Syndicated	Strange Currency Syndicated	Upfront Soul Syndicated	Music Automated playlist		
3 a.m.							
4 a.m.		Letters to Washington Syndicated	Truthdig Radio Syndicated	A Way With Words Syndicated	Economic Update Richard Wolff Latin Waves		
5 a.m.	Thom Hartmann Show Syndicated	Thom Hartmann Show Syndicated	Thom Hartmann Show Syndicated	Thom Hartmann Show Syndicated	Thom Hartmann Show Syndicated	Music Automated playlist	
6 a.m.							Music Automated playlist
7 a.m.							
8 a.m.	Blues to Bluegrass John D.	Soul School Troy Nichols	Generation X Alecia Harper Music with a Purpose Pat Monahan	Eclectic Blender Dave Pedersen	Latin Explosion Juan Montenegro	Celtic Dew Dave Wertman	Wings of the Heart Salima Rael & Carol Rosenbaum
9 a.m.	Rootstock Radio Critical Times Week in Review	Background Briefing Ian Masters (Syndicated)	Peace & Justice Report Tom Walker & Bob Connors	The Detail Cathy Antunes	Surreal News Lew Lorini & Steve Norris	Juke In the Back Syndicated	Alternative Radio Syndicated
10 a.m.							
11 a.m.	Music of the World Marco Ciceron	Nuestra Musica Mariano Afro Cuban Jazz Frankie Piniero	Vibrational Journeys Perette Cannady	Metropics Carlos Pagan	Complex Waveforms Mark Zampella	Ralph Nader Radio Syndicated	Law and Disorder Syndicated
NOON						The Detail (Rebroadcast) Cathy Antunes	Folk Alley Elena See Syndicated
1 p.m.	Democracy Now! Amy Goodman (Syndicated)	Democracy Now! Amy Goodman (Syndicated)	Democracy Now! Amy Goodman (Syndicated)	Democracy Now! Amy Goodman (Syndicated)	Democracy Now! Amy Goodman (Syndicated)	BreakBeat Max New Radio Laila	
2 p.m.	Thom Hartmann Show Syndicated	Thom Hartmann Show Syndicated	Thom Hartmann Show Syndicated	Thom Hartmann Show Syndicated	Thom Hartmann Show Syndicated	De Mush Doctor's Caribbean Rhythms De Mush Doctor	Dadee-O's Collector Corner Dadee-O
3 p.m.	Positive Friction John Haupt	Big Willy's Juke Joint Big Willy Progressive Palace Phil G	Fur Peace Ranch Jorma Kaukonen Global Village Syndicated	Dave's Day Off Dave Beaton (ALTERNATE WEEKS)	Basement Boxes Purple Mike Electricity Susan Runyan	Down The Road Syndicated Second Wind Seany G	
4 p.m.							Bop & Beyond Bill Ewell Velvet Hammer Blues Beth Hammer
5 p.m.	Music Museum Ed Foster	Tuesday Drive Home David Young	Hawaii Bob & Company Hawaii Bob Hot Rod Rock Sven	Ted's Head Ted	Friday Happy Hour Bartender Tommy D.		
6 p.m.						All Mixed Up Syndicated	Global Village Syndicated
7 p.m.	TownTalk TampaBay Sharon Folta Capitol Update State News	Micro-Macro-Enviro-Radio Sea Change Radio / Capitol Update	Talk Nation TUC Radio / Capitol Update	Current Tides Betty & Friends Economic Update Richard Wolff	Critical Times Week in Review Counterspin/Cannabis Connection		
8 p.m.	Yesterday's Dead Today Mark Binder	The Root Cellar Roger & Peter	Acoustic Waves James Hawkins Folk Show Syndicated	Retro Cocktail Hour Syndicated Velvet Radio Elissa Bello	Ripper's Rarities Russ Yodice	Indie-licious Shelia Jane, Vin	Ju Ju Jazz Dr. Nik
9 p.m.							
10 p.m.	Indigenous Sounds White Horse	Moptops and the King Syndicated Music Lagniappe Syndicated	Radio RESET Sharon Folta	Full Moon Hacksaw Syndicated In Transition The 801	Another Late Night Katy Dirty Ice Cream Truck Luke Rosebaro	The Big Picture DJ Smooth E	Love Notes Jessica Nikole
11 p.m.							
12 mid.	Beats, Rhymes & Life DJ Cellus	Lumpytunes! The Head Lump, Rob Demperio	Music Automated playlist	New Radio	Open A.I.R. Matt Dakan & Jamiel Livingston	New Radio	Music Automated playlist

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Potential 2020 Florida Ballot Measures

Despite the hurdles, citizen-initiated constitutional amendments are becoming a popular way to pass reforms that the State Legislature fails to address. Two that were successful in 2018 were Amendment 4 that restored voting rights to ex-offenders and Amendment 13 that banned greyhound racing in Florida. The number of signatures required for a citizen-initiated constitutional amendment is equal to 8 percent of the votes cast in the preceding presidential election. Florida also has a signature distribution

requirement, which requires that signatures equaling at least 8 percent of the district-wide vote in the last presidential election be collected from at least half (14) of the state's 27 congressional districts. Petitions are allowed to circulate for an indefinite period of time, but signatures are valid for a two-year period of time; therefore, proponents must collect all of their signatures for verification within a two-year period. Signatures must be verified by February 1 of the general election year the initiative aims to appear on the

ballot. Since state law gives the secretary of state 30 days to verify signatures, petitioners need to submit signatures on or before January 1, 2020, to guarantee that an initiative qualifies for the ballot in 2020. The signature requirement for 2020 measures is 766,200. You can see a list of the proposed ballot initiatives that have been filed below.

The state legislature can also place constitutional amendments on the ballot. They can do that this legislative session which runs through May 3, 2019 or in the 2020 legislative session.

PROPOSED BALLOT INITIATIVE TITLE	DESCRIPTION	SPONSOR
\$15 Minimum Wage Initiative	Increases minimum wage to \$15 by 2026	Florida For A Fair Wage
Medical Marijuana for Mental Health Disorders Initiative	Allows medical marijuana for mental health disorders	Peaceful Minds for Medical Marijuana
Ban on Military-Style Firearms and Disqualifications for Firearm Possession Initiative	Bans military-style firearms and provides disqualifications for firearm possession	Stop the Killing Committee
Medical Marijuana Plants Initiative	Allows medical marijuana patients or caregivers to grow up to nine mature marijuana plants	Peaceful Minds for Medical Marijuana
Top-Two Open Primary for State and Federal Office Initiative	Establishes a top-two open primary system for state and federal elections	Florida Fair and Open Primaries
Open Primaries Initiative	Allows all registered voters to vote in primary elections regardless of party affiliation, prohibits public resources to be used on primary elections unless everyone can vote	Florida Fair and Open Primaries
Voting and Signing Petitions by Internet Initiative	Allows Florida voters to vote or sign petitions online through secure websites provided by the Florida Division of Elections	Florida For Change
Reentry Program and Supervised Release for Criminal Offenders Initiative	Directs the Florida Commission on Offender Review to develop a reentry program for criminal offenders and place qualifying offenders on supervised release	Floridians for Redeemable People
Changes to Energy Market Initiative	Requires the Florida Legislature to adopt laws providing for changes to energy markets	Citizens for Energy Choices
Citizen Requirement for Voting Initiative	Specifies that only U.S. citizens can vote in federal, state, local, or school elections	Florida Citizen Voters
Acknowledgement of God Pledge in Schools Initiative	Provides for a daily pledge in public schools for the purpose of acknowledging the role of God in America's founding	Pledge of Acknowledgement
Medicaid Expansion Initiative	Expands Medicaid to individuals over age 18 and under age 65 with incomes at or below 138 percent of the federal poverty level	Florida Decides Healthcare
Ban on Semiautomatic Rifles and Shotguns Initiative	Bans possession of semiautomatic rifles and shotguns (defined).	Ban Assault Weapons Now
Community Service In Lieu of Traffic and Parking Ticket Fines Initiative	Allows drivers to complete community service at any nonprofit organization instead of paying fines associated with traffic or parking tickets	Drivers Ready To Improve, Vote and Empower (D.R.I.V.E.)
Firearm Background Checks and Waiting Periods Initiative	Extends the current three-day waiting period for purchase of handguns to all firearms; requires background checks performed by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement	Floridians for Universal Background Checks

Table courtesy of Ballotpedia.com

Morgan Spearheads Attempt to Raise Minimum Wage

BY ALEXANDRA CONTE

The current minimum wage in Florida is \$8.46 per hour which is \$1.21 higher than the national average. Florida for a Fair Wage is attempting to amend the Florida constitution so that the minimum wage will be \$15 by 2026. For the issue to be placed on the 2020 ballot, Florida for a Fair Wage needs to collect 766,200 signatures from Florida voters.

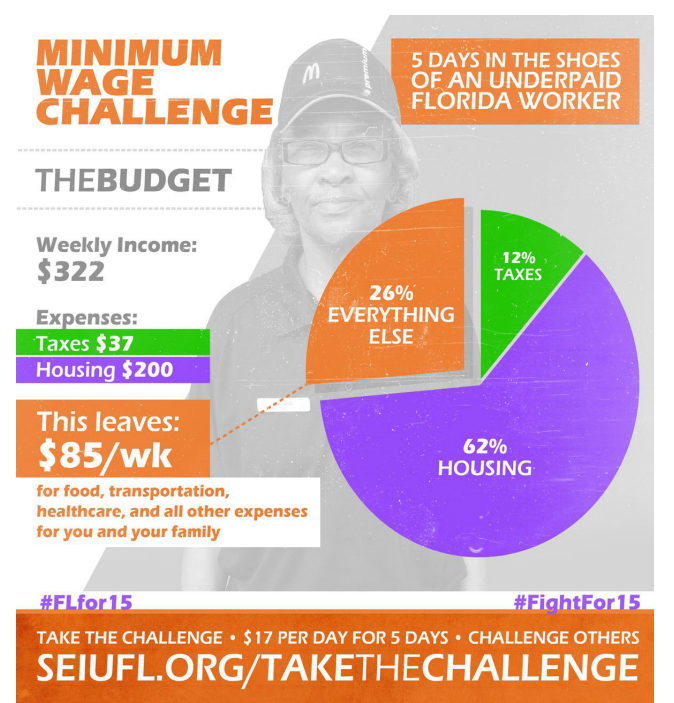
John Morgan, an Orlando attorney, serves as the chairperson for Florida for a Fair Wage. Morgan has claimed to have obtained over 120,000 signatures as of Jan. 2019. In the past, Morgan worked to get medical marijuana legalized, which was successful in 2016.

"This is something that has been a passion for me for a long time," Morgan said in a news conference that the Orlando Sentinel recorded. "Most people live below poverty even though they work. ... Food, medicine, water, shelter, clothing – we believe those things give people dignity. At the firm of Morgan & Morgan, we believe a living wage of \$15 an hour does all of that."

According to Data USA, 14.7 percent of Floridians live below the poverty rate. Florida's poverty rate is ranked above the national poverty rate of 14 percent. Demographically, the most common racial and ethnic groups living below the poverty line in Florida are White, Latino, and Black or African American. The largest demographic group in poverty are females in the 25 to 34 age bracket. Households in Florida have a median annual income of \$50,860, which is less than the median annual income in the United States.

In 2016, Democratic state Rep. Victor Torres sponsored a bill in the Florida House to raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour. Like similar measures in the past, the bill failed to pass. As of 2019, Florida For a Fair Wage is attempting to amend Section 24 of Article X in the Florida constitution. This would change the constitution so that the minimum wage would increase to \$10.00 per hour by 2021, and then by \$1.00 each following year on September 30th, until the minimum wage reaches \$15.00 per hour in 2026. This increase is incremental to ensure that there is a smooth transition.

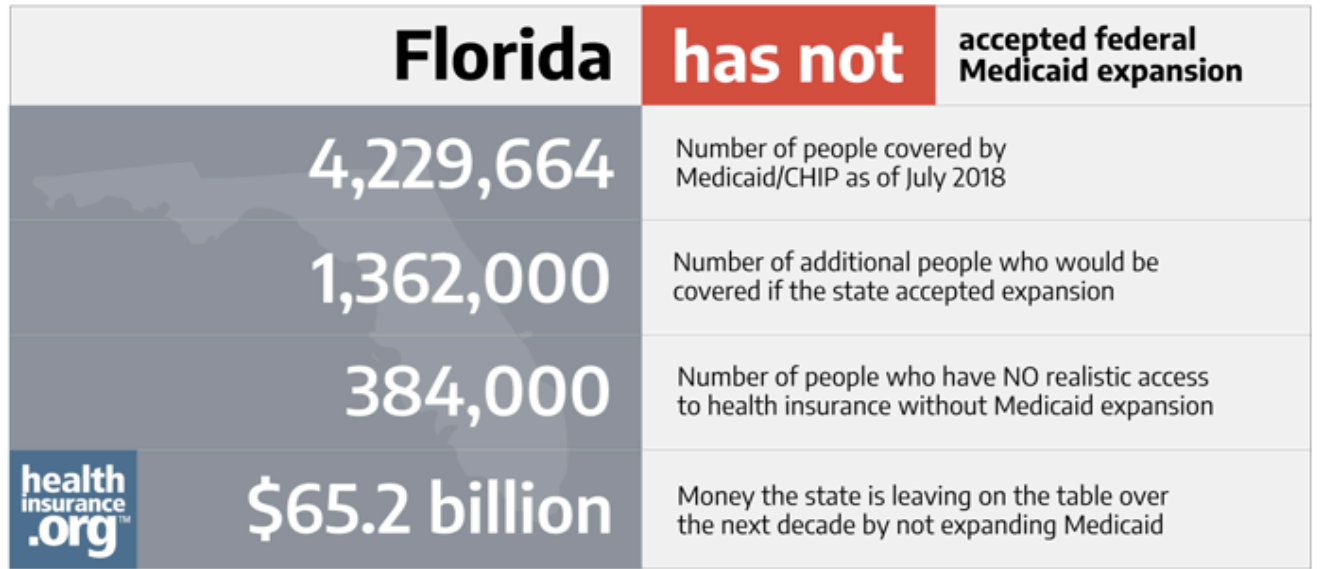
The Orlando Sentinel reports that Morgan made a \$154,230 contribution from his law firm towards the initiative. Overall, the firm has given \$478,158 to the committee since Dec. of 2018.



Medicaid Expansion

Polls show that over 60% of Floridians support Medicaid Expansion, but past Governors and legislatures have failed to act, and so far, all signs point to the newly elected Florida officials taking the same position. An expansion would drop Florida's uninsured rate from 15.7% to approximately 11% percent, according to the nonpartisan Urban Institute. A coalition of groups is working to put the issue on the ballot in 2020.

Medicaid is the largest government health program, insuring at least 73 million low-income Americans. Half of them are children. To date, 33 states and the District of Columbia have expanded it under the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Before that law, Medicaid was generally limited to children, sometimes their parents, pregnant women and people with disabilities. The ACA encouraged states to open the program to all Americans earning up to 138 percent of the poverty level (\$16,753 for an individual in 2018). The federal government is paying the bulk of the cost: 94 percent this year, but gradually dropping to 90 percent in 2020. States pay the rest.



Graphic courtesy of HealthInsurance.org

Republican leaders in Florida have cited various reasons for opposing this step. They say the state can't afford it. They assert that Florida can't trust the federal government to pay for at least 90 percent of costs for the newly eligible. They also argue that Medicaid coverage should not go to non-disabled

adults because the state is straining to cover children, pregnant women and people with disabilities.

Groups supporting Medicaid Expansion include Families USA, SEIU, Planned Parenthood, Organize Florida and Indivisible. To help with the effort, call community organizer Angie Nixon at 904-610-7103.

Changing Florida's Energy Market

BY JOHN JAMES WITTE

A proposed amendment to the Florida constitution may appear on the ballot in November of 2020, changing the way Florida residents' electricity bills look in the coming years. The measure, called the Florida Changes to the Energy Market Initiative by its advocates, would change Florida state policy regarding the solar energy in the state, eventually shifting the state's "wholesale and retail electricity markets [to] be fully competitive so that electricity customers are afforded meaningful choices among a wide variety of competing electricity providers." Of America's seven largest states, Florida is currently the only one that does not have an open energy market, instead allowing private energy companies like Florida Power & Light, Gulf Power, Duke Energy, and Tampa Electric Company to act as local monopolies.

Currently, the state of Florida designates anyone

who sells electricity to end-users as a "public utility", essentially making power purchase agreements (PPAs) illegal, and radically reducing the impetus for at-home users to gather their own solar electricity. Rather than directly restructuring the market, the constitutional amendment would require the Florida legislature to pass changes to the Florida energy market by 2025 that would prohibit the legal establishment of exclusive energy franchises or monopolies and regulate against deceptive or unfair practices. Ultimately, it would allow Florida residents to choose their own electricity providers, or give them more options for producing solar electricity themselves.

The organization pushing for the amendment, Citizens for Energy Choices, has gathered over 100,000 signatures in its effort to bring the issue to the ballot, and the initiative will be reviewed by the Florida supreme court in this year's session.



They argue that Florida's consistently high energy usage and over abundance of sunlight make it a natural location for a more dispersed energy market. By their estimates, Floridians could save roughly \$5 billion a year. Opponents of the amendment, however, claim that the unified nature of the current energy market, because of its lack of competition, allows for Florida energy companies to provide a more efficient and cost-effective infrastructure to their customers. While the CEC petition is currently ahead of schedule, the organization will need to gather 766,200 signatures to make the 2020 ballot. To learn more: <https://www.flenergychoice.com>.

Changing Florida's Closed Primary System

BY ISABELLA CIBELLI DU TERROIL

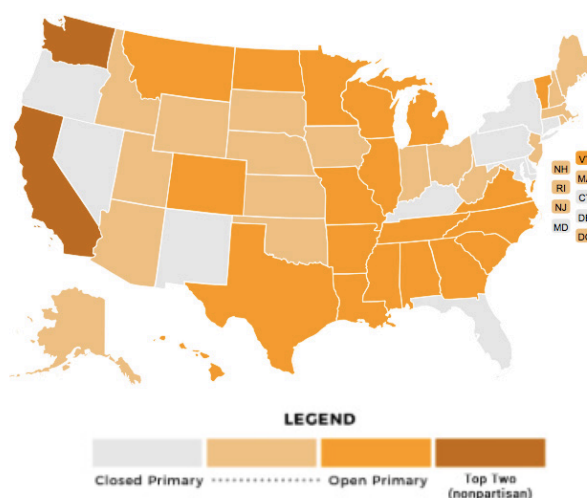
Florida currently operates under a closed primary system. However, there is a movement underway to open primaries led by the political committee, All Voters Vote. This initiative would allow all voters, regardless of party, to vote in primary elections for Congress, Governor, Cabinet Members, and the Legislature. The way the ballot initiative is written, all candidates for the same offices would appear on the same primary ballot and then, come November, the two candidates with the most votes would run against each other. Additionally, if 60 percent of voters approve the proposal, write-in candidates would no longer be able to close a primary.

Opening up primaries would be considerably destabilizing to the two party system. Both the state Republican and Democratic Party argue

against it. Opening primaries increases the political base, thus candidates will need even more money in order to appeal to a larger base. Furthermore, there are concerns that parties would try to game the system by 'party crashing'; or

making sure that the weaker candidate is elected by the opposite party in the primary.

Leaders and supporters of the All Voters Vote movement argue nevertheless that despite the problems this system could pose, it would ultimately foster a better political environment than the closed primary system is creating now. So many voters, especially youth, are excluded from the primary elections because of their desire to not affiliate with a political party. After primary elections, they are stuck with two choices, neither of whom they voted for nor desired, and thus they must either vote for a candidate that is not very appealing to them or skip voting altogether. In their thinking, the candidates who are ultimately elected are not ones who represent the people's interests, but rather the interests of less moderate party factions and special interest groups who effectively pay these candidates' way into positions of power. To learn more visit: <https://allvotersvote.org>.



This map shows whether states have open or closed primaries for Congressional and State Elections. Source: OpenPrimaries.org

Integrity 2020 - Many Important Elections Next Year

DAN LOBECK, PRESIDENT, CONTROL GROWTH NOW

In November 2018, the voters approved Single Member Districts for Sarasota County Commission elections. This major reform will give principled, grassroots candidates a chance against the big money developer machine. The cost to reach voters is cut by 80% and neighborhoods are empowered.

Next year, we have a shot at upending the developers' domination of County and City elections and policies, if we find and support good candidates. Control Growth Now is a nonpartisan organization, so we encourage both Republicans and Democrats, Independents and others, who stand for principle and sound policies, to take on the special interests and let the interests of all of us prevail.

This November, 2019 will provide an early showdown as a preview for 2020, with the election of three of the seven members of the Venice City Council. All will be open seats due to term limits, although departing Council member Bob Daniels is switching to run for the seat which also serves as Mayor. All three of the incumbents are very pro-developer, as is the current Council majority, so this election could return Venice to a controlled growth Council for the first time since 2010. A new group, Venice Tax Watch, will be working toward that end, as will Control Growth Now and others.

But 2020 will provide the big battleground.

Two more Venice City Council members will be up for election in November, 2020, sensible growth advocate Mitzie Fiedler and Charles Newsom, who usually sides with the developers.

Three of the five seats on the Sarasota City Commission will also be up (the single member district seats): the very pro-developer Liz Alpert; Willie Shaw, who has voted consistently for the public interest (with the exception of his first Lido Pavilion vote, which he sought to reverse) and Shelli Freeland Eddie, who has voted with the public more often than not but has several key votes before her prior to next year's election.

Biggest of all will be the three single-member district elections for Sarasota County Commission. We strongly hope incumbent Mike Moran meets his end, having alienated many east County voters with his support for a concrete crushing facility next to the Celery Fields and others with his reliable support for the developers' political machine. Already two candidates have shown interest, Republican Frank DiCicco, who ran a strong late race against Moran in 2016, and former Sarasota Mayor Fredd Atkins, who is a declared candidate as a Democrat.

Incumbent County Commissioner Nancy Detert (R) will also be up for election, in south County. It is not known whether developer Interests will put up an opponent due to her popularity and wide-name recognition from her many years of public service, which is why they supported her in 2016. However, Commissioner Detert has voted against the big developers on some key votes, so that remains to be seen.

The third County Commission seat, in mid to south County, is being vacated by term-limited Charles Hines, so it is an open seat. The rumored candidate of the development community is Planning Commissioner Ron Cutsinger (R). However, as to this seat and the others, it presently remains to be seen how the races will be affected by redistricting which the Commission has planned, which could be used to cut out some candidates' residences and include others.

Two more hot contests will be on the Sarasota County School Board. Eric Robinson, an insider who handles dark money PACs for several of the large developers, is up for reelection. So is Caroline Zucker, who will likely be targeted by development interests for defeat if she runs for reelection. Both are Republicans, although it is a nonpartisan election. If candidates beholding

to development interests take both seats, they will control the School Board and may eliminate school impact fees, which are already only at 25% of full funding, and there will be no chance of increasing them to meet the demands of rampant growth.

Five of the ten seats on the Sarasota County Charter Review Board will be up for election. Residents throughout the County will be eligible to run in these partisan elections, in which a candidate must reside in a district but is elected countywide. There is no filing fee or petition required to run. All five incumbents are Republicans. One, Donna Barcomb, is leaving the Board to run for State Legislature so at least District 2 will be an open seat. Pat Wayman in District 3 has generally voted with the public interest. While the others are a mixed bag, the worst Charter Review Board members are among the five who will not be up until 2022.

On the North Port City Commission, three seats will be up for election, including very pro-developer incumbent Vanessa Carusone. Three Longboat Key Town Commission seats will be up in March of 2020.



Dan Lobeck presented Kindra Muntz and Sura Kochman with Citizen of the Year Awards at Control Growth Now's Annual Picnic in March. Photo credit: Arlene Sweeting

Eight of the eleven Circuit Court Judges will be subject to possible election challenge. Although that has been rare in the past, a challenger upset an incumbent Circuit Court Judge here in 2018 so that could happen again. Also up for election in 2020 is one of the five County Court Judges (David Denkin).

The Sheriff, Tax Collector, Property Appraiser, Supervisor of Elections and Clerk of Court will be up, as well as the State Attorney and Public Defender, although history shows incumbents in those seats are often unopposed. All five of the area's State Legislators are up for election as well as State Senator Joe Gruters.

With the President of the United States also on the ballot, a high turnout can be expected in the general election, as well as perhaps in some primaries.

We hope that 2020 will be the year in which voters will face good choices among candidates for local office, including those who dare to stand for principle and integrity, particularly in the three single member district elections for Sarasota County Commission, as well as others.

Integrity 2020. Let's make a difference!

Bay Vision: Show Us the Money

Continued from pg. 1

Funding the ongoing costs of operation and maintenance of this new park will be critical to its financial sustainability and the financial health of the City of Sarasota. The annual operations and maintenance costs for the proposed park has been estimated at \$5-6 million dollars. While the agreement says the BPC will develop an operating and maintenance plan for each phase of the park, there is no commitment for the BPC to fund operations and maintenance. Why? This is a glaring omission.

While this vision began with an emphasis on philanthropic support, it has become clear that the lion's share of the project financing will come from public coffers. This relatively new clarity regarding reliance on public money is brought into focus by a contract that obligates the City financially, but fails to spell out

the financial commitment of the private sector. Come on people. We've been down this road before. Show us the money.

If the BPC is unable or unwilling to commit to fundraising and other performance benchmarks in a contract with the City of Sarasota, then such a contract likely won't serve the City's interests. Relinquishing control of 53 acres of waterfront land to a conservancy has to work for City residents. What's in it for us? The more specific the contract is about the City's obligations, and the more vague the contract is about the conservancy's obligations, the more reason there is to slow down. The City Commission has to take the time to do this right. The terms of the contract will come before the City Commission again at their regular meeting on April 15.

Editorial: Ban Conversion Therapy

JENNI CASALE, ACTION TOGETHER SUNCOAST

In January 2019, Ellen Page, guest of the Late Show with Stephen Colbert, gave one of the most emotional and impassioned “speeches” (pleas) regarding the treatment of LGBTQ citizens of this country. In particular, she called out Vice-president Mike Pence for his opposition to same-sex marriage and his support of conversion therapy. She said that “when you are in a position of power and you hate people, and you want to cause suffering to them, you go through the trouble, you spend your career trying to cause suffering, what do you think is going to happen? Kids are going to be abused and they are going to kill themselves.” Normally, the Late Show guests are upbeat, funny, and want to talk about their latest book or movie. Ellen took everyone, including Colbert, by surprise, but received enthusiastic support with many audience members standing in appreciation of her strength and passion.

A Bill to ban conversion therapy has been introduced in this year’s Florida legislative session. Several counties in Florida have already moved to ban this cruel and dangerous process. Surprisingly, the “therapy” is still legal in most states, so Florida would be a front-runner in this. I have no idea how it will fare in the upcoming legislative session, but just the fact that it is being proposed is a step in the right direction.

Conversion therapy (often linked with religious organizations and characterized as trying to “pray the gay away”), is the attempt to use psychological or spiritual interventions to alter an individual’s sexual orientation or gender identity. There is no reliable evidence that the process works, and most medical practitioners warn that conversion therapy is, at best, ineffective and, at worst, harmful. Nonetheless, there are still people who argue that a person can have their sexual orientation or gender identity changed through use of “therapy” such as nausea-inducing drugs or an electric shock coupled with same-sex erotic images. The drugs or electric shock would then be removed and the individual shown opposite-sex erotic images. Not surprisingly, these methods have been described by many as torture. Truthfully, I can’t imagine any parent being willing to subject their child to such agony, but they do. Hence, the need for the law protecting those kids.

Declaring that children should be supported rather than shamed, Sen. Jose Javier Rodriguez (D – Miami) filed bill SB 84 which would prohibit licensed mental health therapists and counselors from practicing or performing any form of conversion therapy on clients younger than 18 years of age. While I would love to see the practice outlawed for ANY age, this is at least a start. Presumably, someone over the age of 18 would be able to make their own decision and refuse any attempt to “convert” them. Unfortunately, there are adults who have felt so ashamed of what they have been told by people close to them is an aberration that they might be willing to try anything to feel “normal.” Even though “normal is exactly who they are already.

Many years ago, when I was just beginning to truly understand the prejudice and discrimination encountered by the LGBTQ community, I was given a book to read that shocked, angered, and enlightened me. It also gave me hope and strength to stand up as an ally and accept my friends and family whom many in society labeled as “deficient” or “abnormal.” The book was *Stranger at the Gate: to be Gay and Christian in America* by Mel White. The author was considered to be the darling of the religious right for many years and was a speechwriter for Oliver North and ghostwriter for Jerry Falwell. He counted as friends and co-workers such recognizable names as Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and Billy Graham. He was married and had kids. But throughout his life he knew, deep down, that something didn’t fit.

Stranger at the Gate chronicles White’s attempts to “fix” what he viewed was wrong with him, having been taught by his church that homosexuality was wrong and would doom him to Hell. He tried counseling, exorcism, prayer, and electric shock therapy. Through it all he was close to committing suicide. His story as he comes to terms with who he is and makes peace with his faith is an amazing story, even if you don’t believe in religion. What it showed me is that the prejudice and hate that are experienced by our fellow human beings who are

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gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, and transgendered is powerful and flies in the face of any moral code or religion that preaches acceptance and love. And it truly explains why LGBTQ youth have suicide rates that are up to 3 times higher than their heterosexual peers.

There are many resources out there for gaining and understanding of our LGBTQ brothers and sisters, neighbors, family members, and friends. Books, movies, TV shows – the possibilities are endless. I encourage everyone to find a way to open your heart in order to better understand. We can all be allies, and we can all support those around us who need us to fight for them. Right now, those of us who live in Florida can encourage our state legislators to pass Rodriguez’s bill and make “conversion therapy” illegal – at least for young people. Maybe we can eventually have it be illegal for any age.

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Calendar of Events

TUESDAY, APRIL 2, 6:30PM - IWW Film Screening: Norma Rae. Fogartyville, 525 Kumquat Ct, Sarasota.

WEDNESDAY APRIL 3, 2:00pm - League of Women Voters of Manatee County Board Meeting. The LWV Board will have a public meeting. For details, visit: www.lwvmanatee.org Manatee Central Library, 1301 1st Avenue West, Bradenton

FRIDAY APRIL 5, 11:30am-1:00pm - Project 180: Local Problem-Solving Courts. Three specialty court justices discuss existing programs at the Sarasota County Jail. Please RSVP by March 30; register on Eventbrite at <https://bit.ly/2S29mOT>. Michael's on East, 1212 South East Avenue, Sarasota

TUESDAY, APRIL 8, 7pm - AsoloRep Faces of Change - community documentary theater project based on themes in The Cake.

WEDNESDAY APRIL 10, 11:30am-1:00pm - Project 180: State Solutions, Ralph M. Diaz joins us to discuss the progressive opportunities in California State correctional prisons at present. Please RSVP by May 3rd; register on Eventbrite at <https://bit.ly/2S29mOT>. Michael's on East, 1212 South East Avenue, Sarasota

THURSDAY APRIL 11, 7:00pm-9:00pm - Red Tide & Green Slime, The Manatee-Sarasota Sierra Club will have its general meeting every second Tuesday of the month. Sarasota Garden Club, 1141 Boulevard of the Arts, Sarasota

TUESDAY, APRIL 16, 6:30pm - Conversation with Timothy Enos, Sarasota Schools Chief of Police. Fogartyville, 525 Kumquat Ct, Sarasota

TUESDAY APRIL 16, 10:00am-12:00pm, 2:00pm-4:00pm - Resilience Film Screening & Community Discussion - The film "Resilience" will be screened at two separate times followed by a community discussion on childhood stress and its impact on adult life. RSVP required through Kim.Findley@myffamilies.com. Morgan Center, 6207 West Prince Boulevard, North Port

TUESDAY APRIL 16, 10:00am-4:30pm - Government Operations (GO) Symposium, The city of Sarasota invites residents to register to hear presentations from a number of city officials. For information or to register for the event, visit scgov.net. Robert L. Taylor Community Center, 1845 34th Street, Sarasota

TUESDAY APRIL 16, 11:30am-3:00pm - Women Changing the Political Landscape - Dr. MacManus will speak on "Women Changing the Political Landscape." Please RSVP with payment by April 10th through rsvp@lwvsrq.org. Michael's on East, 1212 South East Street, Sarasota

TUESDAY APRIL 17, 10:00am-4:30pm - Government Operations (GO) Symposium, The city of Sarasota invites residents to register to hear presentations from a number of city officials. For information or to register for the event, visit scgov.net. Robert L. Taylor Community Center, 1845 34th Street, Sarasota

FRIDAY APRIL 19, 1:30pm-2:30pm - Citizens' Climate Lobby Meeting B, The Citizens' Climate Lobby Group will have its meeting. Unitarian Universalists Church of Venice, 1971 Pinebrook Road, Venice

FRIDAY APRIL 20, 8:00pm-10:00pm - Earth Day Celebration, The climate-concerned film "Paris to Pittsburgh" will be screened. RSVP on Eventbrite at www.eventbrite.com/e/earth-day-celebration-tickets-58507949853. Seafood Supreme, 1919 Dr. Martin Luther King Way, Sarasota

TUESDAY APRIL 23, 6:30pm-8:30pm - Pioneers of Climate Science, Jim Euchas will speak on the history of Climate Science. Fogartyville, 525 Kumquat Court, Sarasota

SATURDAY APRIL 27, 11:00am-2:00pm - League of Women Voters of Manatee Annual Meeting and Luncheon, The LWV Board will have a public meeting. For details, visit: www.lwvmanatee.org Bradenton Country Club, 4646 9th Avenue West, Bradenton

TUESDAY, APRIL 30, 6:30PM - Film: Fix It: Healthcare at the Tipping Point. Fogartyville, 525 Kumquat Court, Sarasota.

WEDNESDAY MAY 1, 2:00pm - League of Women Voters of Manatee 2020 planning, The LWV Board will have a public meeting. For details, visit: www.lwvmanatee.org Manatee Central Library, 1301 1st Avenue West, Bradenton

SATURDAY MAY 11, 12:30pm-1:30pm - Citizens' Climate Lobby Meeting B, The Citizens' Climate Lobby Group will have its meeting. North Sarasota Public Library, 2901 Newtown Boulevard, Sarasota

For a complete listing of events or to submit an event, visit www.CriticalTimes.org.

MONTHLY MEETINGS

The Nation Group meets the first Tuesday of every month North Sarasota Library, 2801 Newtown Boulevard, Sarasota.

Sierra Club - Manatee Conservation Committee Meeting, The Manatee Conservation Committee meets every second Monday of the month in the upstairs conference room of the Manatee Public Library, 1301 1st Avenue West, Bradenton

Sarasota County Council of Neighborhood Associations meets every second Monday.

Sarasota Garden Club, 1141 Boulevard of the Arts, Sarasota

Florida Veterans for Common Sense meets the second Monday of the month at the Waldemere Firehouse Community Room, 2070 Waldemere Street, Sarasota

Manatee-Sarasota Sierra Club meets the second Tuesday of the month. Sarasota Garden Club, 1141 Boulevard of the Arts, Sarasota

POPS, Leadership Team Meeting - Protect Our Public Schools (POPS) meets the third Tuesday of every month. North Sarasota Library Room #2, 2801 Newtown Boulevard, Sarasota

Newtown CHAT Regular Meeting meets on the third Tuesday of each month. North Sarasota Library, 2801 Newtown Boulevard, Sarasota

Sierra Club Sarasota Conservation Committee meets on the third Tuesday of every month. Please contact Gayle Reynolds at 941-587-9797. Lucky's Market, 3501 South Tamiami Trail, Sarasota

Coalition of City Neighborhood Associations (CCNA) meets the first Saturday of the month at the Waldemere Fire Station, 2070 Waldemere Street.

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