

SB 48 - A Dangerous New Direction for Education

EDITORIAL

BY CAROL M. LERNER AND ROBIN WILLIAMS, PROTECT OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS MANASOTA

The most dangerous piece of legislation in Florida's 20-year campaign to privatize public education, Senate Bill 48, is working its way through the Florida legislature. Sarasota School Board member Jane Goodwin calls it "the beginning of the end for public education." This free market-oriented legislation provides the mechanisms to break up education into tiny, individualized pieces competing with one another to upend and destroy Florida's public education system.

The 150-page bill, sponsored by Academia's Senator Manny Diaz (R-Hialeah), if enacted, will massively expand the number of students enrolled in educational saving accounts (ESA) from 20,000 to 220,000 students, 8% of all Florida students. It reorganizes the scholarship programs by merging five of the six programs and dividing them into two scholarship programs—one for students with disabilities and the other for regular educational students.

What is an educational savings account? An ESA is basically a bank account set up by the state where a predetermined amount of public funds is deposited. In Florida, the ESA can be accessed by parents who go to the "My Scholar Shop," an e-commerce website explicitly modeled on a combination of "Airbnb, Uber and Amazon."

Income eligibility increases under the bill. A family of four can make as much as \$80k—300% of the poverty level. The income ceiling could increase by as much as an astonishingly 25% per year, making eligibility universal within a few years.

Public education advocates are very concerned that the cost for the ESA scholarships, now reaching over \$1 billion, will be paid for, as the legislation stipulates, by taxpayers directly out of the education budget. "Every tax dollar spent on private schools and ESAs is a dollar that is not going to public schools," the Florida Education

Association stated.

Critics of ESAs point out that ESAs have few regulations and virtually no accountability. It is e-commerce algorithms that provide the little oversight ESAs have. Homeschooling, learning pods and micro-school are encouraged and publicly funded without any supervision. Frequent cases of fraud have been identified in states that use ESAs, including Florida. The profiteering risk is high as fly-by-night companies could enter the exchange as vendors wanting to make a quick buck. Even the oversight on Step Up for Students, the nonprofit agency that administers the scholarships, has been reduced to audits done every three years instead of yearly.

SB 48 is not just another voucher bill. It sets up the mechanism to abolish school districts, end elected school boards and eliminate teacher unions. The bill dumps



Senator Manny Diaz, Sponsor of SB48

continued on page 11

Join the 3rd Annual Compost-A-Thon

BY TRACIE TROXLER

"Grow, Eat, Compost, Repeat" is this year's theme for International Compost Awareness Week (ICAW) happening May 2-8, 2021. The nationwide compost awareness-building initiative is hosted by the Composting Research and Education Foundation. It's an effort that is intended to inspire composters of all scales to elevate awareness about the benefits of composting within their local communities.

This year, Sunshine Community Compost (SCC) will host our 3rd annual Compost-A-Thon as our local compost awareness week event. Compost-A-Thon is a week-long food scrap collection effort that engages as many people and groups in our region, to collect and deposit food scraps in over 20 regional drop-off stations so that the scraps can be transformed into valuable compost instead of being made into garbage at the landfill. The event demonstrates the potency of a

regional collective effort and also shows who is composting, how they are doing it and why.

Participating in Compost-A-Thon is easy. Simply register by May 1 and then collect household or group/business food scraps in a sealable container between May 2-8. You can use your own container or if need be, one can be provided. On May 8, all scraps are to be dropped off at select food scrap/compost drop-off sites. Larger businesses can pre-arrange for us to come pick them up. All scraps are weighed and the grand total of food scrap pounds diverted from the landfill will be reported on May 8th during a live virtual event. Prizes will be awarded May 8 for contests running through the week, including who can guess the grand total amount of food scraps collected during Compost-A-Thon. Virtual content to interact with each day of May 2-8 following the theme of "Grow, Eat, COMPOST, Repeat" will be available and the schedule posted in the upcoming weeks.

continued on page 2



TABLE OF CONTENTS

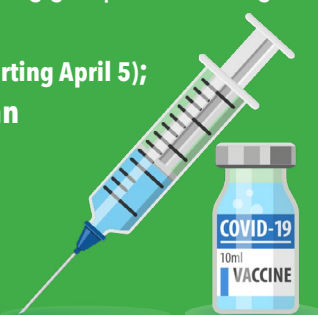
Arts & Racial Justice	Page 2
Youth Trauma Corps	Page 3
Earth Day Every Day	Page 4
Florida's Response to the Climate Crisis WSLR Program Schedule &	Page 5
Upcoming Events	Page 6-7
Brick by Brick Campaign	Page 8
New Local Leadership	Page 9
John Kirkley: The End of Public Education	Page 10
SB48 Analysis	Page 11
County Centennial	Page 12

COVID INFO

ALL PERSONS 40 YEARS OF AGE AND OLDER ARE ELIGIBLE TO RECEIVE THE FREE VACCINE IN FLORIDA

Florida has many sites providing COVID-19 vaccine free to residents. Use the vaccine finder - floridahealthcovid19.gov/vaccines/vaccine-locator/ to find a site near you. Supplies are limited and appointments may be required. Vaccines are free at all locations. The following groups are now eligible:

- **Persons 40 years of age and older (18 and older will be eligible starting April 5);**
- **Persons determined to be extremely vulnerable by a physician (form required);**
- **Health care workers with direct patient contact;**
- **Long-term care facility residents and staff.**



The Arts and Racial Justice

BY CLAIRE THOMAS

In a community where the arts are alive and thriving, Suncoast Black Arts Collaborative works to provide educational opportunities for Black students in the arts and make sure all artists receive all the recognition and appreciation they deserve in such a vibrant arts scene. The Suncoast Black Arts Collaborative organization partners with arts organizations across the area to pursue their mission of giving exposure to and creating visibility and opportunity for African American artists. Through collaborations and partnerships throughout the Suncoast area of Florida, this team has worked to give artists of African descent ample access to arts education and opportunity to have their art displayed and appreciated.

Michele Redwine has worked extensively in education and on boards in Sarasota supporting organizations' efforts of diversity and inclusion programming. She founded and formed Suncoast Black Arts Collaborative in 2017 to effect systemic change in the Suncoast area, and the organization is now working diligently to make

such change and support diverse cultures in the arts. Michele describes the mission of Suncoast Black Arts Collaborative as developing systemic change so "our arts and cultural organizations understand their future life has to be very inclusive of diversity and equity [which] includes employment and

structure of their organizations." The panel series, consisting of four sessions throughout this year, has opened a space for discussion on how arts organizations are taking action for diversity and equal opportunities for all. Two panel events in this series remain, and the next event on April 19 will



Calvin Alexander Ramsey Sr



Charlayne Hunter-Gault



Dorian Emerson Munroe



Sarah Ladipo Manyika



W. Paul Coates

focus on literary arts, media, and film surrounding the theme Our Journey Towards a More Perfect Union: Challenges and Rewards. Panelists are appearing on behalf of local organizations as well as organizations from the New York and Baltimore areas, featuring "people of color who have gone through in their career many, many challenges, and yet rewards," Michele described.

The final panel event, originally set to take place on May 10, has been postponed and will most likely take place in September. This final session of the Arts and Racial Justice series

structural development within organizations."

The organization is focused on growing through volunteers and upcoming programs, but the Arts and Racial Justice Panel series has given the organization a larger presence in the Suncoast community garnering audiences of about 400 people in the first two panel events in the series. With arts organizations across the Suncoast area represented from St. Petersburg to Venice, Michele describes the purpose of these panel events as being able "to allow opportunities for the leadership of these organizations to talk about what they are doing as it relates to diversity, equity and inclusion within programming and within the

will focus on arts in higher education. Michele explained the postponement is to spend time working with local superintendents and college presidents to establish the best structure for the panel. "There is a learning curve that we need to engage in. There have been some significant changes state-wide in terms of certification and accreditation, so we are going to take the time this summer to engage in some knowledge building," she explained.

For more information on this panel series and to sign up to attend the April 19 panel, visit suncoastblackartscollaborative.org and register for the Zoom event.

Join the 3rd Annual Compost-A-Thon *continued from page 1*

There are a lot of households and organizations that are working within their unique settings to support composting, but don't realize their efforts tie to a larger, local movement. This event is designed to bring more composters together while raising awareness and funds for our education and work trade programs. The food scrap/compost drop-off sites available on May 8th extend north to Palmetto, through east Bradenton and down to south Sarasota, including partner organizations in between. We'll even have a drop-off site stationed at the Fogartyville entrance from 9-10 a.m. on May 8th. Check out our website at sunshinecommunitycompost.org to register, see a map of compost drop-off stations, volunteer or become an event sponsor.

Sunshine Community Compost is part of a national committee for International Compost Awareness week, and has learned about a range of national ICAW initiatives this year. In California, they'll be tweeting over 100 legislators each day for policy change, in Minnesota they're hosting volunteer-engaged compost projects, in Michigan they are hosting outreach events. In Florida - specifically Sarasota/Manatee - we are hosting a Compost-A-Thon. We appreciate the "Grow, Eat, Compost, Repeat" theme this year which places composting in a holistic frame and within a web of relations. To connect in and join the efforts, visit us at sunshinecommunitycompost.org.



Critical Times is a publication of WSLR, Inc.

MISSION:

WSLR+Fogartyville is a center for creative expression and community engagement that amplifies the voices of our diverse community and promotes peace, sustainability, democracy and economic and social justice.

ADDRESS:

525 Kumquat Ct, Sarasota, FL 34236

CONTACT US:

(941) 894-6469

criticaltimesrq@gmail.com

www.CriticalTimes.org

Publisher: Arlene Sweeting

Layout: Mark Zampella, Rob Demperio

Contributing Writers: Andy Blanch, Danielle Campbell, Paula Colon, Omar Guerrero, Becca Hadwen, Susan Hicks, Coty Keller, Carol Lerner, Jasmyne Marie Prophet, Claire Thomas, Tracie Troxler, Robin Williams

Youth Trauma Leadership Corps Launched

BY ANDY BLANCH

Twenty local teens and young adults will soon be offering training, mentoring and coaching on how to respond to toxic stress and trauma. The Trauma Leadership Corps (TLC) is a joint project of SRQ Strong and Healthy Teens Coalition of Manatee County, supported through a grant from the Community Foundation of Sarasota County. TLC is based on the premise that people learn best from their peers, and reflects an understanding that youth leadership can transform society.

Dilan Desir is one of ten “young adult leaders” in the project. A Haitian-American, Dilan is currently a sophomore at State College of Florida Collegiate High School. He lived through the 2010 Haitian earthquake, which he says didn’t have a severe impact on him, although he does admit to being “deathly afraid of (earthquake prone) California.” Dilan notes that “Trauma has both biological . . . and socioecological implications. If someone is raised in an abusive household, for example, maybe their brain chemistry changes, I find that interesting. I find it equally interesting, what does that say about society as a whole? How do we perceive abusive households? How do we handle that?”

Noelle Bencie, a senior at St. Stephen’s Episcopal School, is a TLC “teen health educator.” She’s a varsity basketball player, a scholar at the Brain Health Institute, and worked with the Department of Education over the past year to help youth facing Covid-related mental health issues. She was born with a heart condition, which has contributed to her activism on health issues and also to a finely tuned awareness of her body. In her sophomore year, Noelle was diagnosed with a blood clotting disorder - just as she was starting to feel like she had come to terms with her physical vulnerability and was in control of her life. It was really hard, she noted, to “see the other kids playing (basketball) and having to sit on the sideline.” According to Noelle, “To solve issues physically, you have to make sure that the mental



Dilan Desir and Ermelia Constant are part of the Youth Trauma Leadership Team

side of the person is effectively combatted as well, because you can’t do anything if the patient isn’t healthy as a whole.”

Initial training and coaching will be provided by a team of youth from Hopeworks, a career development agency in Camden, New Jersey. Hopeworks helps youth 17-26 “recode their future” and break the cycle of violence and poverty. They have three business ventures – website development, GIS, and a Youth Healing Team. The Healing Team serves as the backbone of Camden’s trauma-informed community effort, and provides trauma training across the region. Having themselves gone through a multi-year process of trauma-informed organizational change, the Hopeworks team speaks from experience. Training will include modules on trauma, brain science, organizational impact, and

societal trauma, as well as coaching, curriculum development, and teach-back sessions.

All twenty youth are eager to get started. Dilan believes that participating in this project will “make me a better person – a better friend, brother and son – by teaching me not just to recognize trauma, but to know what to do about it.” Noelle hopes that understanding the “mental health and traumatic experiences people go through” will help her reach her goal of working in global health and international studies.

You can attend a “mini-session” with the TLC and Hopeworks trainers on April 20nd. TLC will also be featured at a SRQ Strong community forum on June 28th. For more information, contact SarasotaStrong@gmail.com.

Celery Fields Microforest

BY SUSAN HICKS

Florida Veterans for Common Sense (FLVCS) understands that global warming is a huge threat and is taking action to reverse it. The Sarasota Urban ReForestation (SURF) microforest planted west of the Celery Fields is one project they initiated, funded through the associated nonprofit Florida Veterans for Common Sense Fund, the Rotary Club of Sarasota Bay, and START (Solutions to Avoid Red Tide), and supported by Sarasota County, Sarasota Audubon and other organizations.

A team of 24 volunteers came together on Sunday, March 7, to help with an understory planting at the microforest, adding native plants in an area once mowed regularly.

The microforest’s ability to capture and sequester carbon is being carefully tracked by Tim Ramage and other FLVCS volunteers who map the tree and understory plantings and calculate carbon offset for each plant. Ramage is a biologist and planetary ethicist who co-authored “This Spaceship Earth” and coordinates the Environmental Studies program at Ringling College of Art + Design.

“The microforest speeds up natural succession,” Ramage said. “In normal progression of forest development, the area goes from grass to shrub to trees, but we’ve planted all layers here, and they are all native plants. We already have several species of



birds using the forest.”

In addition to providing wildlife habitat for a variety of species, microforests add shade against urban heating, reduce rain runoff and serve as a biofilter, cleaning pollutants before rainwater reaches the bay. Prettier than a fence, a microforest can serve as a windbreak to calm damaging winds and block sound.

A nature trail through the microforest is in the plans, to increase access for people who want to relax in the forest. FLVCS hope this project opens the door for other microforest locations, so more

areas and people will benefit from the beauty and biodiversity of small forests.

FLVCS members produced an extensive report, “Urgency and Action: Drawdown to Reverse Global Warming,” that is available through their website: www.FLVCS.us.

Florida Veterans for Common Sense was organized in 2002, as the Bush Administration was drumming up support for the invasion of Iraq – which the veterans opposed. Since then, they have “dedicated their actions towards informing the community on matters affecting national

continued on page 4

Earth Day Every Day



Senator Gaylord Nelson created Earth Day as a way to force the environment onto the national agenda. On the first Earth Day in 1970, twenty million Americans demonstrated in different U.S. cities to raise awareness about environmental issues and reshape public attitudes. Many important environmental events have happened on Earth Day since 1970, including the signing of the Paris Agreement. This year the Biden Administration has decided to convene a global climate summit on Earth Day 2021. [EARTHDAY.ORG](https://www.earthday.org) along with lead organizers Education International, Hip Hop Caucus, and Earth Uprising are organizing three separate parallel climate action summits on April 20 and 21 ahead of the Biden Administration's global leaders' climate summit. The parallel summits are focused respectively on climate literacy, environmental justice, and a broad range of youth-led climate-focused issues.

"This Earth Day, we have an important opportunity to challenge world leaders to see climate change for what it is – a pressing global security threat, one that threatens everyone and everything but particularly our most vulnerable people and places," said Kathleen Rogers, President of [EARTHDAY.ORG](https://www.earthday.org).



Earth Uprising was started to support and hasten the youth climate movement while providing resources and opportunities to educate one another about the climate crisis.

The three days of climate action begin on April 20th with the global youth climate summit led by Earth Uprising, in collaboration with My Future My Voice, OneMillionOfUs and hundreds of youth climate activists. The global youth summit

will consist of panels, speeches, discussions, and special messages with today's youth climate activists including Greta Thunberg, Alexandria Villaseñor, and Licypriya Kangujam. The four-hour digital summit will address the progress that has been made on their main issues of concern, including the creation of green jobs, climate literacy, civic skill training, environmental justice, biodiversity protection and sustainable agriculture. In the lead up to the event, the youth organizers will put together a short list of demands that they want addressed at the Biden Administration's climate summit.

"President Biden bringing together world leaders to discuss climate change on Earth Day is a major turning point in global climate action! This youth-led summit will bring together global youth climate activists to prepare a message for President Biden on the eve of his historic summit. Youth around the world are experiencing some of the worst effects of climate change right now. We're suffering from extreme weather, pollution, civil unrest, and the loss of lives and livelihoods. Our summit will identify the key issues and solutions most important to youth. The future of our generation is at stake and it's important for our voices to be heard!" said Alexandria Villaseñor, Founder of Earth Uprising.



The Think 100% campaign maintains a strong focus on public health impacts of dirty air and water in African American, Latinx, and Indigenous communities, as well as, Think 100%'s and Hip Hop Caucus' long-term focus on environmental justice impacts of fossil fuel extraction and community exploitation, from fracking to pipelines.

In the evening on April 20, the Hip Hop Caucus and its partners will present the "We Shall Breathe" virtual summit. This digital event will examine climate and environmental justice, connecting the climate crisis to issues of pollution, poverty, police brutality, and the pandemic, all within a racial justice framework.

"Climate and environmental justice were on the ballot in November. The same Black and Brown voters that decided the election for President Biden, are the same communities that have been most impacted by environmental injustice and who are most threatened by climate disaster. This Earth Day, we expect President Biden to reinforce our affirmation that 'We Shall Breathe' by announcing bold climate action based on equity and justice domestically and globally," said Rev. Lennox Yearwood Jr., President and Founder, Hip Hop Caucus.

On April 21, Education International will lead the "Teach for the Planet: Global Education Summit." The multilingual virtual summit will



Greta Thunberg is the Swedish teenager who skipped school and inspired an international movement to fight climate change.

span several time zones and feature prominent activists from every continent, focused on the crucial role that educators play in combating climate change and why we need transformative climate education now.

Susan Hopgood, President of Education International, said, "The fight against climate change must have an education face and a teacher's voice in every area of the world. The planet is in crisis and I strongly believe that teachers and educators have a critical role to play in combating the environmental destruction, human suffering and social injustice that will certainly occur if climate change continues at current rates."

Parallel to the Biden Administration's global climate summit, [EARTHDAY.ORG](https://www.earthday.org) will produce its second Earth Day Live digital event on April 22. The multi-hour multi-channel livestream will include segments taking place around the world starting at noon Eastern Time. Workshops, panel discussions, and special performances will focus on Earth Day's 2021 theme, Restore Our Earth, which examines natural processes, emerging green technologies, and innovative thinking that can restore the world's ecosystems. Topics will include climate and environmental literacy, climate restoration technologies, reforestation efforts, regenerative agriculture, equity and environmental justice, citizen science, cleanups, and beyond. World climate leaders, grassroots activists, nonprofit innovators, thought leaders, industry leaders, artists, musicians, influencers, and more will be involved.

For more information about Earth Day 2021, please visit: <https://www.earthday.org/earth-day-2021>.

NOTE: The Annual Earth Day Celebration at Oscar Scherer State Park has been cancelled this year however a virtual event will include scavenger hunts, action items and prizes. Follow their Facebook page starting April 1st for more information.

Celery Fields Microforest

continued from page 3

defense, active duty military and veterans' issues." Consistent with Defense Department policy, FLVCS views climate change as a national security threat. In addition to climate change, issues they are focused on include voting access and processes, stopping unnecessary toll roads, and overturning corporate personhood protections.

FLVCS recently honored Lt. Col. Alexander Vindman, USA, Ret. with the 2020 Thomas Paine Award for speaking truth to power in hearings leading up to impeachment charges for Donald Trump – as the award's namesake had during the American Revolution.

Florida Veterans For Common Sense is a nonprofit,

non-partisan 501(c)(4) advocacy organization and Florida Veterans for Common Sense Fund is its associated 501(c)(3) charitable organization.

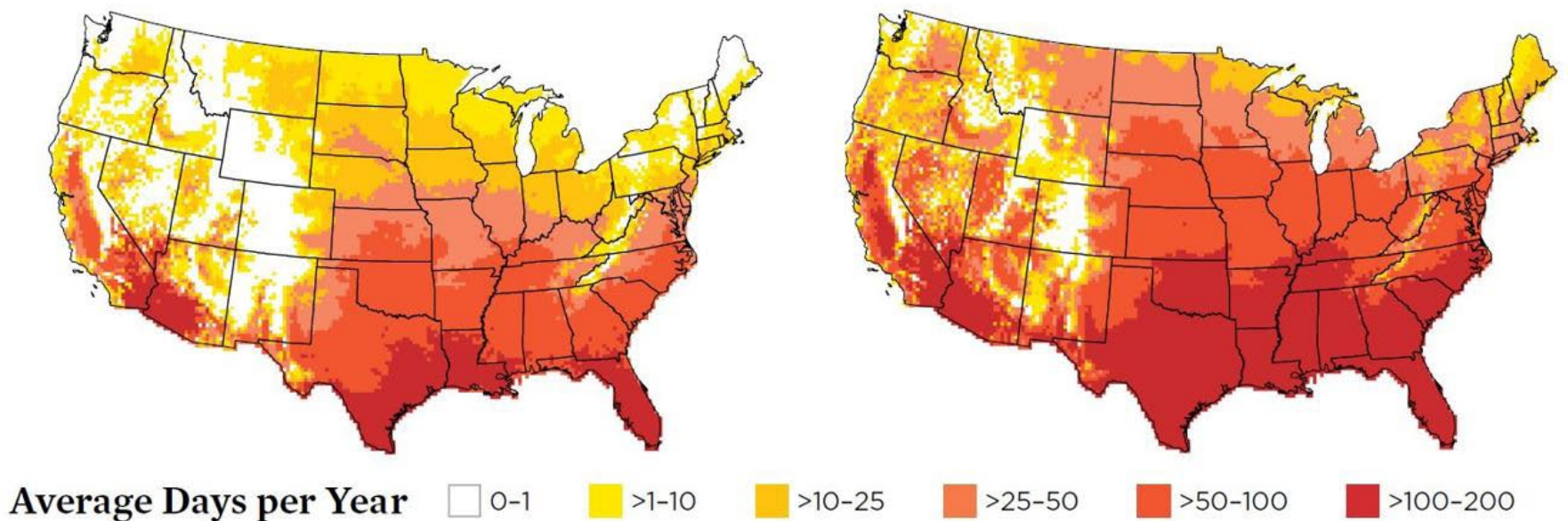
For further information, visit www.FLVCS.us and www.flvcsfund.org or call 349.5131. Follow us on Facebook at @FloridaVeteransforCommonSense and on Twitter at @FLVCSense.

Florida's Response to the Climate Crisis

Historical

Midcentury No Action

90°F+



Data from the Union of Concerned Scientists Killer Heat report.

BY WILLIAM “COTY” KELLER

IT'S ALL ADAPTATION AND IT MUST CHANGE

The governor and legislature are making noise about climate. It's a pitch for adapting to rising seas with a “resiliency” strategy. It avoids the cause of the problem, and the real solution which is “mitigation,” defined by the [UN IPCC](#) as action to reduce emissions and take carbon out of the atmosphere. Michael Oppenheimer, co-authors of the [UN report on climate change](#) says, “Everyone agrees that if we don't slow the warming down, our prospects for adaptation are not good.”

We should adapt. But we must also mitigate because the consequences of not attacking the cause are unbearable. The [world's scientists](#) and [our administration's best and brightest](#) agree that unless we take bold and immediate action, global average temperatures will exceed the cataclysmic threshold of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. The Union of Concerned Scientist's [Killer Heat](#) predicts that part of Florida will be unlivable. No amount of adaptation/resiliency can manage these consequences. The only hope is mitigation.

SOLUTIONS

The solution to the climate crisis is to become nature's biggest ally; to restore and then maintain the carbon cycle so we have tolerable levels (below 350 ppm) of carbon in the atmosphere. We do this by reversing the root causes of the problem: human caused emissions, deforestation and poor soil management. And it has to happen very quickly.

The UN [2019 Emissions Gap report](#) explains half of the solution: We must reduce emissions 70-100% by 2030 (almost 8% annually). [Project Drawdown](#), the [Union of Concerned Scientists](#), [Rewiring America](#) and others explain a combination of (1) reduction of energy use (using less energy by efficiency and conservation measures) and (2) transition to zero emission energy. #1 is important because unless we bring down the consumption curve, #2 is too hard to achieve in time. The overriding strategy is to electrify (almost) everything and then generate

all our electricity by zero emission energy sources ([solar farms](#) -#8 of 100 solutions by Project Drawdown, [rooftop solar](#) -#10, wind -#2 onshore & #22 offshore, [nuclear](#) #20, [small hydro](#) #48 and [geothermal](#) #18).

The [Union of Concerned Scientists](#), [Project Drawdown](#) and others tell us that more photosynthesis is the second half of the solution. Because greenhouse gases remain in the atmosphere for centuries, we must remove lots of carbon already residing in the atmosphere by restoring forests (or planting new ones) and improving soil management through better farming and landscape practices.

Florida's leaders don't mention these solutions.

FLORIDA'S ROLE – STATES REGULATE ELECTRIC UTILITIES

Florida's proper role comes into focus when we recognize that states regulate utilities, and electricity is at the core of the solutions. Experts agree that effective mitigation requires that all states adopt three state level policies:

Low Carbon Electric Portfolio Standard. The [Union of Concerned Scientists](#) call this the most powerful arrow in the state's quiver. The standards require electric utilities to generate a certain percentage of their power from non-emitting sources by specific dates. By requiring a clear and firm target date, the state law would offer certainty to investors and developers of non-emitting energy while helping utilities get away from carbon-based fuels. To meet the bold action goals needed to keep us below the 1.5°C threshold, Florida should mandate the transition to 100% zero emission energy by 2030.

Reducing electrical consumption. [SACE](#) reports that Florida has the second-worst performance in energy efficiency delivered to consumers in the Southeast region. Florida utilities need to up their game with programs such as energy audits, which enable customers to find out how to use energy more efficiently, how to conserve it, how to save more money. Utility companies should also offer discounts for more energy-efficient air conditioning units and other energy-reduction programs such as solar heated water ([#41 of Project Drawdown's solutions](#)).

Rooftop solar friendly laws and rules. The [National Renewable Energy Laboratory](#) says the U.S. could meet almost 40 percent of its electricity needs with rooftop solar alone. Project Drawdown ranks [rooftop solar](#) as #10 of the top 100 solutions for global warming. Rooftop solar in the sunshine state could be a big part of the climate solution, meanwhile providing hundreds of thousands of good-paying jobs and saving people money on their electric bills.

[FPL and SACE](#) both project that Florida is not likely to exceed 2% rooftop solar by 2030. The reason for this pitiful projection? Florida scores F for their solar policies, as judged by the [Center for Biological Diversity](#). To become rooftop solar friendly, Florida needs to make it legal for neighbors, condo or apartment residents to share a common solar generator (a practice called “net metering” or community solar) and to allow third-party ownership so people who cannot afford to buy solar can borrow the equipment thru purchase power agreements.

CONCLUSION

Florida's leaders must move beyond the smokescreen of adaptation/resiliency and immediately implement climate mitigation policies that will serve the people of the state. The unique state level policies mentioned above will mitigate climate change, save citizens money, create jobs and improve our health. If our state leaders are not able and willing to abandon their allegiance to special interests, and act in the people's interests by putting these policies in place; we the people will have to replace them.

William “Coty” Keller is an ecologist, working to conserve and restore the natural relationships among living things and the environment. He is a Vietnam combat vet whose navy career included command of two ships and assignments as professor of national security affairs at the Naval War College. Coty lives and works in Port Charlotte. <https://ecopapak.org/>

This article had to be edited for print. You can find the full article on our website at <https://www.criticaltimes.org/climate-change>.

First Fridays in Newtown

By Danielle Campbell



You may know **Shantel Norman** as the lead singer of *Jah Movement*, a band that brings reggae and soul music to the city of Sarasota, but Norman is also actively engaged in our community in other ways. As an employee of **VISIT Sarasota** and chair of a local non-profit working to end domestic violence, Norman's community involvement has led her to start **First Friday Events** in Newtown.

First Fridays is a project started by the City of Sarasota and Norman in efforts to bridge the gap with the broader Sarasota Community and the majority

African American community of Newtown. Ultimately **First Fridays** are about bringing the community of Newtown together as Covid-19 restrictions start to ease and vaccinations make social gatherings possible again. Held on the first Friday of every month the event brings community vendors, live music, and a local eatery to the center of "**Queens Field.**"

Norman says, "People want to do something outside, with their family in their little group. Everyone will be able to have a good time and enjoy the small business there on the field, while also maintaining Covid-19 procedures." The first **First Friday** event was held on Friday, March 5 with a Jah Movement concert.

First Friday events are also raising awareness of domestic violence abuse, especially as domestic violence rates have been at an all-time high during the Covid-19 pandemic. All proceeds raised by the First Friday events will support the non-profit **Queens**

of Domestic Violence Awareness. Their goal: to build shelters and/or housing for domestic violence victims with nowhere else to go. queensofdva.com



The **First Friday** events are held on "**Queens Field**" which is located on the corner of Martin Luther King Jr Way, and Orange Avenue in an open field. The events are held on **every First Friday from 5pm-9pm**, with the next event occurring on **April 2nd.**

For more information on **First Friday** events and whom to contact about volunteering opportunities please contact **Shantel Norman** at Shantel.Norman@gmail.com

wslr 96.5 lp fm

WEEKLY PROGRAM GUIDE

listen on the air

- WSLR 96.5 LPFM Sarasota
- WPV 100.1 LPFM Sarasota

listen online

- WSLR.org (desktop)
- WSLR App at wslr.org (mobile)

listen on demand

archive.wslr.org Music shows are archived for two weeks. News and public affairs are available for download, and expire later.

Americana · Folk · Cajun · Acoustic · Bluegrass
Blues · Roots · Jazz · R&B · Soul
Electronica · Dubstep · Club · Hip-hop
Freeform · Eclectic
Rock · Punk · Jam · Indie · Pop
News · Public Affairs
World · Spiritual

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
12 mid.		Down The Road Syndicated	Lumpytunes! The Head Lump, Rob Demperio	New Radio	All Mixed Up Syndicated	And You Don't Stop Syndicated	In My Room Syndicated
1 a.m.	Deep Threes Syndicated					Synthelectico Syndicated	
2 a.m.	Music Automated playlist	Midnight Special Syndicated	Music Automated playlist	Upfront Soul Syndicated	Music Automated playlist		
3 a.m.							
4 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
5 a.m.						Music Automated playlist	
6 a.m.	Background Briefing Ian Masters (Syndicated)	Background Briefing Ian Masters (Syndicated)	Background Briefing Ian Masters (Syndicated)	Background Briefing Ian Masters (Syndicated)	Background Briefing Ian Masters (Syndicated)		
7 a.m.							
8 a.m.	Blues to Bluegrass John D.	HipRawk Nation Syndicated	Generation X Alecia Harper	Eclectic Blender Dave Pedersen	Latin Explosion Juan Montenegro	Saturday Morning Gospel Jonah	A Way With Words Syndicated
9 a.m.			ALTERNATE WEEKS				Wings of the Heart Carol or Salima
	Shortwave Report	TUC Radio	Peace & Justice Report Tom Walker & Bob Connors	The Detail Cathy Antunes	Surreal News Lew Lorini & Steve Norris	TownTalk TampaBay	The Detail Cathy Antunes (Rebroadcast)
10 a.m.	Critical Times Week in Review	Sea Change Radio				Ruthless Truth	
	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)	Radio Reset Sharon Preston-Folta	Law and Disorder Syndicated
11 a.m.							
NOON	Music of the World Marco Ciceron	Nuestra Musica Mariano	Bop & Beyond Bill Ewell	Metropics Carlos Pagan	Complex Waveforms Mark Zampella	Upfront Soul Syndicated	Folk Alley Elena See Syndicated
		Afro Cuban Jazz Frankie Piniero	Vibrational Journeys Perette Cannady				
1 p.m.		ALTERNATE WEEKS	ALTERNATE WEEKS				
2 p.m.	Thom Hartmann Show Syndicated	Thom Hartmann Show Syndicated	Thom Hartmann Show Syndicated	Thom Hartmann Show Syndicated	Thom Hartmann Show Syndicated	Hard Knock Radio Syndicated	Dadee-O's Collector's Corner Dadee-O
3 p.m.	Positive Friction John Haupt	Second Wind Seany G	Rhythm Revival Rev. Billy C Wirtz	Basement Boxes Purple Mike	Blues Highway Syndicated	AfroSonic Taxi Syndicated	
4 p.m.				ALTERNATE WEEKS	Everything But the Kitchen Sink Jazz Edition Art on the Air	Global Village Syndicated	Velvet Hammer Blues Beth Hammer
					Everything But the Kitchen Sink Art on the Air	Juke In The Back Syndicated	
5 p.m.	Music Museum Ed Foster	Tuesday Drive Home David Young	HotRodRock Sven	Ted's Head Ted	Friday Happy Hour Bartender Tommy D.		Karen Rakos' Music of the World Syndicated
6 p.m.	Economic Update Richard Wolff	Ralph Nader Radio Syndicated	Got Science?/Critical Times	Alternative Radio Syndicated	Critical Times Week in Review	We Got The Funk Syndicated	Donne Del Mondo Syndicated
	Capitol Update State News		Capitol Update/Laura Flanders		Counterspin/Cannabis Connection		
7 p.m.							
8 p.m.	Yesterday's Dead Today Mark Binder	The Root Cellar Roger & Peter	Acoustic Waves James Hawkins	Retro Cocktail Hour Syndicated	Velvet Radio Elissa Bello	Indie-licious Shelia Jane	Blue Groove Mark Gruder
			ALTERNATE WEEKS	ALTERNATE WEEKS		NEW RADIO DJ Joey PD	
9 p.m.					Ripper's Rarities Russ Yodice	ALTERNATE WEEKS	
10 p.m.	Indigenous Sounds White Horse and Friends	Strange Currency Syndicated	Jazz And More Brian Jones	Progressive Palace Phil G	Music Is The Best Mark Markus	Sonic Cafe Syndicated	Soul Kitchen Paul Junior
				ALTERNATE WEEKS		Mix Sessions Syndicated	Louning After Dark Syndicated
11 p.m.					Dark Side of the Tune Syndicated		
12 mid.	Down The Road Syndicated	Lumpytunes! The Head Lump, Rob Demperio	New Radio	All Mixed Up Syndicated	And You Don't Stop Syndicated	In My Room Syndicated	Cafe Chill Syndicated

Streaming live 24/7/365 at WSLR.org · Studio line 941-954-8636

8pm Saturday, April 3
WSLR LISTEN LOCAL
 CONCERT SERIES PRESENTS:
 Dead-On Dead!



SHIP OF FOOLS
Acoustic Trio
 with **AI Fuller**

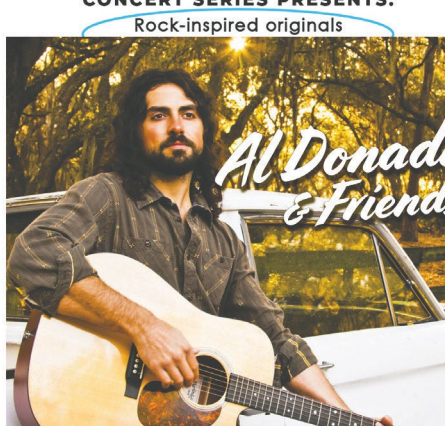
SOME OF SARASOTA'S BIGGEST PURVEYORS OF THE GRATEFUL DEAD & CLASSIC ROCK GENRE, PLAYED WITH ACOUSTICAL PROWESS.

This show is outdoors with socially-distanced seating.

\$12 member
\$15 GENERAL

Beverages available for purchase / no food available - BYOF

8pm Saturday, April 10
WSLR LISTEN LOCAL
 CONCERT SERIES PRESENTS:
 Rock-inspired originals



Al Donadi & Friends

This show is outdoors with socially-distanced seating.

\$12 member
\$15 GENERAL

Beverages available for purchase / no food available - BYOF

Saturday, May 8, 8pm



SHANKH LAHIRI & Friends **\$15 members/\$20 non**

Led by internationally touring tabla musician, music composer and educator Shankh Lahiri, this unique Indian Flamenco Fusion project offers an authentic taste of Raga Music from India with a fresh, modern feel of Spanish Flamenco music. Joining Shankh will be Don Soledad (guitar) & Kanada Narahari (sitar).

Tuesday, May 11, 7pm

Speciesism: The Movie **\$10 members/\$12 non**

The Sarasota Vegan Society will host a creative investigation of the underworld of factory farming, soon discovering a growing political and intellectual movement that considers animals as important as humans.



Masks are mandatory at all shows please.

Saturday, April 17, 8pm




REV. BILLY C. WIRTZ
 45 rpm
 HALLELUJAH!

STEVE ARVEY

\$15 members/\$18 non

Reverend Billy C. Wirtz is a comic genius, gifted pianist and American musicologist who defies easy classification. The Rev. wraps his humorous stories and songs into carefully orchestrated sets that feature his stellar piano playing.

Steve Arvey began his career playing the Chicago blues circuit, he shared the stage with many of the legendary blues masters. Steve is also considered by many to be one of the top cigar box guitar players in the world today.



GRACE PETTIS


Sunday, May 16, 7pm
\$15 members/\$20 non

Daughter of Pierce, Grace Pettis's music has been characterized as "a little bit folk, a little bit country/Americana, and a whole lot of soul." A winner NPR's Mtn. Stage New Song Contest, her musical influences run the gamut of Southern sounds: from mountain/folk music to R&B/hip hop.


Monday, May 24, 7pm
\$15 members/\$18 non

Jalen Baker Quartet

A Chicago Next Gen Allstar jazz vibraphonist Jalen's unique blend of original modern jazz compositions and jazz standards make for exciting performances.



Saturday, April 24, 8pm




ACFM QUARTET

\$18 members/\$22 non

Our own Frankie P has assembled a couple of the hottest "next-gen" upcoming Latin jazz artists in award-winning drummer/vibraphonist/ Latin percussionist/composer, and educator, **Cole Hazlitt**. And award-winning **Tony Madruga** is a 4-time recipient of *Downbeat Student Award* and is featured on HBO Documentary "The Music in Me" and *Jazziz Magazine*.

ACFM Latin Jazz Quartet w/ **Antonio "Tony" Madruga** on Piano, **Cole Hazlitt** on Vibes, Drums & Timbales, **Frankie Pineiro** on Conga Drums/ Percussion, **Mauricio Rodriguez** on Bass

Saturday, May 29, 8pm



HUDOST

\$15 members/\$20 non

Their combination of harmonic vocals, Indian harmonium, keyboards, guitars, dulcinet, percussion, and a slew of sonic ambient effects is a seamless rich tapestry of eclectic world - folk - rock, crossing all borders. Their recent indie release album, 'of Water + Mercy' got rave reviews + rose to #24 in the BILLBOARD charts for Folk/Americana and It just won *The Independent Music Award for Social Action Song*.

ALL SHOWS: no food available - BYOF, NO outside drinks please, Beverages available for purchase.

THE jazz club OF SARASOTA

The Bridge Jazz Concert Series



Sarasota's Own Community Radio
96.5 WSLR LPFM
 LOCAL • NEWS • MUSIC • EVENTS
 +Fogartyville center
 community media & arts

LIVE & VIRTUAL CONCERT SERIES

The Bridge Jazz Concert series is a collaborative project with the Jazz Club of Sarasota & WSLR+Fogartyville to bridge the void of excellent jazz performances created by the pandemic. Our goal is to provide an opportunity for local jazz artists to PLAY and reconnect with their audiences while we stay connected to our Jazz Club and WSLR+Fogartyville communities.

The last two of four evening series features 2 sets of incredible music. These live-streamed events also allow for a very limited live audience to allow for safe and responsible social distancing. Tickets can be purchased for individual nights or the entire series with *discounts for Jazz Club and Fogartyville members*.

Thursday April 15

- MICHAEL ROSS TRIO w/FRED JOHNSON**

Thursday May 27

- SYNIA CARROLL**
- LA LUCHA**





LA LUCHA
 EVERYBODY WANTS TO RULE THE WORLD



Help us PAVE the way (well actually the patio) for more outdoor concerts, shows & gatherings!

We have applied for a grant to pay partial costs for building an outdoor covered structure. So we won't have to be so concerned about rain...AND we'll be able to keep you **COOLER!** and maybe do some summer shows?

We are also planning to remove the uneven, broken concrete and replace it with your creative and thought provoking paver bricks + green spaces.

We're COMMUNITY Positive!

After a year unlike any we've experienced before, it's important to still find reason to be grateful and give thanks. Actually, because of the tumultuous year of social and political changes, a teetering economy, and a worldwide pandemic, it's more important than ever!

JAZZ IT UP!

PEACE, LOVE & UNDERSTANDING, WHAT'S FUNNY?

Here at **WSLR+Fogartyville** we're feeling very grateful for our community - the way you've hung in there with us, offered additional support, and stepped up to serve those in need over the past year.

There's no doubt - we are COMMUNITY Positive!!

DANCE LIKE NO ONE IS WATCHING

PEACE & JUSTICE

Sarasota Community Radio
96.5 WSLR
LOCAL NEWS • MUSIC • EVENTS
+Fogartyville
community media & arts center
WE'RE COMMUNITY POSITIVE!

HONOR CAROL BLOOM & DANCE HERE

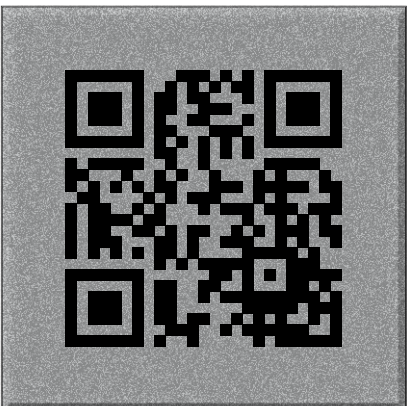
DEMOCRACY

BUILDING OUR FUTURE Brick by Brick

WSLR+Fogartyville is community-owned and operated. It's a place where people come together to build community and break down barriers. With your support, we provide a space for independent ideas and music right in the heart of Sarasota. **WSLR 96.5** has been with you throughout the pandemic - bringing you locally-crafted programming and local news and information. *We haven't missed a beat.* And now **Fogartyville** has re-opened to give you the shot of live music and community you need to start feeling whole again! Please consider making a donation to support our mission during our **Spring Membership Drive** taking place **Thursday, April 8 - Wednesday, April 14.** You can pledge online at www.wslr.org or complete the membership application below and mail it in with a check to **WSLR, P.O. Box**

IN FOND MEMORY OF YOUR #1 HIT

EQUALITY RULES!



2540, Sarasota, FL 34230

Another way you can support **WSLR +Fogartyville** is by participating in our **Brick-by-Brick** campaign. If you don't have a brick on our **People's Patio** yet, *now's your chance!* It's a great opportunity to honor a family member or loved one, to pay tribute to a favorite mentor, or to celebrate your appreciation of live music, art or activism. **Visit PolarEngraving.com/wslrinc** to place your order.

If you'd like to support the patio renovations with a larger donation, please reach out to **Arlene** at 941-894-6469.

All Members Receive:

- Member Pricing on WSLR+Fogartyville events
- E-newsletter notification of upcoming events
- Eligibility to become a WSLR programmer

I want to be a member...

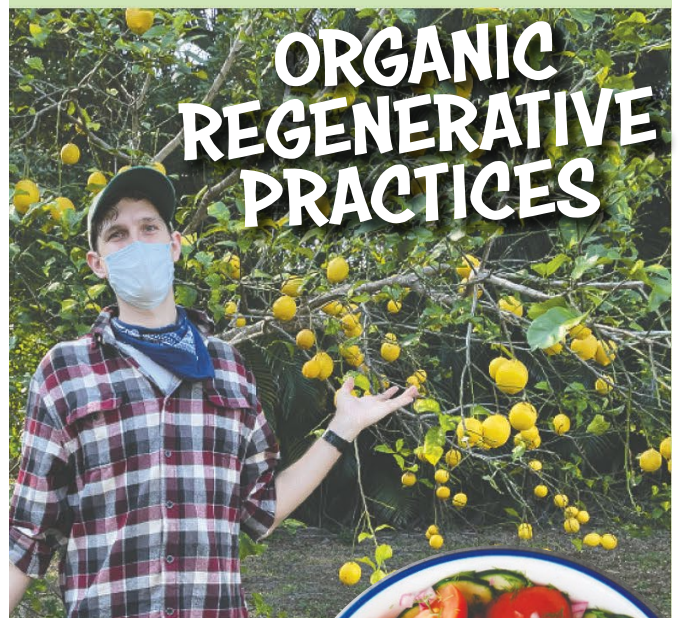
Name _____ Phone _____
Address _____ Email _____
City _____ Zip _____ Level _____

Contribution Levels	
Student	\$15
Listener	\$40
Friend	\$60
Supporter	\$120
Fan Club	\$240
Advocate	\$500
Partner	\$1,000
Concert Lover	\$2,500
Steward	\$5,000



YOURGARDENYARD.COM

Let local, organic farmer **Alex** help you plan, plant *and* maintain your home food garden:
In Ground
Moveable
Boxed



ORGANIC REGENERATIVE PRACTICES



CALL OR TEXT ALEX
941.526.4222
YOURGARDENYARD@GMAIL.COM

Up and Coming: Erik Arroyo and James Rieser

Becca Hadwen and Omar Guerrero profiled two local leaders to learn what changes they plan to bring to the City of Sarasota.



Back in November, voters in District 3 of the City of Sarasota elected Erik Arroyo as their commissioner. Soon after his election, Arroyo became the vice mayor for the City. As a 31-year-old, Hispanic man, Arroyo stands out from his fellow commissioners.

As Arroyo put it, "I am also Hispanic and the youngest commissioner to ever get elected to the city. This enables me to provide a very unique perspective that would otherwise go unexpressed."

Arroyo reflected on his relatively young age, stating, "It affects my perspective in a positive light because I am constantly advocating for new and emerging technologies to be implemented."

His professional experience informs his perspective as well. "My background is primarily in that I am a city business owner, local high school graduate, and attorney that specializes in helping businesses and trusts in maintaining sound fiscal policies, which directly translates to what we do in the city. This differs greatly from the experience of my fellow commissioners since I am the only attorney that specializes in this field."

Since joining the commission, Arroyo has notably headed the charge to alter plans for the Bobby Jones Golf Course. In early March, the commission voted

to consider outside management for the course. During his time in office, Arroyo hopes to address traffic problems by fixing roads and looking at traffic signal coordination. He also aims to reduce homelessness by building public awareness, increasing access to services, and collaborating with the County on a new long-term stay service facility. His platform includes maintaining the tourism industry by protecting the environment and providing businesses with resources to face COVID-19.

The New Chief in Town: James Rieser

On January 29th, Captain James Rieser was sworn in as the 12th chief of police of the Sarasota Police Department. Rieser joined the department in 1992, but has been involved in law enforcement for 30 years. Rieser was appointed shortly after the previous police chief Bernadette DiPino chose to step down. I spoke to Rieser about his recent experiences and the direction that he wants to go with Sarasota PD.

From the get go, Rieser has had to take several measures as the new chief. He stated: "There is going to be a bit of an organizational change here. We are going to fix things around and hit the ground running. We are also starting a new program here -- we are looking to get it out in the next few months. It's a body-worn camera program. We're really excited about it and we think



it's going to be an excellent tool for both us and the community for maximum transparency."

Rieser also commented on the challenges that come with being a newly elected Chief: "There's no book in here that tells you how to be a chief. I have a lot of experience and I'm leaning on that experience. Now that I have a command staff, it's been a huge help to me. As far as being brand new to this job, I am new to the job but frankly I'm not new to the agency, I've been here for 29 years and been in law enforcement for 30 years, so I'm leaning on that experience."

I asked Rieser to speak on the role that Sarasota PD has or should have with its community: "Community policing is our cornerstone, it is our culture. Officers from the very beginning here are trained on many aspects of community policing. It's about community partnerships with individuals and organizations and organizational reform from the top down -- change starts with me and my command staff and goes down to the captains, lieutenants and sergeants and civilian staff -- it helps in trouble-solving."

Earlier in the year, Rieser was summoned to the City Commission regarding their recent cannabis decriminalization. A review by city officials found that Sarasota PD had not been following the ordinance properly -- only one detainee was processed as a civil case since 2019. I asked Rieser what the main obstacles of the policy were and how he plans to address them.

"Well, the obstacles -- I'm not going to go into all the obstacles that the prior administration had to deal with but I can say what we're doing moving forward. We are training all the officers, that's one of the first things we did, we made sure that all the officers understood the ordinance backward and forwards. I had our legal team and attorney John Polzack go to all our ship briefings and train all the officers, as well as our narcotic's unit to make sure that they know what is required of them. We are going to be doing quarterly reporting to the IPAP (Independent Police Advisory Panel). We are also doing annual reporting to the commission. So, we have the right tools and steps in place now to ensure that this program is followed to the T. Making sure that if you're stopped with marijuana that this is what we are going to be doing."

TURN HORSEPOWER INTO FLOWER POWER

Donate your vehicle today. It's easy and tax-deductible.

Call 855-500-7433 or visit www.careasy.org



Sarasota Community Radio
96.5 WSLR
+ Fogartyville
community media & arts center



1. Simply call or complete our online donation form.



2. Schedule your free & convenient pick-up.



3. Receive a donation receipt. That's it!

Learn more at **855-500-7433** or visit **careasy.org** to get started.

John Kirtley: Destroying Public Education

BY CAROL LERNER

Florida schools are the most privatized in the nation both in size and breadth with the number of voucher-supported private schools dwarfing every other state. Behind this explosive growth, stands one man: John Kirtley. Hardly a household name, Kirtley has done more than anyone in shaping the school choice movement in Florida while simultaneously bringing about fundamental changes to Florida's politics.

Who is John Kirtley? Search on the internet for Kirtley and not much comes up. He doesn't even rate a Wikipedia entry. But by piecing together what is available, a pretty damning profile emerges.

There are two John Kirtleys. One is the public persona of Kirtley, the crusader for "poor Black and Brown kids" giving them "a chance to attend private school." He organizes political rallies in Tallahassee with Black ministers and mothers holding signs saying "Don't Take Away My Kid's Dreams." He's seen linking arms with icons of the civil rights movement and their descendants like Martin Luther King III. He calls school choice, the "civil rights issue" of today.

Then there is the other John Kirtley: the wealthy, right-winger, schmoozing with the likes of Betsy DeVos, Charles Koch and Jim Walton. He sits on boards and hammers out ultra-conservative policies at the James Madison Institute in Tallahassee and the American Federation of Children (AFC) in Washington, DC. He serves as Vice Chair of the AFC, founded by Betsy DeVos.

The truth is that John Kirtley is a very wealthy, free market venture capitalist, who, like his billionaire collaborators, abides by the tenants of Milton Friedman's educational policies as laid out in his 1955 tract, *The Role of Government in Education*. Here Friedman, the father of school vouchers, castigated public schools as "government schools" arguing instead for "free market" non-compulsory private schools as the only viable option.

Kirtley had an early interest in supporting private schools for low-income students in New York City when working on Wall Street. When he moved to Tampa in the late 1980s, he set up a scholarship fund to send low-income children to private schools. But he got his real start in 1998 when Walmart's John Walton reached out to him and asked him to help organize for the Children's Scholarship Fund. This got him into the inner circles of the privatization movement with the likes of the Koch brothers and especially Betsy DeVos. He became the Vice Chair of the Alliance for School Choice in 2004 and when it merged with two other choice organizations to form the powerful American Federation for Children (AFC) chaired by Betsy DeVos; he became its Vice Chair too.

When Jeb Bush was elected governor in Florida in 1998, running on a school choice platform, Kirtley immediately approached him about backing a school voucher program. In 1999, the Florida legislature passed the Opportunity Scholarship, a government funded voucher bill written largely by Kirtley. With its constitutionality in doubt, Kirtley turned his attention to writing and getting passed legislation for a tax credit scholarship program—a backdoor voucher based on corporate "donations"

for scholarships in lieu of paying corporate income taxes.

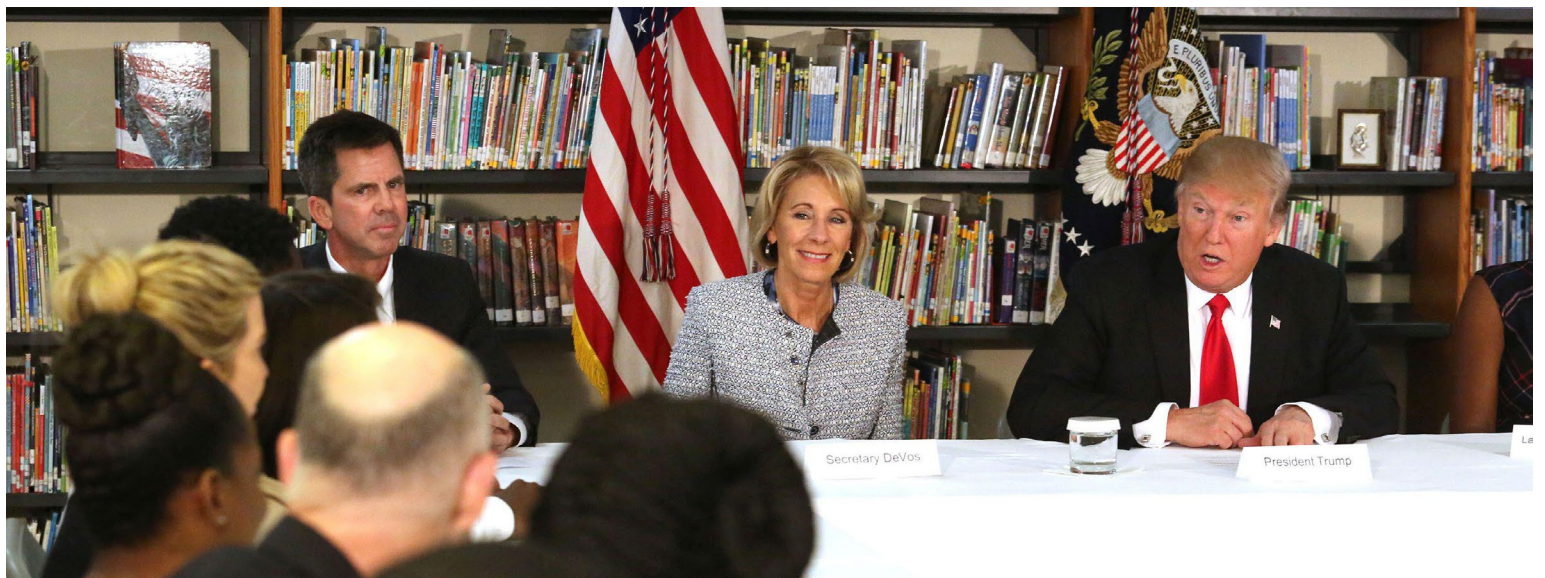
In many ways the court's overturning of the first voucher program was fortuitous for Kirtley. The tax credit voucher required an apparatus outside of government to collect tax credit "donations" from corporations and administer scholarship distribution. Gov. Bush asked Kirtley to set up a nonprofit which later became Step Up for Students.

Step Up for Students has been a critical institution in Florida and nationally, both as an organizing vehicle for gaining political and public support for free market educational ideas and as a laboratory for testing out and perfecting various privatization schemes. While established as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, Step Up is more like a quasi-government agency with considerable power. Most of its time and energy has gone into supporting and expanding the Florida

Most of his PAC funds come from tapping his own wealth as well as his billionaire buddies like Jim Walton and Betsy DeVos's AFC PAC. In the 2020 election, for example, of the over \$1.4 million raised, the largest chunk came from Jim Walton at \$550k, followed by Charter Schools USA at \$350k, Kirtley himself at \$340k and the AFC at \$146k.

Kirtley also uses his large network of voucher schools to sway votes in Tallahassee. At the SB-48 hearings, he deployed dozens of parents and sometimes even children to speak to the merits of the bill. They were all well scripted giving fill in the blank testimony. But as the only parents there, they were very effective.

Many of the parents who attend Kirtley's voucher-supported schools are white evangelicals. But the parents that Kirtley picks for rallies or legislative



Tax-credit scholarship proponent, John Kirtley, and former U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, and President Donald Trump at roundtable discussion on March 3, 2017, in Orlando, FL. Photo by Joe Burbank/Orlando Sentinel/TNS/ABACAPRESS.COM

Tax Credit Scholarship (FTCS) program, by far the largest of the State's six scholarship programs. But it administers five of Florida's scholarship programs. This has put Step Up in charge of a \$1 billion budget.

Step Up for Students also acts as a privatization think tank. The money it generates through fees and independent fundraising allows it to do studies, hold conferences and manage a multi-media arm, *redefinED*, that circulates education policy ideas through print media, videos and podcasts. If you look up the <https://www.redefinedonline.org> website, you will see that its lead campaign currently is supporting the dangerous bill, SB 48.

Kirtley also wields considerable political power in Florida. In a 2013 article in *Philanthropy Magazine*, he states: "I'm really only familiar with education-reform advocacy. But, in my experience, if you want to achieve any real progress, you cannot just have a (c)(3) capacity. You must also have advocacy and political capabilities. If your goal is to change K-12 policy, you're going to have to change K-12 laws. And if legislators refuse to change those laws, then you're going to have to change those legislators."

Soon after the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship program was created, Kirtley set up political PACs including All Children Matter--Florida and later, the Florida Federation for Children PAC and ECO. For each Florida election, Kirtley raised between \$1.4 to \$2.5 million, particularly targeting state legislative races. He sometimes donated to both parties in primary races ensuring that he would get a pro-voucher win. He has given hundreds of thousands of dollars in his own name to state legislative races and to local school board candidates who mirrored his politics.

hearings are usually parents of color from urban voucher schools. In the 2018 Florida gubernatorial race, he warned Black parents that their children's vouchers would be taken away if Andrew Gillum won. Many political analysts believe with the tiny vote margin of victory for Ron DeSantis, Kirtley's organizing efforts likely lost the election for Gillum.

Especially since the 2018 election, Florida has become the perfect playground for Kirtley to advance his school privatization agenda. The Republican margin in the legislature has grown and both the Senate President and the House Speaker are firmly in Kirtley's camp. Likewise, Gov. DeSantis is solidly behind any privatizing education plan. Kirtley has a big fan in Commissioner of Education, Richard Corcoran, who has publicly stated that he would like to "voucherize" Florida 100%.

Kirtley's money has made him lots of friends in the legislature but none are more loyal than Sen. Manny Diaz (R-Hialeah). Diaz, a six-figure administrator for Academica, a wealthy for-profit charter school management company, has sponsored every leading privatization scheme over the past decade—first in the House and now in the Senate. Now Diaz is being put to the test with the most free-market education bill in the state's history, SB 48, a bill that Kirtley and his Step Up staff largely authored.

If SB 48 passes, Kirtley will rule an empire at Step Up for Students that could totally upend education in Florida. His entire national network of think tanks, activist organizations and billionaire reformers are awaiting the results of SB 48. If it passes, it will be a major step toward making Milton Friedman's dream of a fully privatized education system come true.

SB 48 - A Dangerous New Direction for Education *continued from page 1*

vouchers, replacing them with ESAs. Vouchers and ESAs are very different.

With a voucher, funding is released from either the Florida Department of Education (DOE) or Step Up for Students and then sent to the voucher school. With an ESA, the funding is released from the DOE and sent to an account in the child's name and accessed by the parent. This follows the mantra of school choice advocates like Sarasota School Board member Bridget Ziegler, who champions "keeping the funding with the child."

What would it mean if all 2.7 million Florida students had an ESA? In a nutshell, it would mean that all 74 Florida school districts would cease to exist. From the perspective of an ESA devotee, this is how it would unfold. Parents/guardians would be required to choose their child's educational programming on the "My Scholar Shop" e-commerce website. Of the many services, products and programs listed on the website, individual public schools would also be listed. If a parent chooses, say, their local neighborhood public school, the funding would go from the student's ESA directly to the local school, totally by-passing the district. With no incoming revenue and the current FEFP funding formula abolished, the district dissolves and all of the public schools become unregulated, free-standing entities, a cross between



Large grassroots Red for Ed Mobilizations have taken place in other parts of the country.

a charter and a voucher school. In this scenario, there is no need for an elected school board or a teachers' union: the entire system is privatized.

To make this threat a little more real, if this legislation passes, every school in Florida will be listed on the e-commerce exchange. This will allow recipients of ESAs to "purchase" single classes from public schools -- a foot in the door scenario.

Whether or not the full-blown scenario described will happen is very much a political question. Hopefully, the ESA model will be adamantly rejected by the population. It is highly likely unconstitutional too. But it is important to know that a universal ESA is the desired outcome of the individuals who wrote the SB 48 legislation--Sen. Manny Diaz, staff at Step Up for Students, and especially its board chairman, John Kirtley. The legislation is also supported by Gov. DeSantis,

Education Commissioner Richard Corcoran and the majority of the Republican-dominated Florida legislature, all of whom feel beholden to Kirtley and the millions of dollars in campaign donations that he has spread around.

The ESA model is now being pushed by all of the free market-oriented think tanks like Americans for Prosperity, Tallahassee-based James Madison Institute and Betsy DeVos' American Federation for Children. The American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), funded by Charles Koch, has circulated an ESA template used in drafting Florida's SB 48 legislation. Is it any wonder that 5 states already have ETAs and that at least 12 other states, all red or red-leaning, have taken up legislation this year in their state legislature to either start or expand an ESA-based program?

What is the ultimate vision of education under ESAs? According to "educational reform" guru, Clint Bolick, an Arizona Supreme Court Justice and author of the book, *Unshackled: Freeing America's K-12 Education System*, future schools based on ESAs will look very different from today's schools.

"Great" teachers will remain, Bolick said, while technology will allow them to reach thousands of students through remote learning or large lectures. Other teachers will be "booted out the door." Since funding stays with the child and is directed by the parent, the school district, the "middleman," will be eliminated ending "bloated government school districts that sucks up as much as 50% of total funding." The ending of traditional districts will also abolish centralized school boards and get rid of teacher unions. Individual public schools will then be stand-alone schools listed separately as one of many options on the e-commerce exchange. With this model, education will become "much cheaper," Bolick said.

So, why did Step Up for Students and the State legislature choose to push this very radical legislation now, in the midst of COVID, rather than address the very real needs of schools and students hurt by the pandemic? Sen. Manny Diaz, in an April 2020 podcast, answered that question. Speaking about the COVID pandemic and ESAs, Diaz said "sometimes it takes a crisis to have these ideas...sometimes it takes a crisis to accelerate things," adding and anticipating that upcoming ESA implementation will "put Florida in the forefront of all educational reforms."

Bolick was even blunter about how the pandemic could accelerate the nation's movement toward ESAs. "I am hoping that the pandemic will have the same sort of effect--the silver lining--across the country as Hurricane Katrina did in New Orleans." Bolick is referring to what happened to the New Orleans public education system following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. In November 2005, Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco assumed control of New Orleans public schools, fired all the teachers and replaced the public schools with mostly for-profit charter schools.

Senator Diaz, John Kirtley and the other Florida supporters of ESAs believe that the bulk of parents will welcome the flexibility of an ESA-based educational system. They believe that most parents, if given both choice and funding, would want to homeschool their children, start their own learning pod or micro-school. They think the pandemic has increased demand permanently for remote learning or for adopting the "deschooling" model of letting a child do his or her "own thing." They think that parents would like to ditch brick-and-mortar schools and instead, totally "individualize" their child's learning through a hodgepodge of options.

But very few parents have the time and the resources to pull this off even if they would like to try. More importantly, parents overwhelmingly want high quality, caring and safe schools. The pandemic rather than drawing families away from public schools, got many to realize their importance and how precious a good teacher can be.

In Florida, there have been no signs of mass, grassroots opposition to SB 48. There have been a number of strong editorials against it and



Step Up For Students is the nonprofit organization that helps administer Florida's voucher programs and would also administer ESAs if SB48 is approved.

groups like the Florida League of Women Voters, the Florida Education Association, the Florida Parent Teacher Association, and the Unitarian Universalists have all spoken out against it. Locally, Protect Our Public Schools has come out strongly against it and is mobilizing opposition. But there is no large grassroots movement like what occurred in Arizona and Nevada when similar legislation surfaced in these states. This can be attributed, in part, to the inertia heightened by the pandemic. But it might be because very few people understand the true dangers of SB 48 and how it might be the first step in fully upending public education in Florida.

Arizona is a particularly good lesson for Floridians. When the Arizona state legislature passed an ESA package in 2017, many parents were outraged. They formed an organization, Save Our Schools Arizona, and joined by teachers, students and community members, led a referendum vote that in 2018 repealed the ESA law, winning in a landslide. This was an important dynamic in turning Arizona politically from deep red to now purplish. This year the Arizona legislature is at it again, trying to pass another ESA bill and the parents are again mobilizing broadly against it.

This type of mobilization is exactly what Florida needs to do right now to defeat SB 48.

Are You A Veteran?



THEN, I WANT YOU!

Florida Veterans for Common Sense is a group of veterans who share a common goal: to help all returning veterans secure their rightful benefits, quality health care & employment opportunities.

In addition, we advocate moderation in military spending and reducing involvement in endless foreign wars.



Regular Meetings Are Suspended During Covid-19. **Stay Safe!** Sign Up for FLVCS e-mails at FLVeterans@aol.com

Florida Veterans for Common Sense, Inc. is a non-partisan /non-profit 501(c)(4) corporation. Dues are \$45 annually. www.floridaveteransforcommonsense.org

Sarasota County Celebrates Centennial

BY JASMYNE MARIE PROPHET



On July 1, 1921, Sarasota became independent from Manatee County. To commemorate 100 years of Sarasota County's existence, various organizations throughout the city are coming together to celebrate the arts, culture, history, politics, people, and places that make Sarasota unique with the inaugural Sarasota County Centennial. All of the events are available to residents and visitors alike.

On Saturday March 27th from 7-9 pm, there

is going to be a "Centennial Concert in the Old Maine Historic District", an event organized by the Phillippi Crest Community Clubhouse. A continuing photo exhibit at The Venice Museum and Archives looks at the events and people that led to the creation of Sarasota County with an emphasis on the role Venice played in it. On May 1st, from 10am to 3pm Venice Heritage Florida, the Venice Area Historical Society, and the Venice Museum and Archives bring you "Venice Museum Day", a guided tour that includes a free trolley tour. Continuing through April 17th, the Center for Architecture hosts an exhibit of Sarasota's unique architecture, from the earliest native Americans, through the settlement and early development of Sarasota to the international fame of the Sarasota School of Architecture and today's talented architects. Admire the beauty and clarity of the Sarasota School of Architecture, a movement that brought world-wide recognition to Sarasota.

Public libraries throughout the county are also

participating. As part of the Library Centennial, author Craig Pittman will discuss his The New York Times bestseller, Oh, Florida! How America's Weirdest State Influences the Rest of the Country. On Tuesday, April 6th at 2pm, Pittman will speak on the contradictions that make Florida an interesting state politically. On Thursday, April 8th at 4pm the library will host a virtual event titled "Women in Archaeology". Guest speaker Maranda Kles from Archaeological Consultants Inc will emphasize the women who shaped the archaeology of Sarasota County. To find more library Centennial events, follow this link: <https://scgovlibrary.librarymarket.com/events/month?keywords=centennial>

Visit <https://www.sarasotacountycentennial.com/> for physical locations and zoom links for upcoming events. The events highlighted here are by no means a cumulative list so be sure to visit the website to learn more about the activities happening to celebrate Sarasota County's Centennial over the next few months!

Addressing Vaccination Disparities

BY PAULA COLON

After a longstanding call to prioritize vaccine distribution for individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities, advocates are hopeful that emerging policies will continue to address those with special needs as a high risk group, and promote accessibility in the vaccination process.

Gov. Ron DeSantis issued an executive order that would allow Floridians younger than 65 who have high-risk medical conditions to receive the COVID-19 vaccine with a determination of extreme vulnerability form signed by a doctor.

Many individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities have underlying health conditions that place them in the high-risk group for experiencing complications and possibly death if exposed to COVID-19. According to FAIR Health, those with intellectual and developmental disabilities are nearly three times as likely to die from COVID-19 as others who are infected.

"Folks with a full range of disabilities have many of those underlying co-morbidities that make them vulnerable for contraction of Covid," said Tony Palma, director of public policy for Disability rights Florida. "Because of that susceptibility to the virus, the state needed and still needs to consider these unique sort of permutations very carefully in terms of how we guarantee that folks with disabilities receive the appropriate life saving medical care."

Many of these high-risk individuals live in nursing homes or assisted living facilities among other congregate living spaces. According to ExceptionalLives.org, in addition to participating in high risk behaviors, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities have difficulties accessing COVID testing centers, receiving COVID tests, and finding information on COVID prevention.

"They have a higher risk of contracting Covid because they are more likely to live in group homes or with caregivers who are over the age of 60," said Sharon Alexander, CEO of the Unicorn Children's foundation and advocate for individuals with special needs. "We know that sometimes they can't comply with CDC recommendations such as wearing a mask because of sensory issues, maintaining spatial distancing can be problematic, and having access

to the medical care or even understanding or knowing where to go if in fact they do experience symptoms."

While executive order NUMBER 21-46 is meant to give high risk individuals such as those with developmental and intellectual disabilities a better chance of receiving vaccinations, to many, vaccination access has been a long time coming considering how extensively these individuals have been challenged by the pandemic.

"I think vaccination is really important because it kinda gets them back to quote normal life," Alexander said. "When the pandemic hit and the lockdown went into place, these individuals lost access to educational programs and therapeutic courses and most of those programs have gone into virtual format with systems that are not necessarily easy to navigate for this population."

Now with increased vaccination opportunities for more high-risk disability groups, advocates for those with developmental and intellectual disabilities are petitioning for proper accessibility at vaccination sites for all individuals.

"We need to educate our vaccine programs because sometimes these sites can be unfriendly from a sensory perspective, and it can be very overwhelming for families," Alexander said. "By educating the vaccination workers and providing them with strategies on how to make the experience less threatening, we could increase numbers of individuals with disabilities obtaining the vaccine."



A drive thru vaccination clinic in Bradenton

Despite delayed vaccination opportunities for those with special needs, advocates are hopeful that state and federal governments will continue implementing policies and other measures in conjunction with advocacy networks that will alleviate some of the disparities facing the special needs community surrounding COVID-19.

