

Opinion

South Florida 100

Our panel of 100 influential leaders discusses the most important issues affecting you.

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The top stories last week



Katy Sorenson, president, Good Government Initiative, University of Miami

The CIA's shameful practice of torture makes a mockery of our American values. It was heartening to see two U.S. Senate elders of different parties, Dianne Feinstein and John McCain, affirm this unequivocally when the Senate Intelligence Committee released its scathing report. The descriptions of the methods of torture were sickening enough, but even more disturbing was the fact that the CIA outsourced the design of torture methods to former military psychologists for \$80 million. So health care professionals grotesquely abused their knowledge, profited obscenely from it, and we paid for it. All they gave the enemy fodder for vengeance.



Thomas Shea, president, Right Management

NASA's perfect test flight of the Orion space capsule was an important boost for Florida's economic outlook and global image. Like old times, it's great to see Florida-based aerospace talent back in the spotlight, especially with NASA targeting human exploration of Mars in decades to come. With private-sector player SpaceX building a commercial launch facility in Texas, much is at stake as Florida seeks to remain the prime launch site for human exploration of deep space.



Jack Seiler, mayor, Fort Lauderdale

As we near the end of the year, Fort Lauderdale continues to see positive economic news. Unemployment is at 5 percent, the lowest in South Florida and below the state and national averages. We have seen 59 consecutive months of tourism growth, and our marine industry is surging on the heels of its most successful boat show in history. Plus, with average gas prices at \$2.82 a gallon, we should see even more drive-in visitors; more business for our local retail, restaurant, and entertainment destinations; and a spike in recreational boating.



Patty Asseff, president, Broward League of Cities

Last week the Broward League appeared before the Inspector General Selection and Oversight Committee to share our thoughts and concerns regarding the role of the Office of the Inspector General. The League has been working diligently and in good faith with the county and the OIG to ensure transparency and open discussion. While we may not always agree, we believe there is a genuine mutual respect among all parties who share a common mission to serve the best interests of the public. It is through joint efforts that we make a positive difference in the lives of our residents.



Claudette Bruck, commissioner, Coral Springs

Here we go again. Congress is again gearing up to vote on a one-year extension of temporary tax exemptions that affect millions of businesses and individuals instead of making those credits permanent, then concentrating on meaningful overhaul of the entire tax code. At issue are several provisions: One that allows businesses to write off capital investments more quickly, another that protects homeowners granted mortgage debt-reduction from paying income tax on the debt forgiven; and another that permits those who live in states that do not have an income tax to deduct state and local sales tax on their federal returns.



Walter "Skip" Campbell, mayor, Coral Springs

It is easier to be critical than correct. The recent comments of our Public Defender criticizing our Chief Judge for not disciplining his fellow judges for improper behavior outside the courthouse are misplaced. The facts are that the duties of the Chief Judge are set forth in court rules and do not include discipline. We have a separate body known as the Judicial Qualifications Committee, which recommends discipline for unacceptable behavior of judges. People have the right to criticize, but get it right.



Kristin Jacobs, member, Broward County Commission

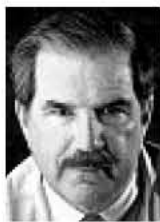
"The only currency you have is your honesty." These were the sage words sternly offered from Rules Committee Chairman Ritch Workman as this freshman U.S. Representative entered her first week of legislative training. Chairman Workman's

admonition came with the directive that there would be no partisan "reindeer games" and no bullying maneuvers by the supermajority to squash the voice of the minority. How refreshing. For colleagues who will soon find ourselves on opposite sides of a debate: The bar for respect, decorum and courtesy has been set. May the class of 2014 rise to it.



Mitch Ceasar, chairman, Broward County Democratic Party

We are now enjoying the pleasure of cooler weather. I love it. But it reminds me of the barrage from climate-change deniers. Some use our cool down as an explanation to prove there is no "change." There is almost universal agreement among world scientists that the planet is getting warmer. Last year was the warmest year ever recorded. Certainly growing up, I do not recall all these worldwide weather occurrences. As a peninsula, Florida is surrounded on three sides by water. We must be vigilant in planning for the future of our children and grandchildren.



Earl Maucker, commissioner, Lighthouse Point; former editor, Sun Sentinel

Broward County's new mayor, Tim Ryan, has declared that he wants to bring peace between the county and the cities. He demonstrated his commitment this week by engineering a delay of a controversial garbage contract discussion until the county's newest commissioner, Mark Bogen, takes office. Smart move by Ryan who rightly believed Brogan should be involved in the dialogue which significantly impact cities he represents. Commissioners Barbara Sharief and Stacy Ridder would be wise to follow Ryan's lead.



Antonio Fins, executive director, Guy Harvey Ocean Foundation

The Bahamian government is again the leader on an important marine conservation measure. Three years ago, it declared Bahamian waters a shark sanctuary. Now it's legislated a closed fishing season for Nassau grouper. This iconic reef species has been overexploited throughout its range for decades. Scientists and NGOs across the Caribbean have called for closed seasons plus protection of spawning sites, especially in islands where Nassau groupers maintain a reasonable population. The Bahamas has acted, thankfully. The Bahamas must now enforce this important decree against poachers, but it's a critical first step.



Hava Leipzig Holzhauser, regional director, Florida Anti-Defamation League

The FBI released 2013 statistics on hate crimes. We are greatly concerned that 11 Florida cities with populations of more than 100,000 reported zero hate crimes. Nationally, more than 6,000 documented hate crimes were reported. Reporting these crimes to the FBI is encouraged but not required. The highest number of religion-based crimes was perpetrated against the Jewish community. We thank our law enforcement partners who did report and who did use best practices.



Chip LaMarca, member, Broward County Commission

Multiple sclerosis patients are navigating a 67-foot sailboat called the "Oceans of Hope" on a 17-month journey covering 33,000 nautical miles and 20 ports across the globe — all to change perceptions of those with MS. This voyage aims to broaden the horizons of those who perceive themselves as trapped by their condition, either physically or mentally, and inspire them to realize that they still have potential to achieve great things. The sailboat made a stop at Bahia Mar this week and will leave Fort Lauderdale on Monday.



Barry Johnson, president, Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce

Florida received some good news this week as the National Association of Realtors forecast that the state, along with Arizona, are considered magnets for the Baby Boomers. With more and more people working beyond 65, boomers who are looking for a pre-retirement opportunity will focus on a dynamic local economy, adequate housing supply and a lower cost of living. South Florida has the ideal weather and a rich diverse population with top entertainment, sports and educational offerings. Not sure we qualify for the preferred lower cost of living aspect, though.

Looking ahead to this week



Archbishop Thomas Wenski, Archdiocese of Miami

Bullying on the Internet is a new form of violence and should not be dismissed lightly, especially when directed against children and other vulnerable persons. Bullying, along with harassment of children by predators, is a terrible plague spread through the Internet. Young people today are continually "connected" and parents must be involved with how their children are exposed to technology to mitigate risks. St. John Paul II rightly described children as a "precious treasure, given to each generation as a challenge to its wisdom and humanity."



Eleanor Sobel, member, Florida Senate

Charter schools are a hot topic in Florida, and this legislative session will be no different. At the Broward Delegation meeting, Pembroke Pines lobbied a bill that would mandate the school board to share funds it receives from property taxes with the Pembroke Pines-run charter schools. However, we need to do what's in the best interests of our children and not simply take from one pants pocket to give to the other. We need to find alternatives that both parties can agree on, such as creating a lab school with Broward College or a separate line item for municipal charters.



Richard Barkett, CEO, Greater Fort Lauderdale REALTORS

The recent housing crisis has prompted questions over whether home ownership is still a viable way toward greater wealth in this country. Confidence in homeownership has been shaken, and many have turned to renting. Researchers continue to find evidence that homeownership contributes to individual wealth. Homeownership long has been central to Americans' ability to amass wealth even with the substantial decline in wealth after the housing bust. The net worth of homeowners over time has significantly outpaced that of renters, who tend as a group to accumulate little if any wealth, according to the New York Times.



Dr. Michael Dennis, chairman, Florida Atlantic University Schmidt College of Medicine

Is it reasonable to question the timing and motivation of the release of CIA interrogation techniques by the Senate Intelligence Committee since that legislative body's leadership changes in several weeks? Is it fair to question whether the CIA's covert investigation of Senator Feinstein's personal files played a role in her decision? Are the deplorable, unlawful acts of torture verifiable (hope not) when only one party prepared the report? Was the potential impact on the safety of American and foreign agents attempting to protect our national security considered? Looking ahead, our citizens deserve to ask informative questions about politics manipulating publicity.



Mike Ryan, mayor, Sunrise

The Fort Lauderdale Strikers announced legendary Brazilian player Ronaldo has joined the ownership team. Ronaldo is a soccer legend, having played for preeminent soccer clubs and World Cup championship teams and received World Player of the Year three times. Many refer to Ronaldo as "the phenomenon" and consider him to be the greatest striker in history. Many also believe this announcement is bigger for South Florida than the announcement of David Beckham's speculative interest. The difference: Ronaldo, as an owner, is joining an iconic and existing team with roots in our community. Broward is now on the international soccer map.



Steven Ronik, CEO, Henderson Behavioral Health

Over the next few months, the Florida Legislature will go back into session. Thankfully, this year, Florida is in much better financial shape and a budget surplus is forecast. It's important to talk about our priorities. What will they be this year? Will our legislature fund key areas like behavioral health care and education to the levels Floridians need and deserve? Or will we continue to rank near the bottom on these key quality of life indicators? Let's do our part to help our local legislators make their case — and be sure to influence committee chairs with the facts.



Frank Ortis, mayor, Pembroke Pines

Another eagle, Joy2, may be making our Pembroke Pines eagle's nest her home if Pride, our male eagle, is comfortable with the situation. Reports indicate that Joy has not been seen this year yet, so Pride may be moving on to a new relationship. Observers are being asked to please stay away from the fence and cone areas. Pictures may be taken in the median so as not to scare the new female eagle away. We are very proud of our eagles, but also want our citizens to be safe. Please follow any signage and respect the boundaries.



Eduardo Padrón, president, Miami Dade College

Next week, many of us will feel the pressure of the holiday rush. We will wrap up our year-end to-do lists, and shop for those last-minute gifts. Our students will take their finals, our faculty will finalize grades and will we all prepare for winter break at the college. During this time of goodwill and reflection, we will be reminded of the lifetime gift that education provides, and that the work we do truly changes lives.



Andrew Duffell, president, Research Park at Florida Atlantic University

In the wake of the recent sad events in Ferguson, Mo., Staten Island, N.Y., and Cleveland, it is tempting to be reactive and accept central control to solve a problem. The states must beware the federal government's overreach into an area that reserved to the states by the Constitution. The federal government must leave local law enforcement to the states and their cities, and they must resist the intrusion in order to preserve the U.S. system of government. Reform and training are undoubtedly needed, but the solutions must come from the states, not the federal government.