

Opinion

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South Florida 100

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

The top stories last week



Kathleen Cannon, president, United Way of Broward County

Despite World Cup fever, perhaps today's favorite soccer team is the Wild Boars, following the herculean rescue of the 12 boys and their coach after 18 days trapped in a cave. The Thai Navy Seals said they didn't know if God or science aided them but thanked both. This complex, perilous international operation had all parents holding our collective breath in solidarity with the boys' parents. "We'll bring the kids home," was the last thing Saman Kunan said before perishing trying to save the boys. Thank you Saman and all first responders for all you do. You are selfless heroes.



Mitch Ceasar, former chairman, Broward Democratic Party

The rescue of the 12 boys and their coach from the cave in Thailand finally ended in success. The attention of the world focused on their ordeal. It was a miracle borne out of guts and science. As a parent I could not stop watching the television. We all felt the anxiety of the parents. The joy of rescue was another emotion shared by all. Finding anything we agree upon these days is very difficult. Perhaps compassion is the common denominator we need to employ more to be a better nation.



Gerry Litrento, senior executive vice president, BankUnited

The greatest soccer team this World Cup season is the Wild Boars that was safely rescued with their coach from a flooded cave in Thailand. In addition to the thoughts and prayers of millions, the effort included a team of international divers led by Thai Navy SEALs, the Australian doctor that entered the cave and a University of Texas faculty member who advised the divers on air quality. My heart lifted at their rescue and my spirits remain high at this dramatic illustration that when called upon we can come together and there is nothing we can't do.



Ghenete Wright Muir, attorney, Realtor, LGBTQ advocate

An international effort to rescue 12 Thai boys and their soccer coach from a flooded cave had the world watching in wonder and worry. I was checking in on them daily and learning of the magnitude of the rescue effort, given the intricate and challenging conditions of the cave. A friend pointed to the global response — including sending resources and rescuers — as a demonstration of the true value of each life. There was a global sigh of relief as the last person emerged from the cave safely, after more than two weeks of being trapped.



Mitchell W. Berger, founder and co-chair, Berger Singerman

It seems we are going to get a wall. The Berlin wall is going to be rebuilt and Vladimir Putin is going to pay for it after Donald Trump forgoes American Leadership and dismantles NATO.



John "Jack" P. Seiler, former mayor, Fort Lauderdale

We are experiencing a lack of civility at the federal, state and local level, and we all need to focus on stopping this troubling trend. Decent Americans, whether elected or not, must refrain from bullying and intimidation; must never resort to name calling and personal attacks; must debate issues and policies, and not individuals and personalities; and must continue to at least attempt to have meaningful and respectful communication with other people, even those we disagree with or disapprove. Being responsible, polite and courteous does not make you weak or ineffective, but going lower than your opponent exposes your weaknesses and flaws. Quite simply, we all need to be civil to each other, and together set an example for the generations to come.



Ted Deutch, member, U.S. House of Representatives

America has been transformed in the five months since the Stoneman Douglas tragedy. A movement of students and parents has shaken our country awake to the reality of gun violence in our communities. A global march led to a national bus tour, and non-profits, foundations, and working groups have formed to follow mourning with action. In Washington students and parents have met with dozens of members of Congress and held briefings, panels, and town halls to promote sensible and bipartisan solutions. We still face an uphill challenge, but with these incredible leaders, I am confident we will win.



Nan Rich, member, Broward County Commission

After many failed attempts at repealing the Affordable Care Act, the Trump administration has decided to eliminate most of the funding for grassroots navigators who help Americans sign up for insurance. To add insult to injury, for the first time officials will encourage navigators to promote health plans that circumvent the law's vital consumer benefits, such as protection for those with pre-existing conditions! Rather than promoting affordable health care options, it is abundantly clear that this administration is still more focused on undermining one of President Obama's legislative achievements, even if it harms millions of Americans in the process.

Americans don't measure up at Mar-a-Lago



Fred Grimm

We're too lazy, us Americans.

Or maybe we lack the requisite skills.

Either way, we're obviously not up to staffing a high priority presidential enterprise.

We can't cook. Serve food. Sling drinks. Wash dishes. Bus tables. Clean

rooms. Tend gardens. We can't perform such work well enough to serve the president's business interests. Or maybe it's that we just won't do it cheap enough.

So once again, President Trump has found himself forced to staff his beloved Mar-a-Lago Club with the very sort of workers he once vowed to banish — those damn job-stealing foreigners.

The blame, of course, lies not with our great president, but with our less-than-great selves. We're the apparent flaw in Donald Trump's plan to make America grand again. Americans — or at least Americans drawn from South Florida's slovenly workforce — just aren't up to working within the gilded confines of his Palm Beach manor. The Prez and his cronies require something special from their servers. Perhaps an exotic East European accent.

On July 5, Trump's beachside club submitted a request to the U.S. Department of Labor for permission to hire 61 non-American seasonal workers. According to Vox, the Mar-a-Lago claimed it needed 40 servers and 21 cooks to work at the club from this coming October through next May.

The resort's application attests that qualified Americans can't be found to fill these essential jobs. The document also indicates that the famously ostentatious club, which charges members \$200,000 a year to hang with the Great Leader, intends to pay imported cooks \$13.31 an hour and servers \$12.68 an hour. (No tipping allowed.) Perhaps Mar-a-Lago's Third World pay scale accounts for the paucity of American applicants.

"It's called Palm Beach social season. And what we do is we sometimes have to bring people in," then-candidate Trump told ABC News back in 2016, explaining his club's need for seasonal foreign workers.

Department of Labor records, however, indicate that other Trump properties, golf clubs, resorts and hotels, also covet cheap imported labor. ABC News reported that since Trump declared his candidacy in 2015, Trump brands have applied for more than 400 H-2B visas for low-skilled, non-agricultural seasonal workers.

Vox reported last week that of the 144 seasonal job openings that Trump businesses posted from 2016 to 2017, only one was filled by an actual American. The other 143 went to H-2B visa holders.

It's not just Trump bent on exploiting imported labor. Hundreds of hotels, ski resorts and restaurants clamor for H-2B seasonal workers. It's pretty obvious to South Floridians that local restaurants have hired a disproportionate number of servers with accents out of the old Soviet bloc.

Apparently H-2B workers are so crucial to his brand that the cost-cutting business guy Donald Trump has trumped the xenophobic America-first Donald Trump.

Candidate Trump promised cheering red hats that he would "institute an absolute requirement to hire American workers for every visa and immigration program. No exceptions."

But self-dealing businessman Trump decided otherwise. Last July, his administration upped the annual allocation of H-2B visas from 66,000 to 81,000. Three days later, Trump properties applied for 76 visas.

Mar-a-Lago, if barely, managed to comply with the Labor Department requirement that employers seeking H-2B visa foreign workers first attempt to fill job openings with Americans. According to the Washington Post, the resort ran a small ad in the Palm Beach Post: *3 mos recent & verifiable exp in fine dining/country club. No tips.* The cryptic ad, which ran twice, listed no email address, mailing address or phone number. Applicants were instructed, *Apply by fax.*

Yet President Trump's outsized sympathy for employers, like himself, in need of cheap, unskilled foreign labor doesn't extend to tech sector companies in desperate want of scientists, researchers, software engineers, programmers, systems analysts and the like. For 16 years in a row, U.S. tech companies have bumped up against the annual limit of H-1B visas for highly skilled foreign workers.

On April 6, the Trump administration announced that the employers had reached the 65,000 annual limit on H-1B visas, along with the 20,000 visas allocated for applicants with advanced degrees. Meanwhile, the administration has been larding visa requirements with new bureaucratic obstacles, adding months of uncertainty to the process. So much so, that Canada instituted an opportunistic fast-track visa approval program for techies and has been happily filching talent that would have otherwise gone to U.S. firms.

But never mind those sneaky Canadians. The Prez has done a bang-up job protecting our strategic advantage in Romanian cooks.

Fred Grimm (@grimm_fred or leogrimm@gmail.com), a longtime resident of Fort Lauderdale, has worked as a reporter or columnist in South Florida since 1976.

Looking ahead to this week



Tim Lonergan, president, Broward League of Cities; mayor, Oakland Park

Following the successful cave rescue operation by brave first responders in Thailand, we are reminded to honor and thank local first responders, our community heroes, who put themselves on the front line of disasters while jeopardizing their own safety every day to protect and save others. The complexity of work by law enforcement officers, firefighters, paramedics, EMTs and volunteers, and the unknown challenges that they face are often not visible in the communities they protect. Never knowing what to expect, they are trained to handle a variety of situations and put themselves in harm's way to keep our communities safe.



Michael De Lucca, president, Broward Regional Health Planning Council Inc.

Starbucks has recently announced that they are eliminating all straws from their stores by 2020. Instead of using straws, customers will be given a plastic lid, similar to the lid that is served on hot beverages. Straws have been known to cause prominent environmental issues, and Starbucks is the first large company to begin to ban straws completely. Other companies, states and cities are starting to follow in this direction. Companies that do not want to get rid of straws are replacing them with paper straws, which are known to decompose easily and have fewer environmental effects.



Sheldon Harr, founding rabbi emeritus, Temple Kol Ami Emanu-El

"Make new friends but keep the old: one is silver and the other gold." This childlike and childhood stanza is supposed to help teach children how to deal with relationships and how important relationships can be. And yet, this past week we are witnessing the continuing diminishing relationships between America and our golden friends, the members of NATO. In life we all know that true friends are difficult to acquire, and sometimes even more difficult to keep. While we may have differences among our friendship circles, there are civil ways in which to resolve those conflicts. This has not been demonstrated in Brussels this past week. And it has not been demonstrated over the past couple of years.



Eleanor Sobel, former member, Florida Senate

For many years, Broward County Schools had a zero-tolerance policy resulting in thousands of juveniles going to jail for misdemeanors. Today the focus of discipline is on the Promise (Preventing Recidivism through Opportunities, Mentoring, Interventions, Supports and Education) program by eliminating the school-to-prison pipeline for minor infractions. "The intent of PROMISE is to safeguard the student from entering the judicial system." The Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Commission led by Sheriff Bob Gualtieri of Pinellas County, who supports the Promise program, backs more law enforcement oversight with greater consistency by state attorneys and reform of the Broward program.



Robert Weinroth, former deputy mayor, Boca Raton

I often hear people declare they don't vote in primaries because they either refuse to be labeled a Republican or Democrat, preferring to be "independent" or, more accurately, NPA (no party affiliation), or they just cannot be bothered going through the exercise but proudly note their record of voting during every general election. These same people gripe about the quality of the candidates from which they must choose in November. To vote in the primary you must be registered in one of the two major parties before June 30th. Exercise your right to vote during the primary and general election!



Peter Moore, president, Chen Moore and Associates

On November 6th ballot, there will be a penny surtax question to fund countywide transportation questions to relieve traffic congestion in all 31 municipalities. These improvements will include traffic signalization, county roadways, intersection improvements and public transportation. While no one likes to pay more in taxes, our economic vitality depends on our ability to move people, goods and services around our county. I'll be dedicating the next several SF100 briefs to this subject, so stay tuned!



Tim Ryan, member, Broward County Commission

Low voter turnout in primary elections is a discouraging Broward County tradition. Only 11 percent to 15 percent of registered voters cast a ballot in the past five primaries. This year's primary is August 28. It's easier than ever to vote with a "vote-by-mail" ballot you can request online at browardsoe.org and click "vote by mail." Important choices on the primary ballot include school security funding, teacher salaries, party nominees for governor and cabinet, and judicial and School Board races. Democracy is founded on choices "we the people" make when we take the time to vote.



Barbara M. Sharief, member, Broward County Commission

We are early in the 2018 hurricane season and already have three named storms. Now is the time to start preparing. Hurricanes can be life-threatening and cause serious damage to property from flooding, storm surges, high winds and tornadoes. While we can't stop a tropical storm or hurricane, we can take steps to protect ourselves, our families and properties. Take time to determine your risk, develop an evacuation plan, secure an insurance check-up, assemble disaster supplies, strengthen your home, identify your trusted sources for hurricane information, and complete your written hurricane plan. For more information visit Broward.org/Hurricane, nhc.noaa.gov or weather.gov/hurricanesafety.