

**December 5, 2019**

[http://daytonanewsjournal.fl.newsmemory.com/?\\_ga=2.145748534.383454882.1575601803-1348640103.1573317101](http://daytonanewsjournal.fl.newsmemory.com/?_ga=2.145748534.383454882.1575601803-1348640103.1573317101)

## **School 'reform' threatens local control, quality**

This is in response to two recent articles in the News-Journal regarding K-12 education in Volusia County.

On the Nov. 25 Opinion page there was a News-Journal call to “Give schools more flexibility.” This was a theme of recent past school district Superintendent Tom Russell, although he usually used the term “autonomy.” Prior to the contrived K-12 school reform movement, U.S. schools had considerably greater autonomy. (I use the word “contrived” because there is good evidence that our schools were performing at least as well as they always had prior to the implementation of that movement.) The excessive standardized testing creates more stress than desirable, and I say this as one whose career background included psychological and educational assessment and measurement as an important element. The letter grading of schools, especially at the elementary level, is counter to psychological principles of motivation for learning.

Another negative feature of the school reform movement appeared in the Local section of the Nov. 26 edition, concerning state approval of a Volusia County STEM-focused elementary charter school. Speaking of autonomy, the local school district had twice rejected this charter school application. A STEM-focused elementary school is questionable. Elementary schools should provide a broadbased type of education.

Psychological research has indicated that most people begin to formulate realistic career plans during adolescent years.

The school reform movement, euphemistically using the term “school choice,” has been strongly pushing for privately operated charter school and vouchers for private schools. Eighty to eighty-five percent of private schools have religious affiliations and many appear to have social, economic, political and/or religious philosophical agendas. This is antithetical to development of the critical thinking that is required for maintaining a workable democracy.

I am not a conspiracy theory type. However, I do wonder if the school reform movement could be part of a broader privatization movement?

**Dan Kennedy**

*Kennedy is retired from a career that combined psychology and education, spent mainly in universities, but which also included several years in public school system psychology departments.*

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**November 30, 2019**

<https://www.news-journalonline.com/opinion/letters>

## **Motives matter**

In a recent issue, Michael Reagan's column justified President Donald Trump's maneuver to bribe Ukraine to investigate the Bidens by withholding military funds approved by Congress. Reagan argues this quid pro quo is legitimate by comparing it to actions by other presidents in their interactions with other nations.

The problem is with the examples he sites: Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill's collaboration with Joseph Stalin during World War II; John F. Kennedy's interaction with Russia during the Cuban Missile Crisis; and Barack Obama's (and other European leaders) deal with Iran to halt their nuclear development program. All of these might be considered quid-pro-quo — our presidents had to give something to get something. The difference is that all of these exchanges were meant to benefit the United States; while in the Ukraine case it was meant to benefit only President Trump, not the nation as a whole.

**Tom Hilburn, Ormond Beach**

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**October 24, 2019**

<https://www.news-journalonline.com/opinion/20191024/getting-volusia-county-students-registered-and-ready-to-vote--letters>

## **GOP rules**

According to President Donald Trump and his supporters, Democrats are behind every investigation of Trump and that the impeachment investigation is a travesty. The facts are otherwise. The Mueller investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 election was headed up by Robert Mueller, a Republican, who was appointed by Rod Rosenstein, a Republican, who was appointed by Donald Trump! Multiple Trump campaign members were convicted of crimes and went to prison.

The Constitution states: "The House of Representatives shall choose their Speaker and other Officers; and shall have the sole Power of Impeachment." Trump does not get to decide how the impeachment inquiry is conducted.

The impeachment inquiry is not a trial. It is similar to a grand jury which determines if there's sufficient evidence for a trial. If there is a trial, it will be conducted by the Senate. The House inquiry is being conducted under the House rules which were adopted when John Boehner, a Republican, was the speaker. Republican committee members have the same ability to question witnesses as do the Democrat members. The hearings are behind closed doors as they would be in a grand jury.

The allegations against Trump are quite serious. Trump is accused of multiple instances of obstruction of justice. In 1998, obstruction of justice was considered by House Republicans to be grounds for impeachment. In the case of his actions with Ukraine, Trump is accused of extortion and bribery. Bribery is specifically stated in the Constitution as grounds for impeachment and removal from office.

**Dale Harmon, Palm Coast**

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**September 22 2019**

<https://www.news-journalonline.com/opinion/20190922/daytona-beach-pursues-skewed-penalties-for-enforcement--letters>

## **CAPITAL QUESTIONS**

Last week The News-Journal published an opinion piece by Phil Kerpen titled “Trump should end tax Pelosi also once wanted to kill.” Kerpen argues that capital gains (profits from investments like stocks and real estate) should be indexed against inflation. That is, investment income should be taxed on the amount realized, excluding the increase in value due to inflation.

Capital gains tax for wealthy investors is much less than the income tax on a high-salary income. The capital gains tax rate is 0% for income of \$0 to \$39,375, 15% for income of \$39,376 to \$434,550 and 20% for income of \$434,551 or more. For single filers the income tax rate on an income of \$39,375 is 24%, on \$434,551 is 35%, and for over \$500,00 is 37%. Why such differences between capital gains and income taxes? I don't know but would suspect it has something to do with lobbying by wealthy investors.

I also do not understand the argument for indexing capital gains taxes against inflation. It seems you could make the same argument for salaried employees. Often salaries, like other expenditures, are adjusted for inflation.

**Thomas Hilburn, Ormond Beach**

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**August 22, 2019**

## **COMMUNITY VOICES**

### ***REMEMBER HIGHER PURPOSE OF HOMELESS SHELTER***

**By the Rev. Kathy Tew Rickey**

I write as a concerned citizen, pastor and co-chair of F.A.I.T.H. For the past several years, F.A.I.T.H. has been at the forefront of urging officials in Volusia County to provide emergency shelter for single, adult homeless people. An all-important component of such a shelter has been offering restorative services to its guests such as lifeskill training, counseling, and addiction treatment. Going beyond a mere bed for the night, F.A.I.T.H.'s vision for a county homeless shelter includes the possibility of transformation that will get folks permanently off the streets.

Like many concerned citizens of Volusia County, I celebrate the founding and construction of First Step Shelter — but thus far I am frustrated by its leadership and management.

On August 14, I attended the meeting between the City Commission of Daytona Beach and the members of the First Step Shelter Board. Listening to our civic leaders, I heard numerous assumptions and much stereotyping about the lives of the homeless. Every homeless person out there is a person deserving of dignity and respect, at least until they prove themselves otherwise. They each have a life story of how and why they are without shelter. While I know from experience that homeless people can be exhausting to serve, they are God's children first.

Which evokes another concern: First Step Shelter ought to have some spirit of hospitality about it. Woven tightly into our Western culture, our society, and our democracy are the ethics of the Abrahamic Religions — Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. At the center is the divine call to hospitality, and it starts in the biblical text of Genesis with the story of Abraham and the Three Strangers. Abraham was a nomadic herdsman in an arid land. When three strangers approached, he did not hesitate to provide them with water, shelter, and food because four thousand years ago in the Ancient Near East not doing so could mean death for those in need. Abraham did not stop to ask the strangers where they came from, why they were there, or if they had a police escort. He simply provided for them and in doing so, entertained angels unawares.

Time and again in sacred text, by the Golden Rule, and by the tenets of all major world religions, we are called to feed the hungry, clothe the poor, and provide hospitality to the stranger. In modernity, we as individuals have few safe options for showing hospitality to strangers. For this reason, I want to see our civic leaders succeed; however, it is frustrating to watch as a scarcity mentality lends fear and distrust between the City Commission and the Shelter Board as they try to conduct business. My dearest hope is that First Step Shelter serve not only as a promise of restoration to people in need, but also as an extension of our individual response to the divine call to hospitality.

Godspeed the completion of the Shelter and may all with the power to make it so cease from being legalistic and fighting over purse strings. May commissioners and board members keep mind and heart on the higher call to serve those in dire need in our county. *Rickey leads the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Ormond Beach and serves as co-chair of the F.A.I.T.H. Community Organization.*

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**August 20, 2019**

**SCIENCE UNDER FIRE**

First, thanks to Brandon Haught for his excellent Sunday piece regarding science education.

Haught points out the possible threat to science education of the new state Board of Education chair Andy Tuck and notes Tuck's ignorance of mainstream science. This ignorance is clearly apparent. If Tuck understood the philosophy of science he would realize that his advocating of restricting the teaching of biological evolution to Darwin's theory is exactly what science teachers want to do. Darwin's theory is very strongly supported by empirical evidence and has no competitors within the realm of science.

Tuck also does not realize that his desire for developing student "critical thinking skills" is what leads to the acceptance of the Darwinian theory rather than biblical creation mythology and intelligence design ideas.

Is it not a bit scary such a scientifically ignorant person as chair of the Florida Board of Education?

**Dan Kennedy, Ormond Beach**

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**August 4, 2019**

<https://www.news-journalonline.com/opinion/20190804/it-makes-sense-to-keep-volusia-countys-echo-tax-going--letters>

## **LOCK DOWN NETWORKS**

America needs strong cyber security now.

Multi-billion dollar weapon systems all require networks of computers and access to GPS to set targeting information, and GPS information to guide them to their targets. On board ships, ground warfare weapons and airborne fighters and bombers' defensive systems all use computers, GPS and networks to know where they are, to analyze data to determine a threat, initiate defensive action and launch anti-threat defensive/offensive systems.

Nowhere do I see a major budget item to protect our sophisticated weapons. Without strong cyber protection, our weapons become useless targets.

Strong cyber protection is required to protect the networks (everything is controlled by computers networked together) that keep us safe from cyber-attacks including our voting machines that are the backbone of our Democratic system. Yet Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, just refused to fund increased cybersecurity for the coming 2020 election.

We have all heard of cybercriminals taking over hospitals, cities, etc computers, encrypting the data and demanding a ransom. If we, our government, does not immediately invest in very strong cybersecurity, our country is going to be held hostage and defenceless.

This is a bipartisan issue that must be addressed now!

**Harry R. White, Ormond Beach**

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**July 22, 2019**

<https://www.news-journalonline.com/opinion/20190722/sewer-conversion-isnt-only-answer-to-water-pollution--letters>

## **SEWER CONVERSION ISN'T THE ONLY ANSWER TO WATER POLLUTION**

Yes, nutrient runoff from septic tanks is polluting our waterways. But the same is happening with the sewer system. Furthermore, nutrient runoff from lawns is also a major contributor to the pollution. So switching everyone over to sewer won't cure our waterways.

We need to reduce the root causes of the runoff. How?

One way is by catching rainwater. A huge volume of water enters our waterways as runoff from impervious surfaces (roofs and pavement). We should be collecting rainwater off our roofs into rainbarrels, and using it for irrigation on dry days. In our rain-rich region, the roof of a 1,000-square-foot house can collect about 30,000 gallons of rainwater a year!

**[\[FLORIDA VOICES: Is there a better way to clean up septic tanks?\]](#)**

Another way is by increasing the ground's capacity to absorb rainwater. Removal of trees and other lush native vegetation has turned the ground into a sieve. We can use mulch, swales, and appropriate plantings to turn it back into a sponge. Trees and other vegetation are highly efficient stormwater pumps, working 24-7 for free.

In some cities, property owners get rebates and other incentives for installing rainbarrels and rain gardens. And public buildings garner much prestige from having these features.

We also need to conserve wetlands. One acre of wetlands can hold up to 1.5 million gallons of rainfall.

And of course, we also need to enforce the restrictions on fertilizing lawns in the summer.

Converting everyone to sewer won't cure water pollution. More effective solutions are simpler and closer at hand.

**Jenny Nazak, Daytona Beach**

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**June 16, 2019**

<https://www.news-journalonline.com/opinion/20190615/readers-debate-volusia-leaders-talk-of-growth-management--letters>

## **THE RIGHT GROWTH**

I am very pleased that our city and country officials apparently understand the meaning of the recent sales tax vote from concerned citizens. Do we have a need for growth? Yes — more plants and trees!

**Dan Kennedy, Ormond Beach**

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<https://www.news-journalonline.com/opinion/20190615/readers-debate-volusia-leaders-talk-of-growth-management--letters>

### **SHOTS FROM RIGHT**

Several recent letters have complained about how the Democrat leftists and the mainstream media criticize the president. I think the authors of these letters are absolutely right! However, what they fail to mention is the number of conservative pundits who criticize the president. For example, the following conservatives have eviscerated the president on TV and in print: George Will, David French, Bret Stephens, David Brooks, Charles Krauthammer (died in 2018), William Kristol, Max Boot, Michael Gerson, Jennifer Rubin, Jonah Goldberg. The list goes on ...

For the most part, the problems that these conservatives have with Trump are not over policy (except for maybe the president's use of trade tariffs and the criticism of our closest allies). Their chief concern is over the president's character.

I am a student of American history and have closely followed presidential politics since the 1952 Eisenhower vs Stevenson election. No president has received such criticism from his party, and no president has had such turnover in key executive positions. Over the last two years, the following have resigned or were fired: chief of staff, national security advisor, secretary of defense, secretary of state, attorney general, FBI Director, EPA director, secretary Health and Human Services, and the Homeland Security Director.

**Thomas Hilburn, Ormond Beach**

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<https://www.news-journalonline.com/opinion/20190530/sunrail-growth-welcome-trend--letters>

**May 30, 2019**

Public transit will play an increasingly central role in region-wide mobility

### **ALL ABOARD FOR MASS TRANSIT**

The growth in SunRail ridership is great news. Thank you for covering this issue. Road congestion will only continue to worsen throughout the region and the state. And we cannot fix congestion by building new roads — the new roads become instantly clogged with cars.

[READ MORE: [SunRail at 5: Ridership for commuter train is growing, but will it ever run to DeLand?](#)]

As our population continues to grow (and continues to age), public transit will play an increasingly central role in region-wide mobility. Adding rail stations, improving connectivity between rail and other modes of transport — bus, cycling, walking, taxi services, and air travel — and otherwise lowering the barriers to using SunRail and other public transit, are investments that will pay for themselves in public safety and quality of life.

[\[How about moving Volusia's second SunRail stop to Deltona? | LETTERS\]](#)

As shops, apartments, and other development continue to sprout up along rail lines, people will find it increasingly convenient and enjoyable to use public transit. There is a certain percentage of the population (not only residents but visitors too) who would prefer not to have to drive on congested roads (or hassle with parking once they reach their destination), and would just as soon leave their cars at home, or even do without car ownership entirely. By lowering the barriers to public transit, we enable that choice.

Naysayers of public transit might want to consider that every time someone who could drive a car chooses to ride the bus or train instead, that's one less car clogging the roads. So it's actually in motorists' self-interest to support public transit, even if they themselves never ride it.

Jennifer Nazak, Daytona Beach

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<https://www.news-journalonline.com/opinion/20190521/floridas-debate-still-strong-on-arming-local-teachers--letters>

**May 22, 2019**

## **A CHINA STRATEGY**

We are engaged in a trade war with China. According to President Trump “trade wars are good, and easy to win.” Maybe, but it is doubtful.

I have some suggestions for how we should deal with China.

On trade, we should rejoin the Trans Pacific Partnership, or TPP. In February 2016, President Obama signed on to the TPP trade agreement with Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, and Vietnam. It contained measures to lower both non-tariff and tariff barriers to trade, and establish an investor-state dispute settlement mechanism. Advocates for the TPP have argued it would have reduced the members' dependence on Chinese trade and bring the other members in a closer trade alliance with the United States.

Although there was bipartisan support for the TPP, it was never approved by Congress, and both Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton rejected it in their presidential campaigns. I recommend that President Trump and the Congress reconsider.

Another tactic I think we should adopt is to strongly denounce China's human-rights abuses and champion civil rights and religious liberty for the Chinese. This is in the spirit of America's greatness and will surely be supported by our other democratic allies.

**Tom Hilburn, Ormond Beach**

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<https://www.news-journalonline.com/opinion/20190416/spruce-creek-students-cope-with-drugs-mental-illness--letters>

**April 16, 2019**

### **SMALL STATES PROTECTED**

A April 7 letter ("[Electoral College fair](#)") about the Electoral College defended it as protecting smaller states from the coastal elites (like California and New York). However, both Texas and Florida have greater populations than New York.

The Founding Fathers instituted the Electoral College to both protect the smaller states from the larger ones and to maintain the institution of slavery. Of course, we should remember that all voters were elites then (white male landowners). Also, recall the Constitution originally counted a slave as three-fifths of a free person, for the purpose of determining the number Representatives for a state. Thank heavens we have changed the Constitution and our laws so that all females, all races and the poor can vote.

It could be argued that the small states are well protected without the Electoral College: The combined population of Wyoming, Alaska, South Dakota, North Dakota, Idaho and Mississippi is less than half that of Florida; but they have six times as many Senators. Wow!

However, I do agree with the author about one thing: Amending the Constitution to change the Electoral College is very unlikely – currently a bridge too far.

Tom Hilburn, Ormond Beach

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**April 5, 2019**

<https://www.news-journalonline.com/opinion/20190405/volusia-county-cant-be-trusted-on-half-penny-tax--letters>

### **SECRET SCARS**

Thanks for the March 31 article ("Secret scars") about the scars of sexual abuse. Matt McGuirk bore such scars. At 10, he bravely testified against his teacher who had been sexually abusing him. His predator was sent to prison, but McGuirk received a life sentence of suffering.

McGuirk seemed proud that he helped put the man in prison so he wouldn't continue to hurt children. However, McGuirk didn't want to talk after the trial about his feelings. He kept his demons inside and died of an accidental drug overdose a month after turning 31.

### **[SECRET SCARS: Mother, daughter find hope in wake of father's sex abuse](#)**

So other victims would receive hope, help and healing even if they couldn't afford it, McGuirk's parents, Mike and Victoria, founded Straight Up SolGier.

Matt himself named it, spelling it with a capital "G" for God and creating the logo. The organization provides free professional counseling for local children and adults who have been sexually abused. People, including several senior citizens, are now benefiting from free therapy the McGuirk's foundation provides.

We're thankful to Gov. Ron DeSantis who as a congressman realized the importance of such a worthy organization. He was instrumental in this foundation achieving a 501(c)3 non-profit status.

April 7-13 is National Crime Victims' Rights Week. One of our licensed mental health counselors, Deborah Ebert, owner of Inner Garden Counseling, has been nominated for Counselor of the Year. Jofre Miller, who has helped with fundraisers paying for counselors, has been nominated for Volunteer of the Year. The winners will be announced at the Victims' Rights Breakfast and Awards Ceremony on April 12.

**Barbara Waite Sandberg, Ormond Beach**

*Barbara Waite Sandberg is a member of the board of Straight Up SolGier*

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<https://www.news-journalonline.com/opinion/20190313/letters-commissioners-need-to-stop-dragging-their-feet-and-get-this-rolling>

**March 13 2019**

## **HEALTHCARE IDEA**

Health care is essential for a human existence. The cost and availability of medical care are key issues. According to a 2016 World Bank study, the U.S. spent over \$9,000 per person on health care, while most industrialized countries spent less than \$6,000 per person.

Republicans have argued that health care will become cheaper if we remove regulations on health insurance companies. Although regulations have been reduced in the federal government and in some states, there has been no significant reduction in cost.

Democratic progressives have proposed Medicare-for-All plans. It is not clear what these plans will cost and how they will be paid for, but probably with increased taxes. It is also not clear what will happen to the over 2.5 million health insurance employees. And, will Medicare-for-All cover employer health plans?

I suggest an alternative that was considered during the deliberations over Obamacare: A public insurance option where the U.S. government sells insurance policies for health coverage similar to Medicare. Individuals and employers would pay for the policies at a rate to cover government costs. Public insurance should be competitive with private insurance, since administrative costs for Medicare are 2 percent, versus 12 to 18 percent for private insurance, and there would no profit paid to shareholders.

Some would argue that public insurance is a form of socialism. However, this is no different from other government entities such as the quasi-governmental postal system, public school systems, NASA's space program and public libraries, all of which have private alternatives.

**Tom Hilburn, Ormond Beach**

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<https://www.news-journalonline.com/opinion/20190227/letters-a-celebration-of-black-history-should-present-acknowledgment-of-talents-and-skills-that-millions-in-bondage-used-for-themselves>

**February 27, 2019**

**“A celebration of black history should present acknowledgment of the talents and skills that millions in bondage used for themselves.”**

## **NOT ALL SLAVES PICKED COTTON**

Most American History textbooks lead students to remember that “Cotton was king” in the economy of the country in the 18th and 19th Centuries, and learn only that blacks as slaves worked in fields. Their skills and talents receive little or no space on textbook pages. Ira Berlin made the statement; “To say that a person was a slave does not tell everything about him or her. The life of slaves was completely supervised by those who towered over them. Slave history was made not only by what was done to them, but also by what they did for themselves.”

A celebration of black history should present acknowledgment of the talents and skills that millions in bondage used for themselves that led to the freedoms enjoyed by their descendants today.

[READ: [Daytona woman brings black history to life](#)]

It was the years of the Civil War that changed everything in the ways of life for all Americans, whether rich or poor, slave or free. It was the service of people of color in the Civil War that significantly affected its outcome. With the Union victory, came freedom of the slaves and one truly great desire.

When slave families were separated in sales, where they were taken, and what happened to them — all this information was kept away from their families. Millions left behind desired to learn and know where their folks were. They determined to know and made efforts to find them.

In contrast, many of the descendants of those in bondage — who are now enjoying the freedoms earned for them — are not showing a desire to learn and know about those folks who made the sacrifices for their freedoms enjoyed today.

This is Black History month and this writer would like to know why millions of descendants (students and adults) who are enjoying freedoms do not seem to desire or want to know about the folks who used their skills and talents and also made sacrifices in blood, sweat and tears to earn the freedoms that they are enjoying today. Why?

### **Mary J. Fears, Daytona Beach**

— Fears has entertained and educated audiences as a black history re-enactor for more than 20 years, following a career as a media specialist in Volusia County Schools. She co-produced the film “Filling the Gap: Forgotten Chapter of American History,” a 2011 NAACP Image Awards nominee for Outstanding Television Movie, Mini-Series or Dramatic Special. Anyone interested in participating in re-enactments can contact Fears through this newspaper at [krys.fluker@news-jrnl.com](mailto:krys.fluker@news-jrnl.com).

## LENGTHENING THEIR STAY

A few months ago, Ormond Beach commissioners were funded into office by generous sponsors with a purpose. And now, in an attempt to lengthen their stay, commissioners want to increase the term for the five seats by adding an item to the proposed May ballot (i.e., they are looking for a way to ensure their grip of control on the city).

Why the rush with this proposal? Why group the topics of length of elected term and staggered terms into one proposal? Why not wait until the next general election? Will generous sponsors be erecting signs along the Granada Boulevard corridor to support your proposal? Would the same people be so aggressive with the proposal if the tide was turned and the opposition had won all five seats last November?

If they want to make a change, I propose a maximum number of years any individual may spend in a commission seat. Sixteen (yes, 16) years is way too long.

Kudos to Mark Lane's column (Feb. 13, "[Ormond commissioners may lengthen their stay](#)"), especially paraphrasing George Orwell's "two years good, four years bad," which is spot on.

In fact, in some cases, two years is 730 days too long!

**Ed Kolaska, Ormond Beach**

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**January, 23 2019**  
**COMMUNITY VOICES**

<https://www.news-journalonline.com/opinion/20190123/dan-kennedy-school-grades-inflate-expectations-of-students-schools>

### **DAN KENNEDY: School grades inflate expectations of students, schools**

We have been hearing a lot about K-12 educational issues in Florida and the nation for some time, including a very informative article in the Jan. 6 News-Journal which focused on the grading of schools. It should be acknowledged up front that I am opposed to the letter grading of schools and certainly in agreement with Dr. Chris Colwell's quoted statements that K-12 education should be broadly based to facilitate development in personal values and social-emotional areas. This is not meant to play down the great importance of academic learning.

People are not born equal in terms of central nervous system wiring (e.g. brain power). Nor are they born equally regarding socio-economic-system levels (e.g. education, income, or parent time for or inclination to encourage academic learning). Decades of psychological and educational research has shown these variables to be very predictive of academic attainment. What these factors add up to is an interaction between genetic predispositions and environmental learning that is extremely important for school learning. Research in cognitive psychology, biology, and neuro-science during recent decades increasingly shows the importance of this interaction.

What this also shows is a clearly unrealistic approach to the Florida system of grading K-12 schools and districts. The current system almost completely ignores a concept of academic aptitude. There appears to be an implicit assumption that all students, with the exception of certain special needs students, can learn at an exceptionally high level; an A level. That is a distorted and unrealistic expectation.

A rational, and somewhat simplified, approach to the issue can be conceptualizing both academic aptitude and achievement in terms of below average, average, and above average. Many human characteristics, including academic aptitude and achievement, fall into these categories. Concerning grades: C traditionally represented average, D and F below average, and B and A above average. The cutting points between these categories are somewhat arbitrary, but are realistic for practical purposes.

None of this is to suggest that almost all students cannot likely improve their academic aptitude and achievement, but it does provide a practical and realistic approach to the issue of grading. Traditionally, elementary schools have tended to emphasize individual student improvement over grades as such, which is a sound psychological approach to encouraging love of learning.

Research reported in the Jan. 6 News-Journal article included a comparison of Volusia County with the 22 largest school districts in Florida. The information included: Volusia has the lowest median household income and second-highest student poverty rate; lowest average teacher salary and experience; and highest rate of student absenteeism. These conditions, at best, predict an average level of student achievement.

The article also noted that “71 percent of elementary schools in Volusia were C- or D-rated.” This represents a realistic assessment considering environmental conditions.

K-12 education in the U.S. is often compared, usually negatively, with other nations. In recent years South Korea and Finland have been among the highest scoring in academic achievement. Students in South Korea experience a great deal of pressure to score high in high stakes testing to “get ahead” in life and reportedly have little time for anything else. In Finland there is a much more relaxed approach with very little standardized testing, and education is broadly based, including academics, social-emotional development, and preparation for leisure time use.

Which model should we use?

— **Kennedy, of Ormond Beach**, is retired from a career that combined psychology and education, spent mostly in university positions.

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<https://www.news-journalonline.com/opinion/20190120/even-more-letters-readers-respond-to-pat-rice>

**January 20, 2019**

**Stop the drugs**

I feel the police are focusing on the wrong part of the problem. If drugs weren't easy to obtain on the street, the women would not be out looking for money to buy them. I support all the tough work that police officers do, but I feel they should spend more time making it tough to sell drugs in our community. Go to a community with little access to drugs, and you won't find prostitutes walking the street looking for money and drugs.

**Jofre Miller, Daytona Beach**

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<https://www.news-journalonline.com/opinion/20190116/letters--its-ridiculous-to-spend-that-much-money-on-this-special-election>

**January 16, 2019**

### **SALES TAX INCREASE CRIMINAL**

Volusia County's idea of increasing sales tax to pay for roads for the new developments is criminal.

We have already paid enough, not only in terms of money but also in terms of quality of life, for the cookie-cutter sprawl developments being built along Interstate 95. Clogged traffic, loss of our precious forests and wetlands, and now we're supposed to pay more taxes, too?

I'd be happy to pay more sales tax, but only if it eliminated our property tax. (We can always dream, right?)

Another problem with the proposed tax increase is that it's about cars and roads, and nothing about bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. Why is our area so behind the times when so many other cities and regions are thinking and planning beyond the car-dependent mode of life?

Existing residents of the core city shouldn't have to shoulder so much of the tax burden for sprawl developments. Sprawl costs us all!

Make the developers pay more, and if that means they take their sprawl development plans elsewhere, so much the better.

**Jenny Nazak, Daytona Beach**

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**Jan 14, 2019**

## **AMERICANS AT RISK**

According to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the number of apprehensions at the southwest U.S. border per year has not significantly changed in the last five years. The average is about 500,000 per year. In 2017 and 2018, Republicans had a majority in both the House and the Senate. They did not provide President Trump with funding for his wall. Yet Trump did not shut down the U.S. government while his Republican colleagues controlled Congress. The fiscal year 2018 appropriations included a total of \$1.3 billion for new and replacement border fencing and barriers. Not all of this money has been spent. The Democrats in the House and the Senate in a unanimous voice vote taken before Christmas offered Trump another \$1.3 billion just for fencing and barriers. Instead, Trump has threatened to veto such funding legislation and Senate Republicans now refuse to even consider legislation passed by the House unless it contains \$5.7 billion for Trump's wall.

During the government shutdown TSA agents, Coast Guard staff, and Border Security workers are not being paid. Every day of the shutdown puts Americans more at risk. Trump's administration has not even spent all the money which has been appropriated for border barriers. It is clear that our President manufactured this border funding "crisis." It is Mr. Trump and his Republican colleagues in the Senate who are lying and endangering America.

**Dale Harmon, Palm Coast**