

Letters to the editor 2012:

REINHOLD SCHLIEPER

Palm Coast

December 30, 2012

RELIGION IS IN SCHOOLS

There are several reasons why a recent letter about any gods being kept out of schools is quite wrong. I cannot think of any theology that would not suggest that a deity must be omnipresent and, thus, ubiquitous. So, one simply cannot keep Him/Her out of any place.

Secondly, Flagler's dress code policy clearly identifies a student's right to dress in keeping with his or her ideological (religious) stance. If this policy is not atypical for schools in general, then students may bring the trappings of their faith to school, another way of admitting the deity to schools. Finally, most of us will remember the urgent need for divine help when difficult examinations threaten. Prayer, then, was an inevitable part of scholarly preparation — as it doubtlessly is also for students in school now. Another way of admitting the deity.

What schools, parents, and students should not want, however, is one religion taking precedence over all others. As we practice our religion and tolerate the religious practices of others, we should not seek dominance over others, who also have a right to be in public schools. For now, an attitude of tolerance and an appreciation of diversity may go further toward the safe school than a one-sided religious orthodoxy.

PANOS STROUMPIS

Daytona Beach Shores

December 4, 2012

SEEK FAIRNESS AND PEACE

I agree with a recent letter writer that it would be horrible for anybody to live under the threat of being targeted by rockets. Israel has the right to defend itself. But the damage caused by the Israelis to Gaza is brutal and completely unacceptable. One can only imagine what it would be like to be a grandmother in Gaza, digging in the rubble to find her dead grandchild. That is by far the worst nightmare.

There are always two sides to every story. I am not taking sides; both parties are responsible for the atrocities that they inflict on one another. I have always been sympathetic to the Jewish people for their suffering,

particularly in World War II. However, I am also sympathetic to the Palestinians for the treatment they have received for more than 50 years.

The majority of the Jewish people are for a settlement and a permanent peace. However, extremists dominate Israel's position. The late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin knew the importance of peace, having served as a soldier in the 1967 war. Unfortunately, he was assassinated by a young Israeli extremist before he was able to accomplish his goal.

It is well-known that Hamas is not easy to deal with. However, the organization still represents the Palestinians. Israel's refusal to recognize it as the legitimate government of Palestine was a very big mistake.

I consider myself a progressive or liberal in my politics, and I feel I have more friends and allies in the American Jewish community than in any other group. I hope I am not labeled anti-Semitic because of my point of view. The most important thing I want to emphasize is that humanity has no color, no religion, no borders, no ethnicity. We are all brothers and sisters of the world.

LANI VAN PETTEN
Ormond Beach
November 30, 2012

TIME TO TALK ABOUT CLIMATE

From Mark Lane's Sunday column: "And there was a bill to guarantee the public's right to speak."

"Speaking up" is one of many ways to let our representatives know what we want.

Let's start by discussing the link between the recent report from the World Bank on climate change, and its effect on our water supply, our springs and the St. Johns River! If not us, who? If not now, when?

MARILYN SAPSFORD
Ormond Beach, FL
November 23, 2012

"WOUNDS MUST BE HEALED"

I am a liberal Democrat who voted for Obama, yet am disappointed in his track record.

Now is the time for Mr. Obama to persistently do whatever it takes to work with congressional Republicans to resolve pressing issues facing our country and the world. He has the skills to reach across the table,

and now is the time to use them.

There are homeless families, drug-addicted veterans, children of undocumented immigrants, American Embassy staff overseas, and scores of others waiting for the squabbling to stop (or at least slow down).

CAROLYN WEST

Ormond Beach

November 20, 2012

DEFINING THE 'TAKERS'

A letter writer in the Nov. 12 issue accused all those voters who supported President Obama of being "greedy." She claims these Americans "don't care about this country" and just care about getting "free stuff."

She seems to echo Mitt Romney's complaint to his wealthy donors that 47 percent of Americans "don't pay income taxes." Those Americans do not earn enough money to pay income taxes. Romney overlooked the fact that many of them still pay payroll taxes. Likely those low-income citizens, most of whom are hard-working people who bus tables, clean restrooms, drive cabs, pick tomatoes, etc., would be pleased to have a chance to make enough money to pay income tax.

Maybe the writer agrees with Romney's vice-presidential nominee, Paul Ryan, who also divided the country into the "makers" and the "takers." Did Ryan mean welfare recipients? But they only make up some 1.5 percent of the population, certainly not the 50-plus percent of the country that re-elected Obama. Or did he mean those same hard-working folks who don't make enough money to pay income taxes?

Or perhaps the writer means Social Security recipients? The letter writer may not realize that monthly Social Security checks or disabled veterans' benefits are not "free" if recipients have been paying payroll taxes or serving in the military. Many of today's seniors had been paying into Social Security for over 45 years, and for Medicare almost that long, so when they receive their Social Security check or Medicare benefits today, they are hardly receiving "free stuff."

The letter writer worries that "someday there won't be enough people working to pay for all the free things." Maybe she should suggest that instead of demanding more tax cuts, people like Romney and his friends should instead pay their fair share.

SHANNON McLEISH
Ormond Beach
November 12, 2012

GRATEFUL TO SUPPORTERS

To all of you who were involved with this campaign — and there are many of you — I honor you. I am grateful to be among you. What you have accomplished in this campaign will become clearer with each passing day. Here are a few facts to consider:

We collected about \$10,000, \$75 of it from Volusia Civic Pride and the rest from ordinary citizens

My opponent collected just under \$90,000, in about the opposite ratio of citizens to corporations and developers. Though we made every dollar count, there's only so many of 60,000 voters you can reach with \$10,000. Nonetheless, of almost 40,000 votes cast in my race, we got nearly half of them. We lost by just 2,000 votes.

Given how much we were outspent, it is clear that the only way we reached that many people was through your efforts — your willingness to stand at the polling place and talk to people, to wave signs, to call, to talk to your neighbors and friends, to vote. As one friend said, we may not have won, but we did not lose.

Further, our energy still burns. I am as committed to this community as I ever was, and as I've heard resoundingly from you over the last couple of days, so are you. In the coming days, we'll meet for some pizza or coffee and talk about where we go from here. We started something really wonderful with this campaign, and it didn't end on Tuesday. I look forward to thanking you in person and to our continued work together in service to our community. I just wanted to take a moment to tell you how humbled I am by your willingness to stand with me and by your trust. Thank you.

SHANNON McLEISH

McLeish was a candidate for Volusia County Council, District 4.

ELLEN NIELSEN
Ormond Beach
Oct. 2, 2012

JUSTICES SHOULD BE RETAINED

One section of the Nov. 6 ballot will ask voters whether three Florida Supreme Court justices should remain in office. This nonpartisan

process, known as merit retention, has been in effect since 1978, and was designed to give voters the right to remove judges with a history of incompetence or corruption. The purpose of merit retention is to keep partisan politics out of our judicial system.

Since the first merit retention election in 1978, The Florida Bar has polled members about the Supreme Court justices and appeals court judges on the merit-retention ballot. For the Supreme Court, 2012 Florida Bar poll results indicate support for retention of Justice R. Fred Lewis by 92 percent, Justice Barbara J. Pariente by 89 percent, and Justice Peggy A. Quince by 90 percent.

However, the Republican Party of Florida announced last week that it opposes retention of all three Supreme Court Justices, based on a 2003 decision in which the three judges ruled that an individual convicted of capital murder should receive a new trial because his attorney had not properly represented him during the trial. The decision was overturned by the United States Supreme Court, and the defendant remains on Death Row. This is the first time that a political party has attempted to intervene in a Florida merit retention election.

What the Republican Party of Florida is not telling voters is that the Supreme Court is an appellate court and in this case, its only job was to determine whether proper legal procedures had been followed in the trial. The Supreme Court is not allowed to rule on matters of fact, or to make any judgment about the guilt or innocence of a defendant. The judges appear to have done their job, but because the crime was a brutal one, it is all too easy to distort and sensationalize the outcome.

Instead of voting against retention of the three judges because the Florida Supreme Court ruled that even a defendant who is accused of a heinous crime must receive a fair trial with competent legal representation, voters should be wondering why the Republican Party of Florida wants to get rid of well-respected and experienced judges and replace them with less experienced judges who will be beholden to the current governor and Legislature.

THE REAL DISCRACE
CAROLYN WEST
Ormond Beach
September 26, 2012

A recent letter writer accuses President Barack Obama of using "disgraceful" campaign tactics to "divide the country," although she mentions no specific examples.

Perhaps she prefers Mitt Romney's vague plan to "cut taxes," and his reluctance to give specifics of how to pay for those cuts, or who would suffer cuts in other services. Perhaps she prefers Romney's vice-presidential pick, Paul Ryan, whose GOP convention speech contained at least six major lies or misrepresentations of the Obama administration, including a claim that the president would cut Medicare services for the elderly.

According to Fox News contributor Sally Kohn, "To anyone paying the slightest bit of attention to facts, Ryan's speech was an apparent attempt to set the world record for the greatest number of blatant lies and misrepresentations slipped into a single political speech." And that was on Fox News!

EASTWOOD'S SPEECH ON-TARGET

by BARBARA SANDBERG

Ormond Beach

September 7, 2012

Clint Eastwood has been criticized for his speech at the Republican National Convention. Critics said it was long and incoherent. Tell me what we couldn't understand when he asked "the sitting president" about the withdrawal of our troops in Afghanistan (to paraphrase: "Why are you giving the date out now? Why don't you just bring them home tomorrow morning?")

Then Eastwood touched on the history of the Russians and the British being in long drawn-out wars in Afghanistan.

Eastwood, a pro-choice Republican, is an example of the diversity of the Republican Party. Those attending the convention received his speech with cheers, while his critics dismissed his speech as the babbling of an old man (that's age discrimination).

Eastwood covered important issues; maybe his critics weren't listening because of their short attention span.

His talking about the war, when other speakers ignored the topic, let us know that in August, the deadliest month in Afghanistan, that we have not forgotten that our troops are still there.

DEFINE 'THE CUTTING EDGE'

BY PHILIP GREEN, ORMOND BEACH

August 26, 2012

I read Tom Feeney's Florida Voices column in Sunday's News-Journal and wondered where the data supporting his statement that "Florida has been at the cutting edge of education reform..." may be found, since the

statement does not appear to correspond to information available from other sources.

According to the annual Annie E. Casey Foundation's Kids Count report on the well-being of children, in education Florida ranks a dismal 35th among all states.

In addition, there has not been much improvement over the years. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reports that 32 percent of fourth-grade children were at or above proficient in reading achievement in 2003, and 35 percent were at this level in 2011. In addition the NAEP reports that 23 percent of eighth-grade children were at or above proficient in math achievement in 2003, improving to 28 percent in 2011.

If these 3 percent and 5 percent gains place Florida at the "cutting edge," this edge must not be too sharp.

REMEMBER RECENT HISTORY

BY CHARLES L. MCDEARMONT, DAYTONA BEACH

August 26, 2012

Most politicians think the intellect of the average American citizen is that of a 12-year-old, and that they are downright incapable of learning from history. For example, consider this: President George W. Bush came into office in 2000 with a budget surplus and a strong economy. He left office eight years later with a huge debt and a shattered economy.

In addition, there has never been a period in my lifetime (1923 to now) when the policy of "protect and nurture the wealthy" had a better opportunity to prove its validity than during the eight years of that Bush administration. If we do not learn from history, we are doomed to relive it.

Currently, the same people whose policies have proven in the past not to work are spending billions to reinstate them. The wealthy contribute greatly to this effort-- they like things the way they are. Lord help us if they win. I have seen racism and segregation in my lifetime and believe it harms everyone. I believe most people worldwide said "only in America" when a descendant of slaves was elected our president. If racism and hate influence your vote, remember, hate destroys the hater.

WHERE TO TURN FOR LAST-MINUTE INFO

BY CAROLYN WEST, ORMOND BEACH

August 13, 2012

Residents of Volusia County might feel inundated by the many fliers, buttons, ads and yard signs that spring up during election years. While we can find out plenty of real information about national candidates for public office, we don't often get a clear, objective picture of more local candidates. Thus when we arrive at the voting booth, we might feel dismayed at the many choices.

However, we do have an excellent source of information available through the League of Women Voters website. Over the summer, the League sent questionnaires concerning local issues to candidates in all Volusia County races, including County Council, supervisor of elections, and School Board as well as candidates for mayor and city council in 12 Volusia municipalities.

Candidates for county court judgeships have answered questions on the site, which also includes statements from state Supreme Court justices who are up for merit retention. (The League website lists responses from all candidates who responded by the July 19 deadline.)

At the website, voters can compare one candidate's answers to the same questions with the answers from another candidate who is running for the same office. For example, we could read and evaluate responses from the four candidates for mayor of Daytona Beach. Voters in that city can see how each candidate responded to the same questions about city issues, as well as gain an idea of each candidate's philosophy and vision for the future. Biographical and contact information are also included.

We are lucky to have this informative resource so easily available. Individuals can find the website at <http://www.lwvvc.org/> or by simply putting "League of Women Voters" and "Volusia" into their Internet browser. The website also has a link to the supervisor of elections' office, where voters can (and should) check to see if their registration is current and the location of their voting precinct.

Voters need not belong to a specific political party to vote in nonpartisan races tomorrow, or even those races where there will be no party opposition in November.

West is a member of the Volusia County League of Women Voters.

BOATERS CAUSE PROBLEM
BY GORDON HART, PORT ORANGE
June 9, 2012

In response to the recent article, "Port Orange residents seek answers for shallow Spruce Creek," May 4: The boaters looking for reasons for the creek being shallow need look no further than their own mirrors.

Power boats roaring up and down Spruce Creek create waves that bounce back and forth from shore-to-shore in the creek causing shoreline erosion that washes into the creek. The silt clouds the water, burying vegetation and aquatic life, including fish eggs, snails and the insects and larvae upon which they feed.

The silt that doesn't sink immediately flows with the current, eventually being deposited on the bottom, or piling up against sand bars, oyster beds and other submerged structure.

These power boaters, in my observations, rarely observe the slow speed zones and are creating the very problems that they are complaining about by their own activities on the water. One need only sit beside the creek bank and watch what happens when the boat-generated waves hit the shore to verify this.

IT'S ABOUT THE MIDDLE CLASS
BY CHARLES L. MCDEARMONT, DAYTONA BEACH
April 26, 2012

Today is my 89th birthday. During my lifetime, I have voted both Republican and Democratic. After years of thoughts and observations, I have concluded that the best measure of a country's strength, both militarily and economically, is the size and economic well-being of its middle class. Economic well-being results when the large middle class receives its fair share of the nation's economic output.

From these statements, I'll let the reader figure out which party I will vote for in the coming presidential election. Just vote for the candidates you believe are the most friendly to the middle class.

March 28, 2012 COMMUNITY VOICES
STATE FUNDING FALLS AS NEED FOR LEGAL HELP INCREASES
BY BILL ABBUEHL,

Abbuehl is the executive director of Community Legal Services of Mid-Florida, which serves Volusia County.

One of the highest hurdles facing poor and disadvantaged individuals in our community is presented when they face legal problems.

Unfortunately, the stakes are often very high.

A victim of domestic violence who has been served with divorce papers by her abusive spouse could lose custody of her children in a heartbeat.

Without legal assistance, foster children facing the prospect of living independently after years of abuse often turn to wasted lives of dependence on welfare or crime.

Our clients face consequences that could send them into a downward spiral, quickly losing control of their lives. Despite the magnitude of what is at stake, there is, of course, no right to legal assistance.

Community Legal Services of Mid-Florida is one of more than 30 organizations in Florida that provide access to justice for those who cannot afford to hire a private attorney to help them resolve civil legal problems in areas such as family law, juvenile law, entitlements to federal government benefits, protection from domestic violence, elder and child abuse, and immigration.

The demand for our services has only grown with the economic downturn, while at the same time, our resources have fallen.

Florida's Interest on Trust Accounts Program, administered by The Florida Bar Foundation, has been providing about 33 percent of the funding for Community Legal Services of Mid-Florida.

But the foundation's revenue, tied directly to interest rates, has plummeted by 88 percent in three years.

Having already cut our funding in recent years, the foundation anticipates cutting local legal aid organizations such as ours by an additional 71 percent within three years. This is devastating to our clients, who include children, the elderly and the disabled.

Florida TaxWatch found in a study commissioned by the Florida Bar Foundation that civil legal assistance generated \$4.78 of economic impact for every \$1 spent on legal aid by a variety of public and private funding sources, based on cases handled by Florida legal aid organizations in 2008.

Currently, legislatures in 23 states provide civil legal assistance funding, recognizing it is vital to democracy and the stability of families and communities. Florida has also made a legislative appropriation to fund legal aid since 2002 through the Florida Access to Civil Legal Assistance Act. As it has for the past 10 years, the Florida Legislature appropriated money for legal aid this year; this time, \$2 million.

All of us who work in legal aid are hopeful Gov. Rick Scott will recognize the program's tremendous benefits and allow it to continue assisting Florida's low-income families.

JANUARY 2012
STORY BEHIND CONFRONTATION
BY SHANNON MCLEISH, ORMOND BEACH
January 28, 2012

Occupy Daytona "mic-checked" Mitt Romney Sunday. I thought people might like to know what we did and why. For why, I'll start with a statistic: About 80 percent of the country agrees with Occupy's position on corporate power over government, which roughly aligns with the statistic that 80 percent of our population controls only 15 percent of the wealth.

Consider: What money do we have to buy commercials or politicians? With what tools can we change such criminal inequity? We have only our voices and bodies -- and a polite, "Excuse me, would you mind not stealing the entire pie," is unlikely to suffice.

The mic-check can garner press in lieu of advertising funds, but protest is not undertaken lightly. Occupiers have been pepper-sprayed, beaten, and arrested for charges like wearing a mask or writing on the sidewalk with chalk. Still, it was an opportunity, so we greeted Mr. Romney with this: "Mr. 1 percent. Corporations are not people. We are the people. We are America. We are the 99 percent." Then we walked out, chanting, "U.S.A."

His reply: "These are the people ... you're the interrupters! We believe in the Constitution. We believe in the right to speech. ... Take a hike!" He then insinuated we're anti-capitalist communists because we want millionaires to pay the same tax rate as laborers and our votes to count over corporate dollars -- government of, for, and by the people.

Romney understood why we were there, that it wasn't partisan -- because Occupy isn't partisan. We're diverse in politics and everything else, but united by our disgust over corporate greed and corruption of government.

I hope our community will not stand mutely by as tens of millions in our country struggle with poverty, hunger, and homelessness due to simple greed. Please join us.

McLeish is a founder of Occupy Daytona.

BAR A COMMUNITY FIXTURE
BY BARBARA SANDBERG, ORMOND BEACH
January 9, 2012

The Rockin' Ranch has long been a favorite place for me to take my family and visitors. I would not have taken my mother there to celebrate her 80th birthday if I thought it was not a safe place.

I would not have taken out-of-state visitors to hear one of the top country singers, Blake Shelton, if I thought it was not safe. Janet Ivanhoe, the owner, charged a cover charge of \$5, while it cost \$75 or more to go to his concert in Daytona Beach. I went to the party she hosted after a London Symphony Orchestra concert for the musicians. I know our friends from London had a great and safe time at the Rockin' Ranch.

I spend a lot of time in Austin, Texas, which is nationally famous for its country dancing. Not even the Broken Spoke Saloon there can compare to the Rockin' Ranch. The Rockin' Ranch is a great place for those who like Latin and swing dancing, too.