



## Understanding Gov. Desantis's Anti-Protest Bill



The Party for Socialism and Liberation has been instrumental in organizing protests for Racial Justice.

BY BRYAN ELLIS, PSL  
MANATEE/SARASOTA

Governor Ron Desantis is pushing a bill in Tallahassee that would crack down on free speech and Black Lives Matter protesters. One provision would even make it easier for people to run over protesters with their vehicles.

Here are a few things the law would do—Make blocking traffic a felony; Prosecute groups that organize or fund so-called “disorderly” protests; Penalize cities that seek to reduce excessive police budgets; Eliminate the right to bail for protesters; Create a 6-month mandatory minimum jail sentence for some protesters and new, harsher sentences for others; Terminate public benefits for protesters and make them ineligible for employment by state and

local government; Allow drivers who fear for their safety to cause death or injury to protesters with their vehicles.

In other words, the law would make protesting too risky for most Floridians, and severely harm the lives of many who continue to protest.

A statewide coalition of groups is organizing against the bill. Everyone should join the movement against this bill. We’ll be educating the public, pressuring legislators in meetings and committees, and protesting.

But most importantly, we need to understand that the issue at hand is far bigger than Desantis or this bill. There will always be another DeSantis or anti-democracy law, until we get to the root of the matter.

The real issue has been raging for over a century—it’s the battle between socialism and a decaying

*Continued on pg. 10*

## Covid Testing

State-Run Testing Sites  
Open Every Day

Drive-Thru Testing available  
Sarasota Kennel Club  
5400 Bradenton Road  
Open 9am-5pm

Walk-Up Testing available  
Robert L. Taylor Community Complex  
1845 34th St  
Open 8am-4pm

Testing also available at  
Bradenton Area Convention Center  
1 Haben Boulevard  
Palmetto, FL 34221  
Open 8am – 4pm

### Mobile App Available

The Healthy Together app offers test results directly through the app for any Florida resident who takes a COVID-19 test from any State provider. If the test is positive, the app offers a self-serve contact tracing interview, which includes questions about your exposure history. Also, the app provides real-time public health announcements, serving as a notification center for state-wide updates and alerts from Florida Public Health, including SMS alerts and automated notifications. Available for Apple or Android phones.

## NCF’s Black History Month Going Vir(tu)al

BY BECCA HADWEN

Last March, the COVID-19 pandemic sent us into lockdown before I finished writing thank-you cards to everyone who pitched in for the Black

History Month programming at the New College of Florida. Over nine months later, I’m in Zoom meetings with the planning committee, and we’re preparing exclusively virtual programming. In response to the pandemic, event planners have either cancelled or gotten creative. The Black History Month planning committee, we’ve chosen the latter.

On Friday, February 5th, the Sur La Bay Music Festival will bring artist performances and workshops into your living room.

Our usual Black Literature Read-In will become a listen-in that floats to you over WSLR’s airwaves. Critical Times Intern and New College student Danielle Campbell is working on a segment on Black music, literature, poetry, and businesses. Professor Hugo Viera-Vargas will discuss Latin American music shaped by the African diaspora.

This year’s symposium will center on the theme “Black Lives Still Matter!” To honor the



Janaka Lewis

realities of screen fatigue, we will space the events out over two days. As always, our symposium will connect artists, academics, and activists for deep conversation. The symposium will feature a

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# Celery Fields Microforest

BY GENE JONES, FLORIDA  
VETERANS FOR COMMON SENSE

Florida Veterans for Common Sense Fund Inc. (FLVCS FUND) in cooperation with the Rotary Club of Sarasota Bay, Solutions to Avoid Red Tide (START), and Sarasota County's Neighborhood Environmental Stewardship Team (NEST), have worked together to plant a demonstration microforest at the Celery Fields, a popular ecological site and recreational amenity in Sarasota County.

Japanese Botanist Akira Miyawaki pioneered the technique to grow a microforest in 20-30 years that can have the attributes of a forest 200-300 years old. Using the Miyawaki technique, native species are planted close together to compete for sunlight so they grow upward instead of sideways. As a result, the forest grows denser and as much as ten times faster. As a bonus, in three short years the microforest should be nearly maintenance-free.

The team worked with the Serenoa Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society and the Sarasota

Audubon Society to find the best mix of native plants for an approximately 1/3-acre footprint chosen for the microforest. The team planted more than fifteen tree and shrub species including canopy trees such

of runoff will be avoided in 30 years.

The forest will provide many other benefits as well. An immediate benefit is that a Miyawaki forest can restore Sarasota's depleted urban forest much quicker than a traditionally planted natural forest. The County will save money and effort by no longer having to mow the area, which will greatly reduce greenhouse gas emissions. As it grows to maturity, the forest will provide shade to help cool the urban heat island and it will filter the air.

The ecological benefits of the microforest are numerous. A primary consequence will be an increase in biodiversity. Much of the Celery Fields is currently open grassland and pond habitat. While the Celery Fields is already a birding hotspot, the microforest will make it better. It will introduce a forest habitat that is missing from the Celery Fields; this

increase in biodiversity will attract more species of birds, particularly migratory songbirds, as well as other animals. The diverse tree and plant species will provide food and shelter for creatures like butterflies, amphibians, and mammals.

A tremendous benefit of the project is outstanding community cooperation. Michael Saunders Foundation, The Rotary Club of Sarasota Bay Foundation, Florida Veterans for Common Sense Inc., START and several private individuals provided funding. Several different businesses



Mike Burns and Dave Siegwald Planting a Bald Cypress Oct 31, 2020

as bald cypress and live oak and understory species such as Dahoon Holly and Sugar Berry. In addition, the team added a ground layer of native shrubs and plants like coontie and beauty berry.

The site chosen for the forest was an open field covered with grass. In order to suppress the grass, provide nutrients for the forest's fast growth, and store moisture in the soil, volunteers covered the site with a layer of cardboard and covered that material with wood chips.



Planting Day 1 Oct. 31, 2020

The primary goal for the forest is to sequester carbon to combat climate change as the microforest will be an effective carbon sink. Forest ecologists estimate that plants and soil in a natural forest can store 40 times more carbon than a monoculture forest. The team estimates that the Celery Fields microforest will sequester approximately 600 tons of carbon in 30 years. Another major benefit will be to intercept and filter rainwater that would otherwise leave the site to transport pollutants that foster red tide and, during intense rain events, cause downstream flooding. It's estimated that over 3,865,00 gallons of water will be intercepted and over 850,000 gallons

donated material and expertise. The Serenoa Chapter, Native Plant Society and Sarasota Audubon provided technical expertise and logistical support. And most importantly, the project succeeded due to the hard work of many volunteers and their efforts are ongoing.

The benefits from the microforest concept are so apparent that the team envisions many more will be planted in S.W. Florida. For more information, or to volunteer, contact Michael Burns at [MTBurns@gmail.com](mailto:MTBurns@gmail.com) or Dr. Charles Reith, [charles.c.reith@gmail.com](mailto:charles.c.reith@gmail.com).



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# FLORIDA LEGISLATIVE SESSION PREVIEW

Regular session convenes: Tuesday, March 2 Last day of regular session: Friday, April 30



Both from the Tampa Bay area, Speaker Chris Sprowls (R-Palm Harbor) will be presiding over the House for the next two years and President Wilton Simpson (R-Trilby) will be at the helm of the Senate. Sen. Gary Farmer and Rep. Bobby DuBose, both from Fort Lauderdale, will lead the Democrats in their respective chambers. Although Florida's regular legislative session doesn't begin until the first Tuesday in March, House and Senate Committees will begin to meet in January and February to hear presentations from state agencies, begin the budget writing process, workshop legislative ideas and even vote certain proprietary bills out of committee so they are available early in session for floor action.



Below are some of the issues on the agenda for the upcoming session:

**Public Safety/Anti-Protesting Policies:** Gov. DeSantis rolled out a proposed concept in late September which would create new criminal offenses and increase penalties for individuals involved in violent or disorderly assemblies. (Read more about the proposed bill in Bryan Ellis's article in this edition of Critical Times)

**COVID-19 Liability Protection:** Both chambers have expressed interest in protecting businesses from liability lawsuits when those businesses have sought to follow CDC guidelines in reopening.

**"Wayfair"/Internet Sales Tax:** Over the last few years, the internet sales tax issue has not made any headway. However, in a move that some find surprising, Senate President Simpson appeared to publicly back the tax in his comments to the press after his first speech as Senate President. The state will be looking for ways to plug the budget hole created by Covid.

**Local Government Powers:** Some state legislators were troubled by the restrictions local governments placed on the economy by emergency ordinance. Expect this to be discussed.

**Governor's Executive Powers – State of Emergency:** COVID-19 has presented each governor with unique challenges in governing by *Executive Order* and some legislative leaders have privately—or even publicly—expressed concern about unilateral powers used during the pandemic and willingness to engage the legislative process to enact a statutory framework for any future state of emergency orders.

**Workforce Reform:** Continuing in the footsteps of Gov. DeSantis and other legislative leaders, Speaker Chris Sprowls has announced his forthcoming "Opportunity Agenda." Among other things, he wants to create a unified hub for workforce programs, with a focus on outcomes instead inputs, expand opportunities for entrepreneurship, and address hurdles within occupational licensing and other business regulations.

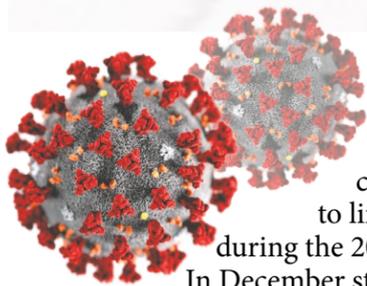
**Literacy/Early Learning:** A handful of lawmakers have been working unsuccessfully for years to get significant legislation passed on early learning. Speaker Sprowls is putting a renewed focus on literacy, including his goal of a massive statewide book initiative and parent bootcamps in partnership with local libraries. He has also expressed a desire to address maternal health.

**Climate Change, Land Conservation, and Sea Level Rise:** The willingness of the Speaker and President to address environmental issues like sea level rise may be higher than of GOP leaders in the past, but it remains to be seen how, and to what extent, these will be addressed. New coastal building codes, setbacks, insurance requirements and coastal protection measures could all be a part of a comprehensive plan discussed in the 2021 legislative session.

**Revisiting Medicaid Expansion:** Neither Gov. DeSantis nor leadership of either chamber has expressed interested in expanding Medicaid; however, with President-elect Biden coming into the White House, there may be federal pressure to rethink this issue, as states continue to look for new ways to reform Medicaid.

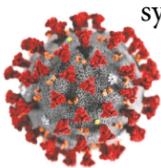
**Child Welfare Reform:** A personal interest of the new Senate President and First Lady, child welfare is certain to be a major issue again this session.

## Covid Protocols for the Legislature



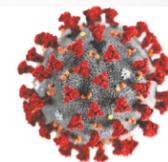
New legislative protocols, which come as COVID-19 cases and deaths in Florida continue to climb, will encourage lawmakers to limit face-to-face interactions with the public during the 2021 Legislative Session.

In December state legislative leaders released contrasting COVID-19 protocols for upcoming committee meetings. Under Senate President Wilton Simpson's plan, members of the public will have to watch and testify remotely from a civic center a few blocks from the Florida Capitol; *unless they are invited* to the meetings by committee chairs. Simpson spokeswoman Katie Betta said, "*Only agency representatives, or other subject-matter experts listed on the meeting agenda who are scheduled to speak before the committee*" will be invited to appear at Senate meetings. Members of the press will be allowed to attend in-person meetings. The Senate continues to observe federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention protocols, which include face coverings, social distancing and frequent hand-washing. To maximize social distancing, Simpson previously announced that the Senate intends to use its largest committee rooms and hold no more than three committee meetings at one time.



House Speaker Chris Sprowls, R-Palm Harbor, has embraced a somewhat more relaxed stance, while still limiting the number of people who will be able to mix and mingle with state lawmakers during committee hearings that begin the week of Jan. 11 in advance of the annual legislative session. Seating in House meeting rooms "will be socially distanced and limited to meetings where committees are discussing bills or potential legislation," Sprowls wrote in a memo to House members. The House will use an online registration system for people who want to provide "substantive testimony" and for the press. Seating in committee rooms will be available on a "first-come, first-served basis," Sprowls added. The House is creating a condensed committee schedule by splitting committee blocks in two and using an alternating meeting schedule, thereby reducing the number of days House members will be in Tallahassee. People who are exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19, who are in quarantine or who were recently diagnosed with the virus won't be allowed to enter the House.

Both Sprowls and Simpson are requiring legislators to undergo COVID-19 testing.



## PINEY POINT A LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY

In December, Manatee County Commissioners voted to make dealing with the contaminated water threat at Piney Point their number one legislative priority with the state legislature for 2021.

The issue, which has consistently been described as a *ticking time bomb*, involves hundreds of millions of gallons of remaining toxic process water in two ponds, along with the gypsum stacks (which are surrounded by two unintentional pools of high-chloride seawater) and a large seepage collection ditch where spoiled water from the saturated gypsum stacks can be corralled as it slowly leaks.

Capacity has been creeping above 90 percent and efforts to reduce volume via spray evaporation have barely been enough to keep to offset additional rainfall. An intense storm, particularly a slow-moving tropical storm or hurricane with heavy rainfall, could easily send overflow into Bishop Harbor.

The state has pushed deep-well injection as a solution. However, public opposition to using high-pressure injection to push the toxic effluent into an underground well has been significant, driven by fears that it could accidentally contaminate the aquifer.

New commissioners George Kruse and Kevin Van Ostenbridge expressed opposition to the deep-well injection method. State Representative Will Robinson (R-Bradenton), said that there were two questions, one for the short-term "band-aid" approach to lowering the water levels and another for the long-term solution that would ultimately solve the problem.

Robinson reiterated that a private landowner currently owns the property and has a legally-binding consent order in place with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. He added that his preference was to dispose of the water and cap the well without using deep-well injection unless alternatives prove impossible.

Commissioner Carol Whitmore expressed support for the deep-well injection method, while Commissioner Misty Servia said she remained open to all options. Both commissioners said that they supported deep-well injection that was limited to the Piney Point effluent—a condition expressed by the agricultural community—and not an operation that took on other contaminants for profit, which had been proposed by previous owners. *This article originally appeared online at [www.thebradentontimes.com](http://www.thebradentontimes.com) and is reprinted with the permission of editor Dennis Maley.*



## MAKING CITIZEN-LED INITIATIVES MORE DIFFICULT?

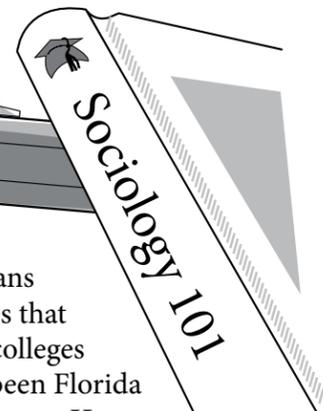
After soundly rejecting a proposed amendment requiring ballot measures be adopted twice to be encoded into the Florida Constitution last month, voters may be asked again to make it more difficult for citizen-led initiatives to be successful.

**Rep. Rick Roth**, R-West Palm Beach, has filed a joint resolution that asks voters to approve an amendment requiring proposed amendments be adopted by a 66.67% majority instead of the 60% margin that's been required since 2006. Roth's House Joint Resolution 61 is similar to his 2018 proposal, which was withdrawn before its first committee hearing, and indicates Florida's Republican-controlled Legislature will continue its attempt to make the state's constitution more difficult to change during the 2021 legislative session.

# GUNS

A controversial proposal to allow guns to be carried on public college and university campuses in Florida is back. The measure has failed several times in the past but sponsor **Rep. Anthony Sabatini** (R-Clermont) believes it'll have a shot this year since Republicans gained seats in the Florida legislature. Florida is one of 16 states that doesn't allow guns to be carried on the campuses of its public colleges and universities. One of the proposals' biggest opponents has been Florida State University President **John Thrasher**. The former state **Senator, House Speaker, and GOP Chairman** doubled-down on his stance **against allowing guns on campus** during his State of the University address.

"I want to make the pledge to you one more time that I've made every year. That I will continue to fight any kind of campus carry legislation," said Thrasher. "We've all experienced enough heartache to know that more guns on campus do not make us safer." During Thrasher's tenure as President, the campus has had several run-ins with gun violence. In 2014 an FSU grad and attorney shot and wounded three people at Strozier Library, and in 2018 a faculty member and student were killed in a shooting at a local yoga studio.



### 1000 FRIENDS OF FLORIDA'S 2021 Priorities:

- ✓ Restore citizens' planning rights while preventing frivolous lawsuits
- ✓ Protect Florida's environment, agricultural lands, budget and Metropolitan Planning Organization transportation priorities from the M-CORES toll road proposal
- ✓ Expand the supply of workforce housing
- ✓ Enact stronger measures to protect Florida natural lands, waterways and drinking water
- ✓ Uphold the authority of local governments and their citizens to make local decisions
- ✓ Oppose efforts to saddle taxpayers and local governments with the costs of growth



### Florida League of Cities 2021 Priorities:

#### THE UNITED VOICE FOR FLORIDA'S MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENTS FOR MORE THAN 90 YEARS,

- ✓ Sales Tax Fairness – The League **SUPPORTS** updating Florida's sales and use tax laws that apply to on-line/e-commerce sales from out-of-state retailers. Changes are needed to ensure in-state retailers are treated equitably and that the Florida sales and use tax law is equally enforced.
- ✓ Annexation – The League **SUPPORTS** legislation that facilitates the municipal annexation of unincorporated areas, while protecting private property rights and respecting municipal boundaries.
- ✓ Short-Term Rentals – The League **SUPPORTS** legislation providing for a collaboration between the Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation and cities to ensure that short-term rental properties abide by state and local regulations, are properly licensed and insured, and comply with state and local taxation requirements, as well as industry-accepted safety practices. The League **SUPPORTS** legislation clarifying that existing, grandfathered municipal short-term rental ordinances can be amended without penalty.
- ✓ Affordable Housing – The League **SUPPORTS** legislation that requires all monies from the Sadowski State and Local Housing Trust Fund be used only for Florida's affordable housing programs.
- ✓ **Discharges to Surface Waters** – The League **SUPPORTS** legislation that establishes reasonable timeframes for utilities to eliminate, to the extent possible in compliance with regulatory requirements and with specified exceptions, discharges to surface waters unless a utility demonstrates it is not environmentally, technically or economically feasible.
- ✓ The League **OPPOSES** unfunded mandates from any level of government and will continue to advocate for legislation that ensures local voices are able to make local choices.



### Florida League of Women Voters 2021 Legislative Priorities

#### ✓ **Government - Election Law**

1. Support automatic voter registration (opt-out system), same-day voter registration, improved online voter registration, and make vote-by-mail a permanent status.
2. Extend deadlines for signature cures and recounts, and allow 10 days for postmark delays.
3. Support home rule for counties and municipalities and oppose any preemptive legislation to counter home rule.
4. Continue to support voting rights restoration (includes efforts surrounding 2018's Amendment 4).

#### ✓ **Natural Resources**

1. Support FULL funding of the **Florida Forever Amendment** to protect and monitor our drinking water, prevent saltwater intrusion and work on Everglades Restoration.
2. Support a statewide ban on fracking
3. Financially support lower income and minority communities who are disproportionately impacted by proximity to industrial pollution and poor air quality.
4. Support legislation that would promote the use of solar, wind power and electric vehicles.

#### ✓ **Health Care**

1. Support expansion of Medicaid to all poor working families, to include funding for **KidCare** mental health services, substance abuse and dental care.
2. Oppose barriers to abortion and any state funding for state mandated counseling.
3. Oppose any efforts to strip away pre-existing conditions from the Affordable Care Act.

#### ✓ **Education**

1. Provide adequate funding for public education including additional dollars to augment operational expenses associated with Covid 19.
2. Oppose any public dollars for private school vouchers.
3. Oppose any effort to arm teachers, or anyone who is not a law enforcement officer.

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## Things to Watch

### 1. The budget

Florida's tourism-dependent budget survived the pandemic's first nine months thanks to a \$5.8 billion federal relief package – 6.2% of the current \$93 billion spending plan. Although the economy has rebounded somewhat, tax collection was \$2 billion less than what was expected before the coronavirus first began to spread in Florida in March, possibly foreshadowing Great Recession-like spending reductions going forward.

### 2. Republicans are emboldened

Florida Republicans see the election as an endorsement of their policies and governing style. Despite coronavirus angst and record-breaking unemployment, they won the state on election day.

### 3. The coronavirus

The House created the Pandemics & Public Emergencies Committee, to be chaired by state Rep. Tom Leek, R-Ormond Beach, to explore issues related to COVID-19 and to plan for future emergencies.

### 4. The \$15 minimum wage implementing bill

Voters threw politicians a curveball by approving a constitutional amendment that eventually creates a \$15 minimum wage. Now, lawmakers have to write a law to schedule a series of increases to raise the minimum from the current \$8.65 per hour to \$15 by September 2026. The amendment should be self-executing, with little the legislature can do to muck it up – but that's what they said about Amendment 4 in 2018 too.



Visit [wslr.org/donateyourvehicle/](http://wslr.org/donateyourvehicle/) or call 855-500-RIDE to learn more.

# 7pm Tuesday, January 26

If the conclusion of the 2020 presidential race has shown us anything, it's that people are engaged as never before. Racial justice, public policy and COVID-19

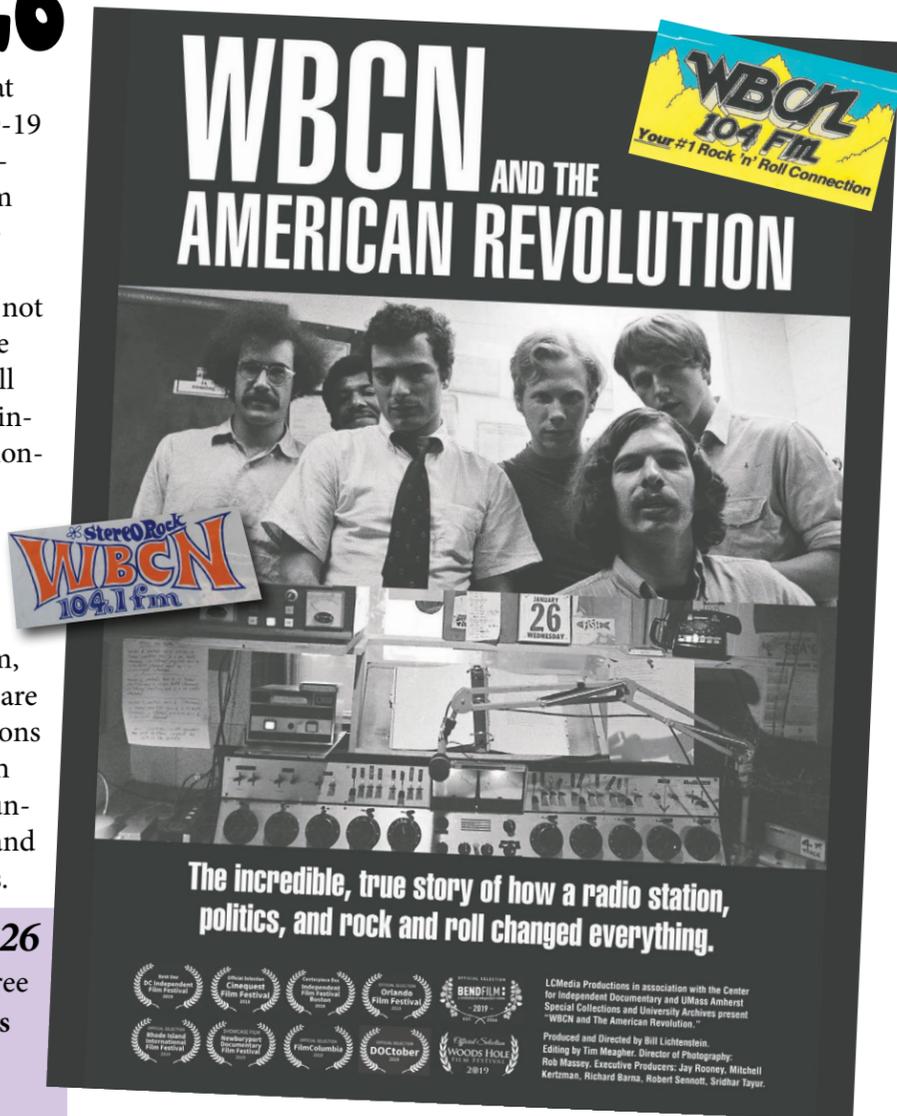
# RADIO & SOCIAL CHANGE

have brought Americans seeking reform and change into the streets and online. Protest, however, is not new. To start out the new year, WSLR will screen the award-winning documentary *WBCN and The American Revolution*. It is part of a nationwide campaign to promote and support community radio.

The documentary shares the untold story of the underground radio station WBCN, set against the profound social, political, and cultural changes that took place in Boston and nationally during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The burgeoning music and countercultural scenes, militant anti-war activism, civil rights struggles, and the emerging women's and LGBTQIA movements are all part of WBCN and its heyday. As we experience social and political tensions bubbling today, how subcultures and ideas pollinate others and spark growth has many common bonds from this period. The film demonstrates how an underground rock radio station built a powerful community with its listeners and helped redirect the course of American history during the tumultuous times.

**The film will be available to screen from – January 16-26** for a \$10 rental fee. If you screen the film, you will be invited to attend a free online discussion with film director Bill Lichtenstein and WSLR founders Arlene Sweeting and David Beaton on Tuesday, January 26 at 7pm. Visit [www.WSLR.org](http://www.WSLR.org) for full details.



**THE JAZZ CLUB OF SARASOTA**  
OF SARASOTA

**The Bridge Jazz Concert Series**

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

## LIVE & VIRTUAL CONCERT SERIES

STARTS IN FEBRUARY

Tickets Available Soon

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.

This four evening series will feature 2 sets of incredible music each show starting in February, running through May. This live-streamed event will 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 February 11

- ARIELLE
- THE JOHNNIE BARKER PROJECT

### Thursday March 11

- HOT CLUB SRQ
- JEFF SACK DUO

### Thursday April 15

- MICHAEL ROSS TRIO w/FRED JOHNSON
- SYNIA CARROLL

### Thursday May 20

- GUMBI ORTIZ & NEW GROOVE CITY
- TBD

**7pm TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 23,**  
**Virtual Town Hall**  
with newly elected  
**State Representative Michele Rayner**  
Livestreamed on WSLR Facebook ([www.facebook.com/wslr965](http://www.facebook.com/wslr965))  
and YouTube channels.

8pm Saturday, March 6

TICKETS:  
\$22 MEMBERS  
\$26 NON-MEMBERS

**ROY BOOK BINDER**

The epitome of the singing, songwriting, storytelling Bluesman troubadour

# January Radio Schedule Changes

The Radio Program Committee and the Management Team of WSLR+Fogartyville are grateful for the feedback that we receive from our community of listeners. This feedback guides our decisions for the Radio Program Schedule, and we have some changes in the New Year. **Democracy Now**, one of the leading U.S.-based independent daily news broadcasts, is moving to 10am, Monday through Friday, shifting our World Music Programs to air from 11am to 1pm. **Thom Hartmann's live hour remains at 1pm**, weekdays. If you're looking for **Ishmael Katz' Eclectricity**, it's moved to alternating Wednesday evenings, 7-9pm.

It's a difficult time to bring new programmers into the studio, but two new

programmers will join us with pre-recorded shows. **Paul Junior** will bring us **Soul Kitchen** - a unique blend of rhythm & blues, funk, fusion, and soul music that celebrates the extraordinary African American contribution to our culture - alternating Sundays, 9-11pm, and **Ruth Beltran** will host **The Ruthless Truth** - a show about social issues affecting disenfranchised communities with emphasis on how we can engage and work to transform our communities and society into the world we desire - alternating Saturdays, 9-9:30am.



photo of Beth Hammer with RJ Howsen, in the studio pre-pandemic selfie

We welcome back **Beth Hammer** with **Velvet Hammer Blues**, Sundays, 3-5pm, and as we look forward to the return of **Dirty Ice Cream Truck** and **Open A.I.R.** on Friday evenings, we'll keep **Dark Side of the Tune** followed by **And You Don't Stop** in the line up. While we wait to find a local programmer, **HipRawk Nation** - featuring an eclectic soundtrack of Alternative, Electronic, Dance, Neo Soul, and Rap music from around the world - will fill in Tuesdays, 7-9am.

You can listen to these shows + more on the radio, online, ask your smart assistant, through our apps, and our archive, with more information about all of our shows available at [www.WSLR.org](http://www.WSLR.org)



photo by Christie Abbott from outside the studio glass: Ishmael Katz, socially-distanced and on the air. His motto :- ) spray-n-play. Welcome back Ish!

## wslr 96.5 lp fm WEEKLY PROGRAM GUIDE

### listen on the air

- WSLR 96.5 LPFM Sarasota
- WBPV 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						
2 a.m.		Midnight Special Syndicated	Strange Currency Syndicated	Upfront Soul Syndicated	Music Automated playlist	Synthelectico Syndicated	
3 a.m.	Music Automated playlist						
4 a.m.		Letters to Washington Syndicated	Background Briefing Ian Masters (Syndicated)	A Way With Words Syndicated	Economic Update Richard Wolff		
5 a.m.							
6 a.m.	Thom Hartmann Show Syndicated	Thom Hartmann Show Syndicated	Thom Hartmann Show Syndicated	Thom Hartmann Show Syndicated	Thom Hartmann Show 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	Ralph Nader Syndicated
9 a.m.			ALTERNATE WEEKS				Wings of the Heart Salima Rael & Carol Rosenbaum
10 a.m.	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)
11 a.m.	Critical Times Week in Review	Sea Change Radio				Radio Reset Sharon Preston-Folta	Law and Disorder Syndicated
NOON	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)		
1 p.m.	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
2 p.m.		Afro Cuban Jazz Frankie Piniero	Vibrational Journeys Perette Cannady				
3 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
4 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	
5 p.m.						Global Village Syndicated	Velvet Hammer Blues Beth Hammer
6 p.m.	Music Museum Ed Foster	Tuesday Drive Home David Young	Hawaii Bob & Company Hawaii Bob	Ted's Head Ted	Friday Happy Hour Bartender Tommy D.	Juke In The Back Syndicated	Paradigms Syndicated
7 p.m.			ALTERNATE WEEKS			We Got The Funk Syndicated	Donne Del Mondo Syndicated
8 p.m.	Economic Update Richard Wolff	Background Briefing Syndicated	Sarasota Opera/Critical Times	Alternative Radio Syndicated	Critical Times Week in Review		
9 p.m.	Capitol Update State News		Laura Flanders Show		Counterspin/Cannabis Connection		
10 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
11 p.m.			ALTERNATE WEEKS	ALTERNATE WEEKS			
12 mid.	Indigenous Sounds White Horse and Friends	In Transition The 801	Jazz And More Brian Jones	Progressive Palace Phil G	Music Is The Best Mark Markus	Ripper's Rarities Russ Yodice	Sonic Cafe Syndicated
				ALTERNATE WEEKS			Mix Sessions Syndicated
	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	Soul Kitchen Paul Junior
							Lounging After Dark Syndicated
							Cafe Chill Syndicated

Streaming live 24/7/365 at [WSLR.org](http://WSLR.org) · Studio line 941-954-8636

# Editorial: The Need to Fund Mental Health Services

BY THE REV. DR. ELIZABETH S. HALL, UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE

With federal funding for Community Mental Health Center's (CMHC's) slipping away, today's largest mental health facilities are the prisons and jails of the country. The decisions about people's mental health are being handled by the judicial systems. Places like Cook County Jail in Los Angeles, Rikers Island in NY City are the new hospitals. Some estimate that 56.2% of prisoners have mental health problems.

"A study by Human Rights Watch revealed that prison guards routinely abuse mentally ill prisoners. Darren Rainey, a mentally ill prisoner in Dade Correctional Institution in FL, was boiled to death in a shower after being locked in it for more than two hours by prison guards." (Origins, April 2018; Larson)

Clearly, who responds to the needs of the community when 911 is called in reaction to a mentally unstable person has fallen to the police. Where community outreach has been underfunded, and now more often defunded, the only place to look for help is the police. Police are neither trained nor, I

suspect, desirous of handling the complex responses needed by the mentally ill on the street.

Homelessness is another outcome of the loss of funding for those suffering from mental illness, drug and or alcohol addictions.

Sadly, we have turned to overfunding the police and underfunding these CMHC's and Mental Health Associations. Both are needed. Each are needed for different tasks in our communities.

The overfunding of the police forces around the country does not cure homelessness, nor does it protect people with mental illness or with drug and alcohol addictions. It exacerbates the problem by causing a lack of funding to care for and allow for the humanization of people by human services agencies.

The Pentagon's 1033 program to allow policing agencies to use Department of Defense tactics and technologies on US citizens has not provided the policing we need. When these programs started during the Watts Riots and the 1967 Detroit riots they did not help keep the peace. They escalated the violence. Between 1997 and 2014, \$5.1 billion in material was given to the local policing agencies. Imagine if that had gone to CMHC's?

1. 62% of all SWAT deployments were for drug raids.
2. 79% of these were done on private residences.
3. Only 7% of all raids were done for situations SWAT was invented for—namely barricades or hostage situations.
4. "As the police have militarized, focus has shifted from one who keeps the peace to one who enforces the law—an important difference."

(*Foundation for Economic Education, "The Militarization of America's Police," Brian Millar, May 24, 2019*)

In summary, when people with mental illness need help, mental health professionals should respond, not armed police. Mental Health professionals should have some of the monies currently funneled to the police, who are ill-prepared for this kind of work. Until we get adequate and appropriate funding where and when it is needed, the police response will continue to fail some of our most vulnerable citizens.

## What To Do With All Our Plastic ....

BY CAT DILLARD AND JANA HOEFLING

On the Federal level, the Break Free From Plastic Pollution Act (H.R. 5845 & S. 3263) is based on proposed legislation and existing statutes from various states combined for the first time to create a comprehensive bill to address plastic pollution and packaging waste in the United States. Introduced in 2020 by Senator Tom Udall from New Mexico and Representative Alan Lowenthal of California, the bill phases out unnecessary single-use plastic products, requires producers of packaging, containers and food service products to design, manage and finance waste and recycling programs (known as EPR – Extended Producer Responsibility), sets up a nationwide beverage container refund program, requires post-consumer recycled content in new products, requires accurate labels for recycling and composting, prohibits the export of plastic waste to developing countries, and pauses the build-out of new plastic producing facilities until regulations are updated. Currently stuck in committee, it's unlikely that this bill will pass in this session but hope remains that it will be re-introduced in the 117th Congress, which assembles in 2021. For now, the sponsoring members have submitted the detailed and proposed regulation to each state, urging them to consider its contents at the state level. But... what are we to do when 17 of our 50 states have some sort of pre-emption on the regulation of single-use plastic and polystyrene within its own towns and cities?

No matter how you look at it, we are in the middle of a plastic crisis – soon to be accelerated. Many of us have heard the projections - "There will be more plastic in the ocean than fish, by 2050". That was last year. Now that oil and natural gas prices are so low and the abundance (especially of the latter) are plenty, there is money to be made and that means production of plastic is easy, cost effective and the demand is overwhelming. The recent and ongoing construction of the Shell plant in Pennsylvania is

only one of more than a dozen plants that are being built or have been proposed around the world by petrochemical companies like Exxon Mobil and Dow, including several in nearby Ohio and West Virginia and on the Gulf Coast. After decades of seeing American industrial jobs head overseas, the rise of the petrochemical sector is creating excitement for some and dread for others.

The fear for some of us as we register the meaning of this growth and proliferation of a throw away substance is overwhelming, keeping us up at night and literally making us cry for the future of our children, the loss of animals and sea life, and the desecration of our environment for the mere reason

minutes, only to be tossed "away" but to exist on our planet for the remainder of time? Now that's not a benefit to anyone – except for that 12 minutes.

What about incineration, gasification and pyrolysis you ask? These technologies have been around for some time, most commonly in Europe, which currently burns almost 42 percent of its waste. The US burns about 12.5 percent. Burning waste and converting it to energy seems like a perfect solution but is costly to set up and operate, and comes with the obvious problem of detrimental emissions and faulty pollution control if not properly operated and regulated. This is a problem with developing countries who do not have the environmental laws or strict enforcement, and may try to save money by skirting the hurdles that attempt to make these processes safe.

To avoid a massive build-up of plastic in the environment, coordinated global action is urgently needed to reduce plastic consumption, increase rates of reuse, waste collection, and recycling, expand safe disposal systems and accelerate innovation in the plastic value chain. Other than personal accountability by refusing to engage with single-use plastic on a daily level and with your purchasing power, it is difficult to hold one's own against

those that continue to produce this substance for the sole object of monetary enrichment.

It is essential that we continue the fight against single-use plastics personally, in our outreach to others by example and suggestion, and to continue to educate ourselves and to let those that lead this country know how important this problem and finding a solution is, to their constituents.

All resources and more for this article can be found on the Resources tab at [www.rethinkingplastic.org](http://www.rethinkingplastic.org)

Join Rethinking Plastic for a Zoom conversation with knowledgeable panelists to learn about EPR and the Break Free from Plastic Pollution Act in the early part of 2021. Check out our website (above) and join our mailing list to get updates or check the WSLR Activist Calendar.



*Rethinking Plastic Members visit Waste Pro*

of profit. We know that plastics have their place in our world and that this substance has unique and valuable properties that can save and change lives, but the approach, reasoning and methodology we currently utilize must change.

Let's hail plastic for the medical industry. Syringes and surgical implements are all plastic and single-use. They wouldn't survive the temperatures needed for sterilization to be used a second time. The benefits of plastic extend into every aspect of our lives - plastic helmets to protect us at work and at play, plastics used in technology, building construction, automobile manufacturing – the list is endless. But it is the gratuitous adoption of single-use plastic at every turn that must be called to task. Using a plastic fork, bag or cup for an average of 12

# Produce for the People

BY REBECCA BREY,  
TRANSITION SARASOTA

On a misty morning, in mid-December, as the sun's rays are just beginning to peek over the horizon, a line of cars can be seen headed East to our local farms. Awake and ready to pitch in, Transition Sarasota's volunteers spill out of their cars- masked, gloved, and ready to pick. The mission: rescue as many peppers and tomatoes as possible for the Food Bank of Manatee and All Faiths Food Bank.

**Did you know?** Sixteen percent of food wasted in the United States happens during production, the remaining 84% occurs through consumer facing businesses (think restaurants, schools, etc.) and your home. Wasted food that rots in fields or the landfill creates harmful methane gas that contributes to the warming crisis of our planet and home.

Enter Transition Sarasota, working in Sarasota and Manatee to create community-driven solutions for a more connected, less wasteful local food system. One that values all efforts that go into creating and using food. Over the past 10 years, they have been taking volunteers out to farm fields to rescue produce and donate it to local organizations that feed our neighbors. This year brought new challenges to our community, with more people than ever uncertain about employment and where their next meal was coming from. Despite all that uncertainty, Transition Sarasota modified their procedures, and was able to recover produce for a record breaking food donation year!

With the help of our community Transition Sarasota donated 6.8 Asian Elephants OR (if you don't count in elephants...) that's over 60,000 pounds of produce in 2020. In our 10 years of existence this is the most produce we've ever donated in a year's time.

Thank you. To everyone who masked up, showed



Transition Sarasota volunteers harvest peppers for the Food Bank

up, and everyone who worked the front lines and those that decided to stay safer at home. Thank you for helping us feed this community, our home.

**Check it out:** The United States has BIG goals to reduce food waste by 50% by the year 2030. In 2015 the USDA & EPA joined forces for this goal. As we're now a third of the way into it, you're going to see and hear a lot of progress towards awareness and action to achieve this goal.

**Feeling inspired?** There's still plenty of ways to pitch in--How you can help:

43% of food waste happens in our homes, we're literally throwing away over \$2,000 a year in food we don't eat.

**Start small to make it stick!** Reducing waste doesn't mean going cold turkey. It simply means getting a little more creative, a little more conscious about what you're buying, using and throwing

away. Pick one thing that feels manageable and then grow to add another when it's habit. Plan your meals, create a "use first" shelf, or be better about eating those leftovers!

**Get Connected!** Visit [www.transitionsrq.org](http://www.transitionsrq.org) to learn about ways to donate your time or resources to help Transition Sarasota fight waste, and feed the community.

**Save the Date!** March 14-21, for Virtual Eat Local Week 2021 (<https://www.transitionsrq.org/eatlocalweek>), "Dare to Grow". Get inspired to grow food, knowledge, and your mind as we explore our local food system and how it intersects with the world around us.

Transition Sarasota is committed to a vision of a sustainable, just, and thriving local food system.

# Food Scraps for Social Good in 2021

BY TRACIE TROXLER, SUNSHINE  
COMMUNITY COMPOST

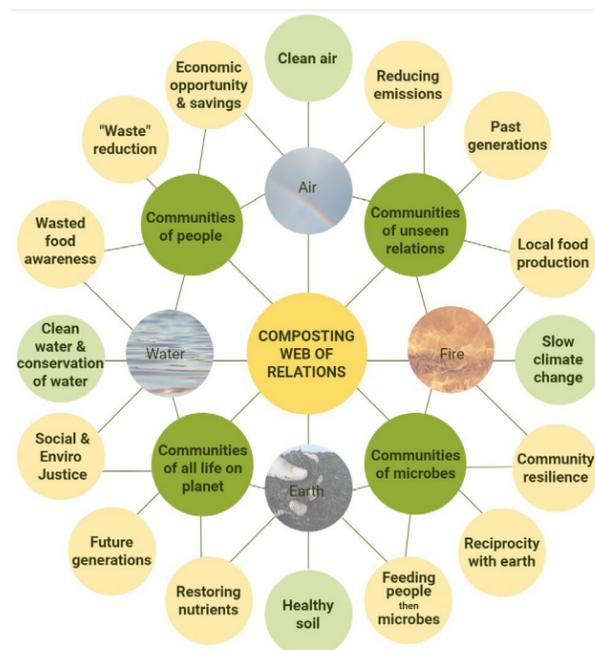
Moving into a new year is a great time to set intentions about what new actions or habits can be brought into the upcoming year. For 2021, the team at Sunshine Community Compost encourages everyone to include composting in your profile of community action and use food scraps for social good. The year 2020 shined a bright light on the fact that a whole lot more than just food scraps need to be composted and put through a deconstructive, transformative, regeneration process. But composting food scraps is a good reinforcing strategy while we also work to "compost" systems, structures, unexamined habits and patterns – not only to regenerate our soil and food - but also ourselves, communities, relationships, and culture.

Metaphors aside, the simple, single action of placing food scraps into a composting process instead of a landfilling process yields multiple social and environmental benefits. It's a single action that is part of a rich web of interconnections that re-ignite our organization's passion for the practice. Some are included below to inspire your current practice or to get you started.

First and foremost is to understand that food scraps are not trash until they are placed in the garbage and sent to the landfill – now they have been wasted, now they are waste.

Further examination of the human-created notion

of "waste" reveals that the practice of "wasting" is designed into the framework of society that we are pulled into every time we venture out into the world. It's a far-reaching construct and infiltrates far more than how we manage material solid waste. Regardless, there is hope and new pathways leading to re-design strategies and interventions that recover resources - and more importantly - recover human potential and lives.



On an individual level, composting enables us to make rich soil amendment, reduce garbage volumes, make new friends, grow nutrient dense local food,

save money by recovering the entire investment we make in food including the inedible parts, and yields a soil-building resource that can reduce the need for added fertilizers.

The social benefits of creating and using compost include healthier soil, cleaner water, increased soil water holding capacity so more water stays in place with less run-off, reduced GHG emissions, an increase in the soil's carbon-sinking ability while also spreading the burden of waste more equitably. Community composting with our family, school, or neighborhood increases community skill building, can provide local green jobs, and strengthen multi-stakeholder relationships and collaborations.

Having food scraps is a great privilege that can transform the challenge of wasting into a wide range of opportunities. Consider increasing the impact of your activism by including composting in your profile of social action and turning your food scraps into social good.

Want to learn more? Zoom into one of our free, monthly programs – Intro to Composting & Wasted Food Reduction or Q&A Composting Clinic. We are expanding our services further into nonprofits, apartments, condos, restaurants and businesses in 2021. If you want to get involved, please reach us at [sunshinecommunitycompost.org](http://sunshinecommunitycompost.org) or [info@sunshinecommunitycompost.org](mailto:info@sunshinecommunitycompost.org).

# Editorial: Revamp Special Education in Florida and Locally

BY CAROL LERNER, FOUNDER,  
PROTECT OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

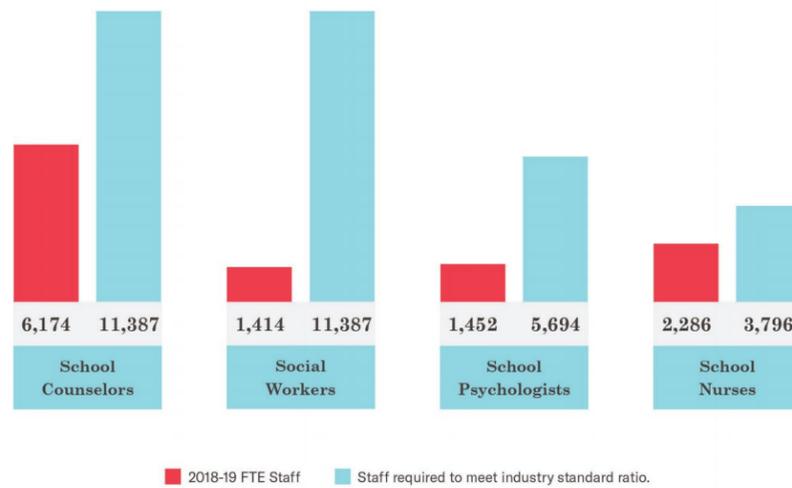
Most of you have either heard, or read, about the saga of DJ, a Sarasota County student who in third grade was moved into the Access Points program and given an academic program geared to children with severe cognitive disabilities or traumatic brain injury—a program reserved for just 1 percent of students who have the most severe cognitive impairments. DJ, at the time of this transfer, had been diagnosed with a specific learning disability and ADHD and was said to be reading near grade level.

Six years later DJ, and allegedly 122 other students who had experienced a similar transfer to Access Points (according to special education advocates), were suddenly transferred back to a regular academic program under pressure from the federal government. DJ was in high school at that time and quickly became academically lost. Despite being a straight-A student on the Access Points simplified curriculum, DJ couldn't do the work and was failing. He became deeply depressed and suicidal shortly after the transition. No tutoring or mental health counseling was offered by the district. His mother became concerned and, at that point, learned what had happened to her son.

DJ's mother took legal action to cover the costs of the compensatory education costs. In October 2019, an administrative law judge ruled that the Sarasota district falsified records and acted with "willful indifference" towards DJ, denying him of a "free and appropriate public education." The judge believed the district's motivations were due to wanting to remove DJ from state testing to avoid his likely low score from bringing down his school's grade. On December 8 of this year, the district settled with his family for \$250,000 and will cover the costs of tuition for DJ, now 18, at a private school for four years.

In December Commissioner of Education Richard Corcoran issued a scathing letter to the Sarasota district that placed significant new sanctions on the district, with the threat of losing special education funding for non-compliance. In a sample study of the files of 66 students in Access Points, the Department of Education investigators found that 27 of the students—or 41%—were either improperly placed or lacked the necessary documentation to show that the student belonged in the program.

Education advocates in Manatee County are also charging that students are placed inappropriately in programs or, even more often, are deprived of needed special education services. This is particularly true in



From the ACLU Cost of Policing Report: In Florida, during the 2018-19 school year, no school district met the industry standards for the number of students served by a single student support professional.

third grade when students must pass the standardized test to be promoted to fourth grade. Many parents charge that they had tried to receive services for their struggling child and were ignored or denied and then their child is held back.

Add to this, the fact that like general education, special education in Florida is woefully underfunded. This perversely puts pressure to either ignore the



Sarasota School Superintendent  
Dr. Brennan Asplen

more common disabilities, like specific learning disabilities or ADHD, because, in the tiered system, they are poorly funded or to make the disability classification more extreme because severe or multiple disabilities receive a higher rate. In addition, in-class supports are usually sorely lacking. So a child with a behavioral problem that might easily be corrected if behavioral specialists develop a good behavioral plan and work with both the student and the teacher, is often simply shuffled off to an alternative school (which also gets funded at a higher rate). This is one way the school to prison pipeline is created.

Florida schools are under-resourced and have insufficient guidance counselors and confidential therapists. Very few schools have school nurses. A recent study by the Florida ACLU, The Cost of School Policing found that Florida schools have half the number of school counselors as best-practices recommend and only one-tenth of the number of social workers needed.

The poor or inadequate services sometimes drive parents out of the public system and into voucherized services and programs, most of which are grievously inadequate and in many cases offer no services. Parents who move their children to these programs that are heavily promoted by state leaders and legislators, often do not realize that their children give up all of their rights under IDEA.

In Sarasota, Superintendent Asplen has a chance to reshape the exceptional student education services and programs for the better. Yes, he will still be hampered by inadequate funding and lousy state rules and regulations but there is a lot that can be done to drastically improve the situation. Perhaps, a task force of special education staff, parents, experts, advocates and others can look at the ESE program as a whole and determine what would constitute a high quality and responsive system that meets students, parents and staff needs. Like its success in so many areas, Sarasota County Public Schools could become a model of what special education programs and services could and should be. Let's get to work so that there will be no more DJ-like stories.

## North Port Special Election

North Port residents will pick a new District 1 city commissioner in a special election March 9. David Iannotti, elected to the Commission in November 2020, resigned on December 1st citing health reasons. To qualify, candidates had to file paperwork between Dec. 28 and 31 and must have lived in the district for at least a year before the Dec. 31 date.

Three candidates have filed to run for the seat: Walter Grzesnikowski, Joseph Garren and Alice White. Grzesnikowski has served previously on the Planning and Zoning Advisory Board. White ran unsuccessfully for the District 5 County Commission seat. Garren is a quality engineer.

A change to the North Port city charter eliminated the need for a runoff in special



elections, so the top vote-getter in March – will be named the winner. The last day to register to vote in the election is February 8th.

## Understanding Gov. Desantis's Anti-Protest Bill

Continued from pg. 1

capitalism, what's known as fascism.

Fascism is a form of far-right, authoritarian ultranationalism which emerged in early 20th-century Europe during a deepening crisis of capitalism. It came into being as capitalists sought to maintain power over the working class and the socialist movement. Fascism sought to divide working people where socialism sought to unite them—across boundaries of nationality, race, gender, sexual orientation, and ability.

Around the world today, as capitalism's latest crises deepen, far-right and fascist movements

are gaining strength. Ron Desantis's attempt to criminalize protests for racial justice is part of this ominous historical trend.

Since February, hundreds of thousands of Americans have been sacrificed to the virus so that the capitalist class could get richer. Fifty million Americans are hungry, forty million families are facing eviction, millions have lost health care benefits, and more than a million health care workers have lost their jobs in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. All of this, along with state violence, has fallen hardest on working people

of color, strengthening the nationwide uprising against racism.

Because they have no solutions to the crisis, politicians like Desantis have only one option: quell the resistance. That's why they build up the police state, clamp down on dissent, and fan the flames of nationalism, bigotry and racism.

If you are interested in learning more, you can contact the Emergency Campaign for Free Speech in Florida (Facebook, Twitter, IG) or email: [Emergencycampaignforfreespeech@gmail.com](mailto:Emergencycampaignforfreespeech@gmail.com).

# My Experience with a Health Sharing Ministry

BY DIANE DESEMBERG

I had decided several years ago that the ACA (Obamacare) health insurance plans available to me made no sense financially. Even letting my imagination run wildly negative, my wallet ended up better off if I didn't buy into any of those plans. This conclusion went against every prudent, commonsensical bone in my body.

So I started asking around. Amongst my friends and acquaintances in Florida who were

- not covered by an employer-sponsored plan,
- not old enough to qualify for Medicare,
- not young enough to have more reasonable health insurance premiums,
- and not impoverished enough to qualify for ACA subsidies.

What were they doing about health insurance? I was hoping for new options and perhaps an uplifting story or two. It was a disheartening survey among friends, but it did yield one glimmer of hope: health care sharing ministries.

A health care sharing ministry is a faith-based program built upon the principle of people sharing each other's medical burdens. Although this is similar to the risk-pooling nature of health insurance, there is no legally binding contract that protects members. Everything is voluntary and based on trust. Does that set off red alerts for you? It certainly did for me.

Nationwide, there were only a handful of ministries, and they varied considerably.

I signed up with Liberty Healthshare, because, unlike the others, they did not require me to be Christian. Their prices and benefits were similar to health insurance in the old days - back in the 1970s and 1980s. My share amount (similar to a monthly premium) would be \$199/month and my Annual Unshared Amount (the AUA is similar to a deductible) would be \$500. This was a fraction of what any of the ACA plans would cost me. Of course, the devil is in the details, so I analyzed the whole package. In the end, I decided to give it a go.

The road has been bumpy, but all things considered, I am happy enough to continue with Liberty Healthshare. I share my experience, so that others may see an up-close and personal view.

First off, membership isn't a given. Liberty Healthshare would have been within their rights to deny me membership. Once a member, for the first year, they don't share expenses for anything they deem a pre-existing condition. I didn't expect to meet my AUA (~deductible) the first year, because I only had one health care expense - a quick visit to the dermatologist for a skin cancer check with no skin cancers found. I was sadly surprised that this visit was deemed a pre-existing condition. I had done my research, so I was aware that others had reported similar problems with an overly broad definition of pre-existing condition. For the next two membership years, they would cover pre-existing conditions up to \$50,000. Starting the fourth year,

a condition is no longer considered pre-existing. Knowing this, I felt comfortable continuing in the program.

Just like insurance companies, Liberty Healthshare only covers reasonable fees. Beyond that I'm on the hook. This means that I am expected to be a good consumer, compare health care costs, and ask for discounts. I got to test my negotiating skills during my second year of membership. I went for an annual wellness visit, and my doctor ordered a few standard blood tests. Any insurance company worth its salt has negotiated reasonable fees with the nationwide laboratories. Although Liberty Healthshare was amenable to reimbursing me for the doctor's fees, I was told to ask the lab to bill Liberty Healthshare directly, and then they would negotiate the fees for me. Ha! Like that was going to work. Every lab I spoke with demanded insurance or payment up front. Nobody had the authority to give me a discount. It was going to cost me about \$600 for some basic lab tests, which had previously

I was reimbursed for my first doctor's visit four months later. I thought that was a ridiculously long time, but then it only got worse. For two years, I called every two or three months to advise them of their processing mistakes and to find out what the holdup was, only to be told that they would resubmit my expenses. Reimbursement took anywhere from 6 months to 1 1/2 years. Liberty Healthshare acknowledged to their members that they had a severe problem and overhauled their system. They also jacked up their monthly share amount (~premium) after having already doubled their AUA (~deductible). With such price hikes, I do hope these problems are behind them. Of more importance, in the end, all of my expenses beyond the AUA have been reimbursed.

Being part of a health care sharing ministry includes sharing biblical principles. At the outset, this sounded too vague to be meaningful. One of those principles is a commitment to healthy living. That makes sense in the context of medical care.

But it does go deeper than this. After Hurricane Irma devastated a portion of Southwest Florida, I got a call from Liberty Healthshare, asking me if I was okay. The person on the other end wanted to know if they could do anything to help. It was that sweet and that simple.

If you experienced sticker shock with your last health insurance renewal, or if you have been kicked off your employer's health plan recently, a health care sharing ministry may be something to consider.

I don't know anybody else who is a member of a health care sharing ministry, but I'm glad I didn't reject the concept out of hand. These ministries have been around for decades, and there are now over a million members. Part of the reason they are less expensive than conventional health insurance is that they cover fewer things. They all have quirks, and one of those quirks may be especially important to you. Do you use tobacco? If so, you may not be eligible. Some programs may require agreement with a statement of faith and verification of your church attendance. Are you a rock climber? If so, Liberty Healthshare may not be for you, as they don't cover injuries resulting from hazardous activities, which, by their definition, includes rock climbing. These ministries probably won't cover health-related costs they deem unbiblical, such as abortion and injuries related to alcohol or drugs. My plan has a maximum sharing limit for any given incident of \$1 million; other plans have lower limits. This just scratches the surface of the fine print. Look at all the details carefully.

It would be awesome if the medical industry in the United States were comprehensively reformed so as to provide all citizens with the health care they need. Until then, you might consider whether a health care sharing ministry would work for you. Read their guidelines in excruciating detail before signing up!



cost my insurance company about \$60. These lab companies are corporate behemoths, so I'm not sure why I was sent on this fool's errand. I circled back to my doctor and asked if they knew how to get a reasonable price for lab work. There was good news from that corner. Evidently, many doctors negotiate favorable rates with a nearby lab. If I paid my doctor up front for the tests, I could take advantage of my doctor's rates. A couple of years later I discovered several discount labs online, if you are not using insurance. Now I can select the desired tests, prepay for them, and go to the corresponding lab.

Admittedly all this took a lot of time to figure out. Add to that the time I already spend finding reasonable prices on prescription drugs, and I'm thinking that I deserve a raise. Many years ago, I discovered that there were instances when I found better prices for prescription drugs than what I paid through my insurance. The GoodRx.com website has been my friend in tracking down the best prices nearby. More recently, between shrinking formularies, increasing co-pays, larger co-insurance percentages, exponential growth in the price of drugs, and large drug deductibles, many insurance companies don't end up covering much in the way of prescription drugs. As a result of this sad state of affairs, the fact that Liberty Healthshare does not cover maintenance medications has not been as big a blow for me as it might otherwise be. However, if I needed many pricey prescription drugs, this would be a serious limitation.

## NCF's Black History Month Going Vir(tu)al

keynote address, two panels, and a creative writing workshop. One panel will focus on the local movements against police brutality, and the other on school discipline.

Dr. Janaka Bowman-Lewis from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte will join us for one of our conversations on race and ethnicity. She will discuss Black women's narratives of freedom. At UNC Charlotte, Dr. Bowman-Lewis teaches English, African American Studies, and Gender Studies.

As part of our community service events, the SA[U]CE Office will work with Valerie Buchand on a conversation and an activity related to the Newtown Nation. Archaeology professor Uzi Baram will also share his Looking For Angola Project, which explores a 19th-century maroon community off the Manatee River.

These events will just be one piece of our programming. Make sure to check out the website at [www.ncf.edu/black-history-month](http://www.ncf.edu/black-history-month) as we update it with more information.

*Continued from pg. 1*



*Looking for Angola Project Photo courtesy: New College of Florida*

# Public Schools' Chance to Improve Parental Engagement

BY GERI CHAFFEE  
PRESIDENT, PDO.ORG

Parental engagement has long been recognized as a foundational pillar to students' academic success. However, in schools serving socio-economically disadvantaged neighborhoods, numerous cultural, linguistic and time constraints present barriers. Although the will may be there to reach out to parents, the existential realities of both the school system and the families often get in the way. In many cases, biases are developed on both sides that often become insurmountable to connectivity and inclusion.

When the education system closed in March, state DOE's mandated that districts find every student and ensure that they were ready for distance learning until further notice. Families not in the district's communication platforms or email lists were the most difficult to find. For the first time ever, individual schools had to rely on whatever data they had gathered at the beginning of the year to connect with parents. Anyone who has worked in schools that serve vulnerable communities is aware of the constant flux children experience as they cope with poverty and all the social issues associated with unstable living conditions.



Gerri Chaffee hosts the radio show *Por Nuestros Niños*, a Spanish language show about issues associated with distance learning and education.

The pandemic has given our public education system a tremendous opportunity to build on the mandated effort to connect with all our students where they are, which according to a national survey was very well received by parents, especially African American and Hispanic families. In fact, a majority of racially diverse parents stated that they were "more likely to get a better understanding of what my child is expected to learn at this/her new grade level"; "find more time to talk to my children about their everyday assignments"; and "develop a stronger relationship with my child's teacher than I have in the past." Learning Heroes Survey 2020

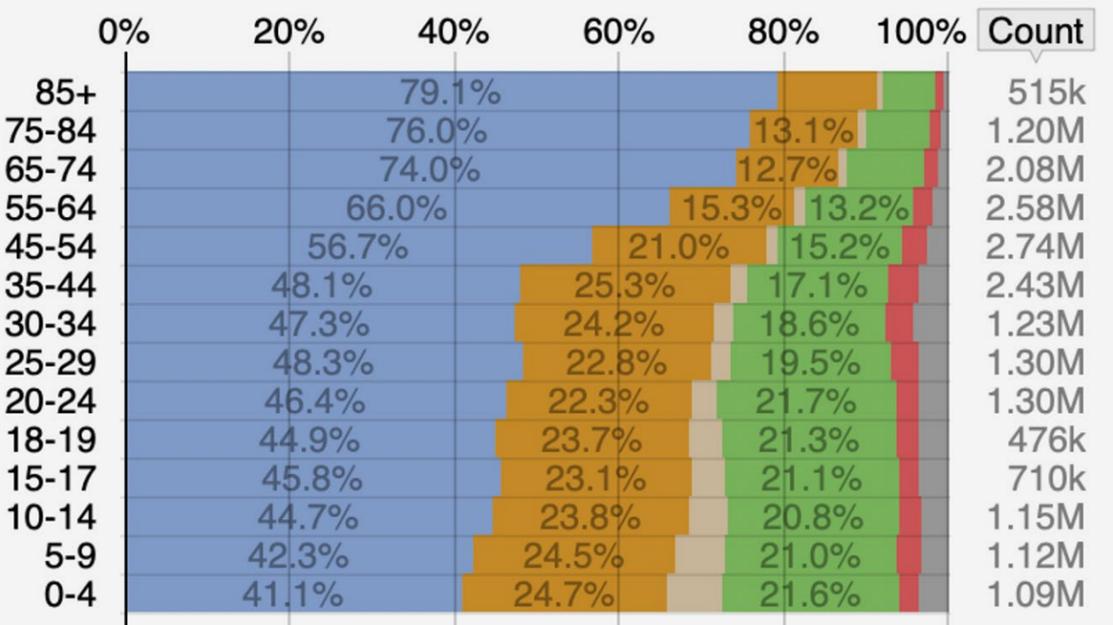
By now, most of us in education advocacy are painfully aware of the inequities in the system that have grown over the years, but it took a global pandemic to stop kicking the can down the road. A review of Florida's demographic data reveals that over 50% of people of child-bearing and rearing age are racially and culturally diverse. Also, Florida 2019 DOE data states that 61% of enrolled students are economically disadvantaged. This correlates with the fact that so many of our public schools have become what education professionals call majority minority schools. Nearly 70 years after Brown, our schools are rapidly becoming more segregated, not less. Many students are actually experiencing triple segregation: by race, by income and more recently, by language (GAO Diversity Study 2016).

A renewed opportunity to understand the underlying sociological drivers and familiarize ourselves with the research and best practices will help address academic disparities in racially and culturally diverse student populations. Other districts

## Relative Ethno-Racial Composition by Age #3

Ethno-racial composition by age cohort as a percentage within each age cohort.

Scope: population of Florida



Count total number of people in age cohort

<sup>1</sup> non-Hispanic white

<sup>2</sup> white Hispanic

<sup>3</sup> including Hispanic

Source: [www.statisticalatlas.com](http://www.statisticalatlas.com)

have successfully adapted professional development and instructional models in an attempt to create inclusive climates that celebrate students and build on the multiple assets their families bring to school communities. When parents are viewed as essential partners in the education of children, education equity and academic achievement are more readily attained.

In this work, the first step is access. Early last summer, as reopening mandates were handed down from Tallahassee, Manatee County School District leaders realized that two-way communication would play a critical role, especially with Spanish-speaking families. Hispanic students now constitute 35% of district enrollment. An aggressive outreach campaign was developed, with most tactics considered and implemented for the first time. With help from Hispanic community leaders and the Manatee Community Foundation, the campaign included print advertising in Spanish media, local radio spots on Spanish radio, a new Spanish FaceBook page @SDMCEspanol, a dedicated easy to remember (909-1999) hotline staffed with Spanish-speaking personnel, and all information and videos on the district website produced in both English and Spanish. These efforts have since provided an enormous amount of data that is driving ongoing and future communication campaigns.



As the Manatee Superintendent Cynthia Saunders was just recognized with a top state award for her leadership during these difficult times, we hope other Florida districts can realize that efforts to engage parents and improve access and equity for all students are a small investment that will reap tremendous benefits as we educate our future generations into productive lives of service and leadership.

## MANATEE COUNTY SCHOOLS HISPANIC OUTREACH

Facebook: Distrito Escolar del Condado de Manatee @SDMCEspanol

Manatee County Schools Spanish Language Hotline: 941-909-1999

## Who Is Thomas Paine?

Florida Veterans for Common Sense continues to blaze the trail explored by Thomas Paine, the author of "Common Sense", a pamphlet that outlined our form of government. Paine also served as citizen soldier during the American Revolutionary War.



Paine struggled advancing the promise of America. He was one of the first abolitionists, the father of Social Security, an advocate for efficient and peaceful government. He loathed war profiteers and unnecessary war.

As Veterans of the American military, our mission is to inspire Americans of today with the spirit of Thomas Paine.



**Are You A Veteran?**

**Write for a Membership Application Today!**

**Dues are \$45 annually.**

**P. O. Box 2311, Sarasota, FL 34230**

Florida Veterans for Common Sense, Inc. is a non-partisan/non-profit 501(c)(4) corporation. Contact [FLVeterans@aol.com](mailto:FLVeterans@aol.com).