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SOUTH FLORIDA 100 OPINION

# South Florida 100: Congratulations, Class of 2021!

SOUTH FLORIDA SUN SENTINEL | JUN 11, 2021



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Students from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School walk into the BB&T Center in Sunrise for a graduation ceremony on Tuesday, June 8, 2021. (John McCall)

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

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## **Robin Bartleman, member, Florida House of Representatives**

**Last week:** This school year was unprecedented. Many teachers and students transitioned throughout the school year from online instruction to in-person, all while facing their own family's struggle during the pandemic. As a parent and a former teacher, I understand the difficulties our schools faced. Yet, schools across the state have demonstrated resilience. I want to extend my personal gratitude to administrators, staff and teachers. Congratulations to the Class of 2021; it was an honor to watch some of

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you cross the stage! And of course, the teacher in me encourages all students to participate in the summer program to avoid academic regression.

**Looking ahead:** June is LGBTQ+ Pride Month. It is a time to commemorate the Stonewall Riots and celebrate the LGBTQ+ community. I encourage everyone to take this month to learn about the history of Pride and to attend a local event, including the Stonewall Pride Parade on June 19 that I will be walking in. It is more important than ever for families and allies to support the LGBTQ+ community. Every individual deserves the right to feel comfortable in their own skin. I want you to know I am here for you and will always support you.

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### **Lori Berman, member, Florida Senate**

**Last week:** June 12 will mark the five-year anniversary of one of the most horrific tragedies to befall our state, the Pulse Nightclub shooting. Forty-nine lives were lost that

day, and countless other family members and friends have suffered from the trauma they incurred from the tragedy. Efforts to honor and memorialize the Pulse victims in Congress amounted to a recent bipartisan vote that designates the site as the National Pulse Memorial. That comes just days after Gov. DeSantis shamefully vetoed \$150,000 in state funds that would have provided counseling for Pulse survivors, despite \$9.5 billion in reserves.

**Looking ahead:** With only two weeks into hurricane season, we must remember that disaster preparedness is critical in keeping ourselves and our families safe. Take steps to minimize stress and prepare your household for disasters. Palm Beach County's Emergency Operations Center, in conjunction with the Florida Department of Emergency Management, works tirelessly to ensure our county and state are as prepared as possible. The team at Emergency Management wants you to follow these steps: make a plan, build a kit, get involved and be informed. Ensuring our community is safe and educating our residents is vital, in addition to planning and coordinating responses as needed.

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### **Jane Bolin, mayor, Oakland Park**

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follows Gov. DeSantis' April agreement with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to build a \$3.4 billion reservoir to supply the Everglades with fresh water. Sadly, following decades of development, agricultural pollution and

saltwater intrusion, the reserve's delicate ecosystem is in real danger of extinction. That's why I welcome and fully support the much-needed bipartisan recognition of the urgent need to protect the Everglades' unique environment, which is truly the heart and bloodline of South Florida.

**Looking ahead:** This week, Gov. DeSantis signed two bills aimed at combating Chinese influence at Florida universities. The legislation was prompted by concerns that some Chinese nationals working at Florida colleges are sharing sensitive materials with the Chinese government. The bills, HB 7017 and HB 1523, are designed to monitor monetary donations and gifts from seven countries, including China, Russia, Iran, North Korea, Syria, Cuba and Venezuela, and increase penalties for stealing trade secrets. While some critics have already called the new laws xenophobic, China's theft of American intellectual property has been a serious concern for many years and needed to be addressed.

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### **Lauren Book, member, Florida Senate**

**Last week:** First, congratulations to those students who graduated. Whether you are graduating high school or college, educational achievement should always be

celebrated as a personal milestone. To each of you, I offer sincere admiration for a job well done. Sadly, 14 students who would have graduated from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School were only present in our hearts this week because their lives were needlessly cut short by a failed system and a deranged young man. To the parents of the 14, I know this week was especially hard. Please know that 1,215 days after the shooting, we still remember you.

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### **Kathleen Cannon, president, United Way of Broward County**

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pride and understanding, thanks to a new sing-along video created by Nickelodeon's "Blue's Clues." The animated video features a drag queen, a Pride parade and LGBTQ-inclusive lyrics celebrating the diversity of queer families, the importance of loving people as they are, and the importance of being an ally for the LGBTQ community. I encourage all to watch the video on YouTube and share it during Pride Month.

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### **Mike Caruso, member, Florida House of Representatives**

**Last week:** This week Gov. DeSantis signed two bills into law, HB 1523 and HB 7017, which were both unanimously passed by the House and Senate. These are the first bills in the U.S. that work to combat foreign espionage by steepening penalties for entities that steal intellectual property to benefit a foreign government, requiring colleges and universities to disclose foreign gifts of more than \$50,000, and toughening the screening process of foreign applicants for research positions. HB 7017 also lists China, Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Russia, Syria and Venezuela as countries of concern. High-security risks for the U.S., foreign governments like China have been stealing intellectual property by weaseling their way into our state institutions for far too long. These bills are crucial in ensuring that those who engage in these traitorous acts are rightfully punished.

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### **Angelo Castillo, commissioner, Pembroke Pines**

**Last week:** With a six-shot lead going into the final round of this past week's PGA Memorial Golf Tournament, Jon Rahm, playing outstandingly at the top of his game, was virtually guaranteed a win and a purse of \$1.6 million. Until he was told at the end of his third round that he had tested positive for COVID and was therefore disqualified. That news alone is tough enough to handle. But then we learned that Rahm had not been vaccinated. That's got to be even tougher to contend with. Florida is well behind other U.S.

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decisions for yourself and your family, because while nobody's going to force to you to get vaccinated, the consequences of not doing so could cost you an easy win. And my sincerest hope is that doesn't happen to you. Be positive, stay COVID negative. Go get your shot.

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### **Paul Castronovo, host, Paul Castronovo Show on Big 105.9**

**Last week:** I can't blame the cruise industry for caving, but as a potential passenger, I'm annoyed. Once DeSantis signed the bill saying cruise lines could be fined \$5,000 per passenger just for asking if they've been vaccinated, they caved. Even before COVID, if somebody sneezed in the buffet line, I was ready to jump overboard. All we need is one major outbreak on a ship, and we're back to square one. At press time, only Norwegian has said, "we are doing fully vaccinated cruises." Governor, your move. What if you charged nonvaccinated passengers double? I bet they'd get the vaccine immediately.

**Looking ahead:** Where am I gonna go? "You should see what people are paying for houses in my neighborhood, I'd love to cash in." I have this conversation every day. People are moving here in record numbers, overpaying and outbidding each other on houses that elicit a collective, "meh" upon seeing them. So, let's say you said, "OK, sold!" and you sell your home for a fat profit. Then what? We actually explored the idea. "Maybe we could move into a condo?" We looked. Condo commandos, no parking and people in white pants playing shuffleboard; we're staying put.

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

**Last week:** Last week, marked the 40th anniversary of the nation's first reported cases of AIDs. This anniversary serves as a day to remember the lives lost to this disease and to acknowledge the 38 million people worldwide who are currently living with HIV. This devastating

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drastically changed the prognosis for HIV/AIDS patients and have made the diagnosis more manageable, there's still no cure. As a global community, we must come together to end the HIV epidemic everywhere.

**Looking ahead:** The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced their approval of the drug aducanumab to treat patients with Alzheimer's disease. This is the first new drug approved by the FDA for Alzheimer's disease in almost two decades. As a condition of approval, the FDA is requiring Biogen, the drug's maker, to conduct another clinical study to confirm the reduction of amyloid plaques results in clinical improvement for patients. If this works, this drug will be able to slow the progression of this disease. If the study does not show a clinical improvement, the FDA could withdraw the approval.

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**Dr. Michael Dennis, chair, FAU Schmidt College of Medicine**

**Last week:** Much attention is rightfully being paid to disparities in the delivery of health care and other aspects of human life. Add to those the alarming tax advantages provided to the extremely wealthy. Information released this week indicated that the vast majority of Americans are taxed on salary and the sale of assets like stocks or property while the very wealthy are not taxed on unidentifiable gains. Jeff Bezos, whose net worth has ballooned to about \$200 billion, was eligible for a \$4,000 child tax credit! As the country is seeking revenue to correct many deficiencies, this "disparity" cannot be overlooked.

**Looking ahead:** The COVID-19 pandemic has placed many extra demands on mankind's ability to address crisis issues. Among them is the tremendous need for high quality medical care. Our physicians, nurses and all other medical personnel have performed generously and compassionately – often while in danger of getting the virus. One fortunate outcome: The situation has encouraged even more interest in the medical field. As an example, the Florida Atlantic University College of Medicine received over 6,000 applications for the current new class of 64 students. The graduates are strongly encouraged to remain after their training in service to South Floridians.

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## **Howard Dvorkin, CPA, chairman, Debt.com**

**Looking ahead:** The Sun Sentinel recently reported that “one in three people in South Florida has maxed out a credit card.” Separately, a study found that the Miami metro area has the nation’s ninth-highest share of million-dollar homes. You can draw two conclusions here: South Florida is becoming a middle-class wasteland, with only rich and poor populations. Or South Floridians are spending way too much on housing, and it’s causing a cascade of personal debt. Or maybe both things are true.

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## **Bernie Fernandez Jr., M.D., CEO, Baptist Health Medical Group**

**Last week:** Moderna has filed for full FDA approval of its COVID-19 vaccine, following the lead of Pfizer and BioNTech. Both vaccines, along with Johnson & Johnson’s vaccine, are in use nationwide with the FDA’s emergency use authorization (EUA). The EUA allows the vaccines to be given, since their safety and efficacy data and two months of follow-up data were reviewed by the FDA. Full approval requires six months of follow-up data and further review of the clinical trial data. With more than 1 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines safely administered worldwide, full FDA approval is likely and will ease vaccine hesitancy.

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## **Lamar Fisher, member, Broward County Commission**

**Last week:** The cruise industry is back and in full force! This week, our very own Port Everglades welcomed Royal Caribbean International’s newest ship, Odyssey of the Seas. Although the ship did not carry passengers and is only here for provisioning, this is an exciting first step. On June 26, Port Everglades will also be the homeport for the first cruise to begin sailing again from the United States since the pandemic restricted cruising. I am happy to see our cruise and tourism industry back in full swing, as we know this is

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**Looking ahead:** Next week, I will be presenting a proclamation designating June 21-25, 2021 as National Boys and Girls Club Week. The Boys and Girls Clubs of Broward County are vital institutions that provide so much for our kids. Even with these challenging times, the clubs have maintained their success with 96% of the members progressing to the next grade, 97% of senior members graduated from high school, and 76% of seniors enrolled in college. I am proud to stand with the 4,000 clubs and more than 2 million young people nationwide recognizing the amazing work these clubs do for our community.

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### **Dan Flynn, vice president for research, Florida Atlantic University**

**Last week:** Alzheimer's disease affects 6.2 million

Americans each year, leading to cognitive decline and an inability to perform basic tasks. This week, the Food and Drug Administration approved a new drug called Aduhelm that slows the progression of the disease. The drug slows plaque development in the brain, which correlates with slower declines in cognition and extends quality of life. Although expensive, it appears insurance companies may cover much of the cost but require brain scans to show that the drug is benefiting patients. Aduhelm is an important early step in efforts to find ways to diagnose and treat Alzheimer's disease.

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### **Lois Frankel, member, U.S. House of Representatives**

**Last week:** In the past 10 years, states have passed hundreds of laws creating abortion restrictions interfering

with a woman's right to make important decisions about when and how to start a family. This week, along with like-minded colleagues, I introduced The Women's Health Protection Act, which will take the power to make these deeply personal medical decisions out of the grasp of governors and state legislators, and put it back where it belongs: in the hands of women and the people they trust.

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**Last week:** After a week full of beautiful high school graduations throughout Broward County, we should not forget the difficulties the class of 2021 faced – especially those students graduating from Marjory Stoneman Douglas

High School. The class of 2021 at MSD were freshmen when the tragic shooting occurred. Nine of their classmates were supposed to be graduating this week. That freshman class took tragedy and turned it into action that resonated throughout our country. Now, as we face another epidemic of gun violence in South Florida, we should heed the words of these wise young students and start to make change.

**Looking ahead:** A data revolution is coming to Broward County. The Broward Metropolitan Planning Organization will be collecting an unprecedented amount of anonymous data about how, where and when people move around in Broward. This data will tell us helpful information, such as what times attractions get the most traffic, which seasons have the most bus usage and much, much more. That information will tell us how to coordinate our traffic lights and patterns, where to put commuter rail stations, how many buses to run, and other important decisions. This will be a critical tool in expanding transit and enhancing mobility in Broward County.

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### **Anna Fusco, president, Broward Teachers Union**

**Looking ahead:** I'd like to thank Broward educators and encourage them to truly enjoy this summer. Broward offers

many options. In addition to sunbathing, the beach can be a great place to meditate by a pier or simply people-watch. Anne Kolb, Secret Woods, Fern Forest and other parks provide enriching experiences with nature. Las Olas Oceanside Park, Hollywood ArtsPark and Riverfront offer free weekend music. If you need to escape the heat, consider free browsing in green markets and swap shops and reasonable admissions at a plethora of museums and galleries. The important thing is to just chill and have fun – you've earned it.

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Don Gorman, Dean, College of Business, Florida Atlantic

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**Last week:** America recently celebrated Memorial Day, honoring the sacrifices of the brave men and women who served to protect our country and the American ideals of individual freedom and liberty for all. These are ideals

which need to be continually pursued, not taken for granted. This promise of freedom still attracts people from all over the world. In my university experience, our international students and faculty, particularly those who came from socialist countries, value America highly, even more than some who were born here, as these immigrants know how exceptional America is compared to much of the world.

**Looking ahead:** Small businesses in Georgia are fighting back against the “woke” decision of Major League Baseball to move the All-Star game from Atlanta to Denver, a decision the MLB made after Georgia passed voting reforms that drew complaints from multiple Democrats, including the president. The Job Creators Network, an organization that advocates for small businesses, filed suit to move the game back to Atlanta or pay damages to these businesses. Ironically, this decision by MLB will likely have a disproportionately negative effect on minority businesses, as Atlanta is much more racially diverse than Denver. Will this case foreshadow future actions?

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

**Last week:** How refreshing it was to watch President Biden speak to the troops in Great Britain, understandingly emoting as he remembered his late son. Later in the week, he was able to consult with our European allies, announcing that America was ready to lead again. Again: how refreshing. And how important it is to have allies and friends! Isn't this message an applicable one in our own personal life's journey? Allies and friends - important in our lives.

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### **Marty Kiar, property appraiser, Broward County**

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especially important. The 2021 class were freshmen when the tragedy occurred and have become global activists working to make our world a better place. As President Biden said: “No graduating class gets to choose the world into which they graduate. But every once in a while, every few generations, young people come along at a point in history with a chance to make real change.” Congratulations to these graduates as they are the embodiment of positive change!

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### **Tracey Labgold, chairperson, Anti-Defamation League Florida**

**Looking ahead:** As we mark Pride Month, we celebrate the LGBTQ community and the strides taken to bend the arc of the moral universe toward justice. We also recognize the continued challenges and rampant discrimination that the LGBTQ community is subject to, as seen with the anti-transgender youth sports ban that was signed into law by Gov. DeSantis as Pride Month began. Societies built on empathy and inclusivity should never set one group apart. We support transgender youth in Florida and transgender people everywhere, because discrimination toward any of us is discrimination toward all of us.

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### **Chip LaMarca, member, Florida House of Representatives**

**Last week:** Residents who require financial assistance due to the COVID-19 pandemic may be eligible to apply for the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program. This program is offered by the Federal Communications Commission, and the commission will provide a temporary discount on monthly broadband bills for low-income families. If eligible, you can receive up to \$50 monthly discount on services or equipment, or a \$100 discount on tablets or computers. The program is on a first-come, first-serve basis and will be offered until the FCC funding is exhausted. For more information and how to apply please go to [getemergencybroadband.org](https://www.getemergencybroadband.org).

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June 21. The courts have been closed since March of 2020. Under the chief justice's order, vaccines are readily available for everyone 12 years and older, with increasing vaccination rates, courtrooms will have the option to conduct proceedings without facemasks or social distancing. Proceedings other than jury trials may stay remote for their hearings. I will provide more information as it becomes available.

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### **Ina Lee, owner, Travelhost Elite of Greater Fort Lauderdale**

**Last week:** Another day, another shooting, in the seemingly unending gun violence that is shattering lives.

And soon, there will predictably be another mass shooting that will grab headlines and public outcry until once again, we do nothing to put in place meaningful gun control because politics is winning over the lives of our citizenry and our youth.

**Looking ahead:** The report from ProPublica on the taxes (or no taxes) paid by some of the wealthiest people in our country truly highlights the inequity of our tax system. The report shows that the country's wealthiest executives paid \$13.6 billion federal income tax on \$401 billion of their wealth. Clearly there are loopholes in our tax code that allow for this disparity.

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### **Tim Lonergan, former mayor, Oakland Park**

**Last week:** The Florida Guardian ad Litem Program's vision is to continue to be a powerful and effective voice

that advocates for the best interests of Florida's abused, abandoned and neglected children, but your help is needed. In Broward there are over 1,600 children who have reportedly been abused and neglected and need someone to stand for them – to be their voice. If you want to change a child's story, stand with the active volunteer base of more than 500 and help make a difference in a child's life. Please email [17th.recruitment@gal.fl.gov](mailto:17th.recruitment@gal.fl.gov) or contact the Broward recruiter at 954-831-6214. Learn more at [www.voicesbroward.org/gal](http://www.voicesbroward.org/gal).

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feeling neglected and slighted. A great destination for tourists and locals who want to be seen, Las Olas continues to satisfy. Housing stock is exploding in the area, with many new condominium and apartment complexes already built or currently under construction. Additional investment in the area is understandable. The problem is, a fair share of tax dollars is not going into other neighborhoods to improve the infrastructure, plant trees, add sidewalks and streetlights and repave the roads.

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### **Charlotte Mather-Taylor, executive director, Area Agency on Aging of Broward County**

**Last week:** This past week, the FDA approved a new drug, Aduhelm, to treat Alzheimer's disease. Although controversial, according to the FDA, this treatment is the first therapy to target and affect the underlying disease process of Alzheimer's. Approximately 560,000 individuals currently live with Alzheimer's disease in Florida, with projections that more than 720,000 individuals will be living with the disease by 2025. These figures do not include other forms of dementia. If you need assistance helping a loved one with Alzheimer's or dementia, please visit the Area Agency on Aging website at [www.adrcbroward.org](http://www.adrcbroward.org) or call our Helpline at 954-745-9567.

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### **Nancy Metayer, city commissioner, Coral Springs**

**Last week:** I had the honor of attending several high school graduation ceremonies. I enjoyed meeting the next generation of leaders, sharing their endless joy and expressing how proud I am of each and every graduate. Congratulations to the Class of 2021! The pride and accomplishment you feel are just the first of many chapters in life to be celebrated. You have endured, you have conquered, and you are prepared. You have every right to feel uncertain, afraid and even anxious. You are allowed to feel as if life has let you down, but always remember you are among a generation of fighters and

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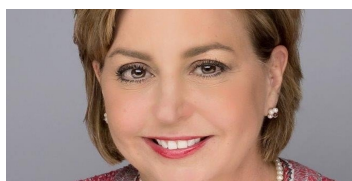




## **Peter Moore, president, Chen Moore and Associates**

**Last week:** This past week, Gov. DeSantis finally appointed new members to the Florida Board of Professional Engineers. Many of the empty spots had sat vacant for years and the business of the board was only being conducted by those whose terms were long expired. I know that the gubernatorial appointments office was backed up, but for a profession that was deemed by the governor's office as essential, it seemed like the appointments were long overdue.

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## **Jennifer O'Flannery Anderson, president and CEO, Community Foundation of Broward**

**Last week:** Feeding South Florida deserves the chance to continue handling distribution of federal food aid in Broward. This trusted organization, based in Pembroke Park, has a proven track record of making sure the people in need in our community don't go hungry. Throughout the pandemic, Feeding South Florida has helped keep food on the table for struggling families, seniors and others stung by job loss during the economic crisis. It's good news that state agricultural officials are listening to community concerns and giving more consideration to sticking with Feeding South Florida to help meet our community's needs.

**Looking ahead:** I was thrilled to read in the Sun Sentinel that construction is underway on a new manatee viewing platform along the South Fork of the New River. This two-story platform at the Secret Woods Nature Center in Dania Beach will be the first designated manatee-watching spot created for Broward residents. Hopefully, this lovely addition to the park will raise awareness about protecting manatees, which suffer from loss of sea grass, water pollution, boat strikes and other human hazards. The new viewing platform offers a safe, respectful way for more people to get a closer look at these beloved creatures.

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**Last week:** School is out for the summer. Students have had to cope with getting through this pandemic, learning in ways they never imagined, and they persevered. Most of this year's classes got to graduate together in person, unlike last year, and that is cause for real celebration. The Class of 2021 lived through a global pandemic and came out on the other side with compassion, courage and determination. I am extremely proud of all our students. I have attended many graduations and each one leaves me proud of who are young people are and who they are becoming. Congratulations graduates!

**Looking ahead:** Property insurance rates are a constant headache for consumers. Florida, the third largest property insurance market in the U.S., has complex risks from hurricanes, tornadoes and flooding. It makes owning a home here financially difficult. Now rates may go up again. The governor is signing a bill allowing for larger annual rate increases for state-backed Citizens Property Insurance Corp. customers and reduces from three to two years the time to file claims. Even though the bill tries to curb roof-damage claims and lawsuits, it's not enough. We need real property insurance reform and affordable rates. More needs to be done.

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### **Shelly Petrolia, mayor, Delray Beach**

**Last week:** Delray Beach took a step toward greater unity this week. The process of hiring a new city manager included feedback from a ten-person citizen and city partner panel. After two days of presentations, interviews and discussion, the city commission unanimously chose Terrence Moore from a pool of highly qualified candidates. The overall experience was a positive affirmation of our commission's commitment to listening to stakeholders and residents. A community is better served when its leaders reflect the goals and aspirations of the population.

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### **Tina Polsky, member, Florida Senate**

**Last week:** Tuesday, as the Marjory Stoneman Douglas

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have been there: Alex Schachter, Alyssa Alhadeff, Martin Duque, Jamie Guttenberg, Luke Hoyer, Cara Loughran, Gina Montalto, Alaina Petty and Peter Wang. As the youngest victims of the MSD shooting, this graduating class persevered, remembering their classmates and the tragedy that came on Feb. 14, 2018. I am so proud of this class, and I will keep fighting as a legislator, community member and mom to ensure that we can vindicate the lives lost through sensible gun safety reform.

**Looking ahead:** This past Saturday, we remembered and honored the 49 lives taken in the 2016 Pulse Shooting. The five-year memorial has come around, but little has been done to address gun violence. Rather than hear my bill on safe gun storage, or hear bills that ban automatic assault rifles or allow family members to petition for risk protection orders, the Legislature has focused on allowing guns in schools and churches, creating memorials defending the Second Amendment, etc. It's only June, and the Gun Violence Archive has already reported 261 mass shootings. The GOP must stop its complacency and address this issue now.

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### **Tom Powers, chairman, Republican Party of Broward County**

**Looking ahead:** Millions of Hispanic Americans and Black Americans are living in poverty in this country. The

Biden administration's answer is to ignore our citizens and instead give U.S. tax dollars to illegal aliens and foreign governments. This does little or nothing to support the welfare of our American citizens and promote the safety of our communities. American tax dollars should put Americans first. We saw this working in action when in 2018 and 2019, the number of people living in poverty was the lowest since 1959 – a direct result of President Trump's economic plan to put America first.

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### **Philip Purcell, CEO/President, Marine Industries Association of South Florida**

**Last week:** The first marine economy statistics were

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in 2019. Tourism and recreation represented the largest marine economy activity in 2019, accounting for \$234.9 billion. The marine economy grew 4.2% in 2019, faster than the 2.2% growth for the overall U.S. economy. This comes as no surprise to marine-centric South Florida and can explain in small part why Florida is in its ninth consecutive month exceeding revenue expectations as the state recovers from the pandemic's economic fallout.

**Looking ahead:** New boat sales, which reached a 13-year high in 2020, remains strong, with sales through March 2021 up 30% compared to the 2020 average. Demand is at an all-time high as Americans take to the water in record numbers; new data shows 415,000 first-time boat buyers entered the market in 2020. These buyers are averaging younger, and 1.5 times more likely to be women than other segments. Boating is the largest outdoor recreation activities in the U.S., and its increasing popularity is positive for the future of South Florida's marine industry and the \$12.5 billion of economic impact and 149,000 jobs it supports.

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### **Larry Rein, CEO and President, ChildNet**

**Last week:** In a bold and much-needed response to the havoc COVID wrecked on our children's academic progress, local public school systems have announced the

transformation and expansion of summer programming to include all grades. Not the same old "summer school" but rather 'The Summer Experience' in Broward County and 'Summer Acceleration Academies' in Palm Beach County. Both sound like exciting attempts to address an unexpected but critical challenge creatively and refreshingly. They are presenting their programs as potentially positive, even joyful, experiences intended to build and strengthen student performance. If their implementation is as good as their marketing, students will benefit immensely.

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### **Nan Rich, member, Broward County Commission**

**Last week:** This session, a disrespectful, regrettable bill was passed by the Legislature and signed by the governor.

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tobacco settlement. Designated for health programs and research, the endowment fund was always vulnerable to sweeps, just like the Sadowski Affordable Housing Trust Fund. Far from protecting the fund, by liquidating and redirecting the \$958 million balance into reserves, all the protections for the health programs are gone. Legislators can now use the funds for whatever they desire!

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## **Dr. Steven Ronik, CEO, Henderson Behavioral Health**

**Last week:** On June 10, the World Health Organization released a 300-page document, "Guidance on Community Mental Health Services: Promoting Person-Centered and Rights-Based Approaches." This is a long time coming and provides meaningful guidance to advance treatment and support for those with mental health conditions. For some of us, the report reiterates and emphasizes what we know and do right here in South Florida. Peer-support, supportive housing choices and a priority on recovery – not merely symptom-reduction – is our passion. As the pandemic winds down and the consequent surge for mental health services occurs, we need these informed services more than ever.

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## **Kerry Ann Royes, CEO, YWCA South Florida**

**Last week:** In the past week, Gov. DeSantis signed one of the largest state budgets to date, with a goal of tackling our community's most pressing issues. Within the budget is a notable bill that will help low-income pregnant women, particularly those of color, with Medicaid coverage that extends up to one year after they deliver their babies. The transformative adjustment addresses recent data from the National Center for Health Statistics that shows heightened maternal mortality rates, with women of color dying two-and-a-half times more often than white women from maternal-related causes. With potential to save thousands of mothers, this new bill is a critical step forward in social justice as we commit to the long-term health and overall lives of mothers

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## **Tim Ryan, member, Broward County Commission**

**Last week:** Bipartisanship has historically been a feature of our democracy. Democrats and Republicans have come

together at various times in our history to move the country forward and make life better for everyone. This spirit of cooperation and collaboration is sorely needed in the current Congress. Big issues such as infrastructure that have previously been uncontroversial are now flashpoints for politics. Rules in place to prevent legislation from passing that were once used sparingly now operate to block progress on almost every issue. Congress must find a way forward to get things accomplished.

**Looking ahead:** The Biden administration announced it will donate 500 million Pfizer vaccines internationally to combat the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. Vaccine diplomacy is not only the right thing to do morally, but also strategically. This generosity will engender goodwill, help the global economy recover and reduce the chances of more COVID-19 variants spreading. While many Americans have returned to a pre-pandemic mindset, much of the world still suffers. As the world's wealthiest nation, and a beacon of hope for many, America can again demonstrate moral leadership for the greater good of all humanity.

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## **Alissa Jean Schafer, member, Broward Soil and Water Conservation District**

**Looking ahead:** While we officially kicked off hurricane season days ago, it remains to be seen how intense of a

season we will face. Regardless, the time to prepare is now. Don't wait for panic shopping. Take some time to review your hurricane plan, stock up on your favorite nonperishable food items, check batteries on flashlights. If you invest in a generator, I recommend a fume-less solar option; the time to purchase one is now! One thing you do not need to do is stock up on bottled water. You can use containers you already have, filling them before the storm hits.

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**Looking ahead:** On June 15, Broward County commissioners will determine whether to put the countywide elected mayor item on the ballot. An elected mayor would give the county consistency in its

representation for diplomatic visits, working with the governor's office, lobbying for the airport, seaport and representation in Tallahassee. Miami-Dade County does much better because they have a consistent four-year mayor who's developing relationships that move their issues forward. Bottom line: It's time for our 2 million residents to speak and stop muting their voices. It's time to put this item on the ballot! Sign-up to speak on June 15 at: <https://ems8.intellor.com/?do=register&t=1&p=837764>, agenda item #110.

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## **Howard Simon, retired executive director, ACLU of Florida**

**Last week:** Of the line-item vetoes to the budget issued by Gov. Ron DeSantis last week, perhaps none will have more

of a cruel impact nor a more counterproductive effect (considering the governor's rigid ideological position on abortion) than his veto of \$20 million for Long-Acting Reversible Contraception (LARC). It is cruel because becoming a teenage mother is the principal predictor of a lifetime of poverty. And it will be counter-productive because, as the anti-abortion Senate President who inserted the allocation into the budget clearly stated, restricting access to birth control will only increase the number of abortions.

**Looking ahead:** Pressured by the governor and the education commissioner, the Florida Board of Education is poised to ban teaching critical race theory. What will be the practical effect? Will it ban teaching and discussions about the inescapable central role that race plays in American history, from slavery to the brutal end of Reconstruction, from Jim Crow to the civil rights movement and discussions about systemic racism? If that's the effect, the board will impose the kind of censorship of critical issues confronting the country that the governor rails against when it comes to Big Tech — this time, it will be censorship imposed by government.

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## **Kelly Skidmore, member, Florida House of Representatives**

**Looking ahead:** Summer is here! This season now includes dangerous algae blooms throughout the state.

Though the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's most recent map doesn't include Palm Beach in its areas of high concentration for the blooms, our residents know the harmful impact they have on our marinas, beaches, lakes, springs and rivers. This problem is not limited to a specific area in Florida. It is a complex issue that affects us all. But, regardless of what actually causes these blooms, it's time the state takes control and safeguards the blue economy that is the economic engine of our state.

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## **Eleanor Sobel, former member, Florida Senate**

**Last week:** Senate Republicans recently used the filibuster to thwart legislation aimed at decreasing the wage

gap. The legislation would have permitted employees to compare salaries and prohibited pay differentials for reasons not deemed "bona fide." The use of the filibuster prevented the Senate from working to decrease present pay disparities. In 2020, American women earned around 80% of what men earned, and Black and Latina women specifically earned 65% of what white men with the same education earned. We must work to close this wage gap, promote equal pay, and ensure that one's sex and race do not limit one's earnings.

**Looking ahead:** Greenwood District was once known as "Black Wall Street" for its thriving businesses and African American community. However, in June 1921, white mobs almost destroyed the entire locality during the Tulsa Race Massacre. Tulsa was a highly segregated city, and white supremacists, following the arrest of a Black teenager, committed immeasurable violence against Black citizens by burning houses, looting business and murdering individuals. Information about the massacre was hidden for decades, but it is now remembered through marches, demonstrations and speakers. White supremacy remains the most lethal threat to the U.S. today, and we must never forget this horrific tragedy.

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## **Nick Sortal, member, Plantation City Council**

**Looking ahead:** We are at a time of awkward social interaction. Do we greet friends with a hug, an elbow bump or just a wave? Well, an article in The Wall Street Journal offered a way for us all to make a quick assessment: Wristbands. Green means “hug away,” yellow is kind of in-between and red means “hands off, no exceptions.” And regardless of the wristband, here’s my advice: Don’t judge. We likely don’t know the background that the other person has experienced. So maybe just an air kiss will have to do.

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## **Andy Thomson, member, Boca Raton City Council**

**Looking ahead:** This week marks the end of the school year for Palm Beach County public schools. Perhaps more than any school year in memory, this one presented enormous challenges for students, teachers and administrators. But by and large, these challenges were met with grace and determination and ultimately overcome. My two oldest children attend Calusa Elementary, and the staff there did an incredible job in continuing to provide an exceptional education amid difficult circumstances. We applaud all the teachers and support staff countywide for their resolve and flexibility this year and welcome home the students for a well-deserved summer break!

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## **Gregory Tony, Broward Sheriff**

**Last week:** I learned at a young age that people in uniform are not just officers; they are friends, mentors and leaders. As a society, we have a responsibility to mentor our youth and help pave their path toward success. This week, the Broward Sheriff’s Office launched our newest initiative – the BSO Youth L.E.A.D Camp, centered on Learning, Educating And Developing. The eight-week summer program will teach valuable life skills and instill the importance of leadership to Broward’s youngest generation. With the development of the BSOYLC, we are preparing today’s youth

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## **Michael Udine, vice mayor, Broward County**

**Last week:** Millions of dollars from TV, packed stadiums and merchandise are flowing right into the pockets of

Division I universities. Athletes make this happen and receive what amounts to pennies on the dollar in financial scholarships. This week, Congress will start the process of creating national standards for athlete compensation, which is essential to prevent patchwork rules that may vary state to state. Florida and other southeastern states are leading the charge with laws on this topic. Standards should be set that provide fair compensation for athletes while still maintaining the focus on outstanding education.

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## **Robert Weinroth, member, Palm Beach County Commission**

**Last week:** With the recent tragic car crash in Boca Raton and community outcry concerning speeding in the area, I

directed our county engineer to initiate a speed study. Consequently, the county installed the tubes and counter to document the vehicle speeds in the vicinity of the accident. The results of the study have been provided to the Palm Beach County Sheriff, who has committed to initiated enhanced enforcement measures. Safely designed roads cannot negate the actions of drivers. Excessive speeds and distracted driving will be the target of the enhanced enforcement efforts to, hopefully, forestall a repetition of these catastrophic events.

**Looking ahead:** Boca Raton has joined Fort Lauderdale in exploring the idea of constructing a tunnel, which, in Boca's case, would connect the new Brightline station to Mizner Park. Elon Musk's Boring Co. has been invited to present more details. Palm Beach County is Florida's third largest county. Moving people safely and efficiently is an imperative as our population continues to grow. Musk's futuristic tunnel systems are low-cost compared to constructing bridges and flyovers, sparking interest across South Florida. Questions and concerns still need to be addressed. Nevertheless, it's exciting to see the idea being explored in South Florida.

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## **Thomas Wenski, archbishop, Archdiocese of Miami**

**Last week:** The unanimous Supreme Court decision on TPS reaffirms the status quo of the law – that those who

were not inspected on entering the U.S. cannot use TPS status to adjust to Legal Permanent Resident (LPR) without first leaving and reentering the country with proper inspection. The decision simply reminds everyone that the executive branch cannot change or make up the laws to fit its policy desires. In other words, needed immigration reforms (that provide a path to LPR and citizenship for the millions in irregular status or holding TPS) must pass through the Congress. Congress needs to act – and act responsibly.

**Looking ahead:** With COVID-19 vaccines being administered, we see a light at the end of the tunnel. But as we gradually begin recovery, populations in most of the countries in the world are still struggling with high transmission rates of the virus, overwhelmed health care systems, and still far away from the prospect of a post-pandemic world. The U.S. and the rich countries of Europe need to ensure an equitable access to vaccines for all, especially the most poor and vulnerable. Haiti, for example, has yet to vaccinate anyone – and the virus is spreading.

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## **Matt Willhite, member, Florida House of Representatives**

**Last week:** As vaccinations rise, restrictions ease and attitudes shift, Florida has announced that it is

"transitioning into the next phase of the COVID-19 response" by no longer reporting daily COVID cases and fatalities. Over the past week, the U.S. averaged about 16,000 new infections per day, a low level not seen since the early stages of the original outbreak. Though restrictions are easing, public health experts still warn that it may be premature to let our guard down and risky to loosen data reporting guidelines. Florida joins Alabama in discontinuing daily COVID-19 reporting data. Last week, Florida reported eight new cases per 100,000 residents.

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**Last week:** Last week the Florida City and County Management Association presented Adam Reichbach, Assistant City Manager for Finance and Administration for the City of Hollywood, with the 2021 Assistant for

Excellence in Leadership Award. This past year, Reichbach played an integral part of the Broward League of Cities' CARES Act Task Force. His leadership efforts helped Broward County's 31 municipalities secure \$102 Million in CARES Act funding. I know I speak for my fellow municipal elected officials when I say, thank you for your hard work and congratulations on receiving this year's FCCMA Leadership Award – you deserve it!

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### **Ghenete "G" Wright Muir, attorney, LGBTQ advocate**

**Last week:** The LGBTQ community returned to in-person events with Our Fund Foundation's LGBTQ Arts & Culture

Grant Reception. A total of \$226,500 was granted to 18 agencies including ArtServe, Gay Men's Chorus of SFL, Thinking Cap Theatre, Island City Stage and Thou Art Woman. The \$5,000 to \$20,000 grants will help sustain many organizations impacted by the pandemic and prepare many to return to in-person programming. Our Fund Foundation has been a lifeline. In 2020 they distributed emergency aid to 30 organizations and created Arts Proud—a collective of art organizations—to provide a network of support through the pandemic.

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