

• [SOUTH FLORIDA SUN SENTINEL](#)

South Florida 100: Saying goodbye to Alcee Hastings

SOUTH FLORIDA SUN SENTINEL |

APR 09, 2021 AT 6:33 AM

U.S. Rep. Alcee Hastings D-Fla., speaks to the walkers at the start of the Florida AIDS walk, Sunday March 20, 2011 at Huizenga Plaza in downtown Ft. Lauderdale. The long-time congressman died this week at 84. (Joe Cavaretta/Sun Sentinel)

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



Anthony J. Abbate, architect

Last week: This week, lamentations from local restaurant and service industry providers shed light on the scarcity of job applicants. Reasons vary, but what has not been mentioned is a probable link with housing affordability and transportation. According to MarketWatch, 69% of Floridians cannot afford a median priced home, and Greater Miami is among the most expensive places to rent in the U.S. Perhaps our legislators should work on incentives to help the real estate industry shift its focus to provide housing for locals who make up so much of our labor force instead of raiding the Affordable Housing Trust Fund.

Looking ahead: The so-called “intellectual survey” that passed the Florida Senate and is headed to the House (House Bill 233) is yet another waste of taxpayer money and time. Whether you question your beliefs or seek ways to scaffold them is up to you to decide, not government. And if the Legislature is truly interested in “intellectual diversity,” then why not allow academic exchange with Cuba? The goings-on in this year’s Legislature only underscore its distance from the everyday reality of most Floridians, who seek stability in employment, affordable housing and a transportation system that can get us places on time.



Lori Berman, member, Florida Senate

Last week: April 8 was Holocaust Remembrance Day. Decades ago, 6 million Jews were murdered for their religious beliefs, while millions of others were murdered systematically for their sexuality, disability and ethnicity at the hands of a hateful government and ordinary bystanders. In America, violence against these communities still exists. In honor of those who suffered, we cannot turn the other cheek to injustice. We must relay stories of this tragedy as those who lived the experience pass on. Each of us has a continued obligation to fight hatred and injustice, so that we can work toward the day when “never again” becomes reality.

Looking ahead: The Senate approved a preliminary budget of approximately \$94 billion, but there are some issues that need more attention. The proposal does not include any money from the \$10 billion in federal assistance provided by the American Rescue Plan. It also cuts funding for hospitals and recommends cuts to Medicaid, including removing 19- and 20-year-olds from the Medicaid rolls and eliminating over \$251 million directed to hospitals that treat large numbers of Medicaid patients. As the debate on

the budget continues between now and the end of session, I hope that we can plug some of these holes in the budget.



Lauren Book, member, Florida Senate

Last week: It is easy to forget that we, as a nation, still have many “firsts” among us and each time we lose one of those pioneers, we are reminded of how far we still have to go. Congressman Alcee Hastings was a pioneer who broke barriers and was among those “firsts” we cherish. Hastings was a leading voice in the fight to advance civil rights, serving as the first Black federal judge in Florida and as the first Black congressperson to represent Florida since the Civil War. His spirit, his voice and his gentle smile will be missed.



Traci Callari, President, Broward League of Cities; Hollywood commissioner

Looking ahead: With legislative session in full swing we must advocate as one Broward to protect home rule. With more than 60 pieces of proposed legislation threatening preemptions, our ability to govern at the municipal level could be drastically reduced. Home rule shouldn’t be treated as a convenience. At the onset of COVID-19, state leaders left tough decisions regarding closures and mask mandates up to local governments, then later rescinded it by stripping away the ability for local governments to issue fines. Please contact your state representatives. Let them know that we sent them to Tallahassee to protect home rule, not jeopardize it.

Kathleen Cannon, president, United Way of Broward County

Last week: For nearly 30 years, Rep. Alcee Hastings represented many of the same Broward County residents in Washington we serve through our community impact work locally. During that time, we witnessed how Rep. Hastings was a champion for the voices of ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) families in our county. When we advocated in the U.S. Capitol for policies to promote the health, education and financial stability of Broward County residents, our team could count on Rep. Hastings and his staff to be our champions. He leaves behind a legacy of always standing up for the most vulnerable amongst us.



Angelo Castillo, commissioner, Pembroke Pines

Last week: When I saw the now infamous 60 Minutes segment on DeSantis and Publix, it just didn't sound balanced to me. Missing were essential interviews central to the storyline's credibility. They got some parts right but some others very wrong. For example, most Floridians actually do like that Publix is vaccinating people and they don't really care if the stores seek insurance reimbursement in return for their trouble, much less what campaigns they contribute to. Yet too many minority Floridians do live in communities far away from a Publix. Without a doubt, minorities in Florida are getting the short end when it comes to vaccination. And that's the story they should have focused on because the numbers tell that story. The campaign contribution angle went nowhere, explaining why the segment came off as decidedly not ready for prime time. 60 Minutes is an icon in the news

business, but there was an important story to tell here and they missed it. I say try again.



Dan Daley, member, Florida House of Representatives

Last week: This past week, all four of my local bills regarding the water district's election processes within Broward County passed unanimously through the Public Integrity & Elections Committee. These bills revise the election method for the board members from election by landowners on a one-acre/one-vote basis to a one-person/one-vote basis. These bills must be approved by voters in a referendum to be held during the 2022 general election. By moving to popular elections, we are increasing the accountability and transparency of these districts.



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

Last week: Last week was National Public Health Week. This year's theme focused on "Building Bridges to Better Health." The daily themes that were recognized included: Rebuilding, Advancing Racial Equity, Strengthening Community, Galvanizing Climate Justice, Building COVID-19 Resilience, Uplifting Mental Health & Wellness and Elevating the Essential and Health Workforce. All of these public health topics are essential to our future success in working together to become the healthiest nation. As seen in the COVID-19 pandemic, we have a light at the end of the tunnel, as we all work together to get vaccinated and continue practicing healthy habits.

Looking ahead: The Let's Wing It, South Florida March Madness competition began with 32 restaurants selected by Sun Sentinel food experts and the winner of the best chicken wings was awarded to Wings Plus. The final four included Wings Plus, Bru's Room, Flanigan's and Wings N' Things. At the Oakland Park Wings Plus location, general manager Chelsea Walsh says all the customers are extremely loyal and have been coming to the restaurant for decades! All sauces are homemade by the cooks and a fan favorite are the medium wings in Wens Sauce that is a combination of BBQ teriyaki garlic and parmesan.



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

Last week: At a critical time, when the fate of mankind's healthy future depends upon a productive, protective effort to defeat the COVID pandemic, it's disgusting to learn that a relationship between a biotech firm and the government agency supposed to supervise it is one of collusion. The New York Times has reported that the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority has overlooked serious failures at Emergent Biosolutions, a Baltimore firm producing 150 million vaccine doses. But not a single dose has been approved because of hidden faulty contamination. They're literally destroying what might have been lifesaving relief for millions of Americans.

Looking ahead: The alarming frequency of mass shootings has quite understandably focused attention on the Second Amendment in the Bill of Rights. The wording is quite specific in identifying "a well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State" but a bit vague on "the right of the people to keep and bear arms." What types of firearms and for what reasons? It's a precious right, but doubtful the forefathers would condone the

sale of assault weapons. Interestingly, only three countries in the world have a constitutional right to own guns: the US, Mexico and Guatemala.



Lamar Fisher, member, Broward County Commission

Last week: This week, I had the honor of attending the renaming ceremony for the Kristin Jacobs Natural Area, previously known as the Hillsboro Pineland Natural Area, to honor the memory and service of former Broward County Commissioner and Florida state Rep. Kristin Jacobs. She was well recognized for her passion and advocacy in the protection, restoration and enhancement of the natural environment. Personally, she was a friend who I admired for her passion, persistence and performance. As we remembered my great friend Kristin, I also thanked her family for allowing us to share in her greatness with our community.

Looking ahead: The pandemic has brought a lot of grief to many families in Broward County, and it is important that these families have as much support as possible during this tremendous hardship. In response to the many lives lost, the Federal Emergency Management Agency announced the launch of a Funeral Assistance Program that will begin to accept applications on Monday April 12. The program will assist eligible families with COVID-19 related funeral expenses incurred after January 20, 2020. For more information, please visit fema.gov/disasters/coronavirus/economic/funeral-assistance.



Beam Furr, member, Broward County Commission

Last week: Broward County Animal Care has launched a new dashboard that will provide up-to-date, interactive data and information on the animals at our shelter. This includes important metrics like live release rate, as well as interactive maps of where animals were found and what areas are seeing adoptions. This new dashboard is coupled with the launch of our Virtual Shelter, which allows residents to learn everything there is about each of the animals in our care, such as height, weight, behavior, age and much more. These innovative steps will lead to more adoptions for Broward’s animals in need of permanent homes.

Looking ahead: In a time of unprecedented challenges for our children and students, Broward County Libraries has teamed up with Broward County Public Schools to provide access to more resources than ever before. This groundbreaking collaboration between libraries and schools has given 80,000 students a library card, with access to a bevy of great books, games and other resources to help foster a love of reading. They have also made databases and resources for research and college applications available to all high school students. This is a wonderful collaboration and opportunity for our students – go to browardlibrary.beanstack.com to learn more!



Anna Fusco, president, Broward Teachers Union

Looking ahead: Alaina, Nicole, Jack, Taylor, too many others have left me here to think and ask, “Why them?” Many people struggle with loss. So many friends and family have been at our tables and in our arms, but now they live only in our memories to remain in our hearts. We are changed by their death in ways we cannot explain and often at a loss for words. Hug when you can. Send those birthday cards. End that phone call with “I love you.” Life is

precious and we need to take time to appreciate what we have today and every day.



Michael Gottlieb, member, Florida House of Representatives

Last week: The partisanship that has divided our country and poisoned many relationships came back this week. We heard one memorial denouncing socialism. As an opinion of the state government, this bill stifles differing thought processes and discourages freedom of association. The second memorial forces the state to stand against any Federal law that might affect the Second Amendment, without even knowing the impact or import of the legislation. These bills are designed to create a wedge, painting legislators into a corner, for or against an ideology or future rights. We have more important tasks, such as helping school children, fighting climate change, funding affordable housing or building back our economy. Why are we passing memorials and not laws, if we are truly elected to serve the people and not special interests?

Looking ahead: On the House floor we took up a much-needed measure, House Bill 15, which imposes a sales tax on out-of-state businesses operating in Florida. This bill levels the playing field for local business by deleting the competitive edge out-of-state corps have had for years. But the bill morphed and diverted the new tax dollars from general revenue into unemployment. Arguably, we all benefit when local business benefits, but when the money does not go into general revenue and instead goes into our unemployment system, this diversion does not benefit the state by giving us the bang for our spending buck.

Dan Gropper, dean, College of Business, Florida Atlantic University

Last week: Economic indicators show that as Florida's economy has bounced back strongly, the entire American economy is poised to grow rapidly, even if nothing more is done now than remove the lockdown restrictions put in place last year in response to the coronavirus. The entrepreneurial spirit that exists among Americans of all races and creeds will carry this country forward. We are enjoying the great accomplishments of vaccine development and production under the prior administration and distribution under this one; let's share the credit, get immunized, and get back to school and back to work as soon as possible.

Looking ahead: Inflationary pressures are building in the U.S. economy. We have already seen asset price inflation in many areas, and now costs on building supplies and some consumer goods are rising. With the Fed committed to continuing monetary stimulus and the economy reopening across more states, expect our current low inflation rates to heat up over the coming year.

Marlon A. Hill, of counsel, Weiss Serota Helfman Cole & Bierman, P.L.

Last week: The loss of venerable Congressman Alcee Hastings to pancreatic cancer is likely to shake the political ground of South Florida, tipping off a tsunami of aspirants seeking to fill the void of his leadership. Prior to these dominoes falling, however, we must honor his vociferous advocacy on civil rights and social justice in our state, nation and, indeed, across our hemisphere and the world. He was a courageous and dedicated public servant who never withheld his opinions for the sake of protocol or fragile political egos. As a legendary fraternity member of Kappa Alpha Phi, Inc., he exhibited achievement and excellence in his chosen endeavor of serving the citizens of South Florida.

Debbi Hixon, member, Broward County School Board

Last week: April is World Autism Month (#LightUpWithKindness). It is so important as a parent or caregiver to learn the early signs of autism and become familiar with the typical developmental milestones that your child should be reaching. If you have concerns about your child's development, you should contact your healthcare provider to have your child evaluated. An early diagnosis of autism and early interventions can help improve learning, communication and social skills in children with autism spectrum disorders. Visit autismspeaks.org for more information. Support those with ASD; show kindness to help create a world where everyone can reach their full potential.



Marty Kiar, property appraiser, Broward County

Last week: Our community lost a remarkable public servant with the passing of Alcee Hastings. After serving as a civil rights attorney, Alcee became Florida's first African American federal judge before being elected as a congressman representing both Broward and Palm Beach counties. Congressman Hastings was a champion for affordable healthcare, racial justice, women's rights, LGBT rights, the country of Israel and so much more. He was a personal inspiration to me and one of the most dynamic, passionate and captivating speakers I have known. He made a tremendous positive difference for our country, state and local community.



Tracey Labgold, chairperson, Anti-Defamation League Florida

Last week: Last week we observed Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Memorial Day, to reflect not only on the indescribable atrocities committed in years past, but also so that we can be reminded of the need to interrupt hate today. We know the deadly consequences when hate is left unchecked. Florida has a mandate to include Holocaust education in public schools – the standards should ultimately provide opportunities to explore this history and apply lessons to today’s society. Students should learn to firmly and frequently take action against bigotry and elevate our shared values of equality and diversity.



Chip LaMarca, member, Florida House of Representatives

Last week: April 6 was recognized as National Student Athlete Day in the Florida House of Representatives. On this day of recognition, we honored and recognized athletes that excel not for their actions on the field, but for their actions in their classrooms and their communities. I was honored to have sponsored House Resolution 8035, National Student Athlete Day on the House Floor earlier this week. I will continue to be a strong advocate for student athletes throughout Florida.

Looking ahead: I am happy to announce that all adults are now eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine! Those 18 years and older can now receive any of the three vaccines offered, Moderna, Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson. The vaccines are offered at myvaccine.fl.gov, Publix, CVS, Walgreens and Walmart. However, with parental permission, those 16 and 17 years old are eligible only for the Pfizer vaccine. They are not approved for the Moderna and the

Johnson & Johnson vaccine yet. For those who are 16 or 17, Pfizer is offered at the state-run vaccination locations in Florida.



Tim Lonergan, former mayor, Oakland Park

Last week: Broward County took a bold and important step forward in 2018 when voters approved a one-cent sales tax increase to fund transportation improvement projects. The 30-year plan is a smart investment designed to fix existing transportation problems throughout the county while implementing new transportation solutions for the future. This week brought news of President Biden's new infrastructure bill, which is exactly what is needed to improve the national infrastructure by funding roads, bridges, the electrical grid, water pipes and more. Investing in our nation's infrastructure and future is long overdue and critically necessary.

Looking ahead: April is Earth Month: Let's celebrate! Together, we can make our planet cleaner and healthier. Earth Day, April 22, was first held in 1970 to demonstrate support for environmental protection. Positive progress was made this year when the Biden administration called for a global climate summit to be held on Earth Day and with the rejoining of the Paris Climate Accord. Now is the time to research the volunteer opportunities your local municipality has planned for Earth Day and to get involved. Educational information is also available at www.earthday.org.

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

Last week: Last week, I read in dismay the article regarding two South Florida seniors victimized by scammers targeting seniors. The elderly are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation due to risk factors associated with aging,

such as social isolation and mental and physical impairments. According to the Department of Justice, approximately 1 in 10 seniors are abused each year in the United States. If you suspect an elder is being taken advantage of and want to learn about the sign of elder abuse, please check out the Area Agency on Aging website, adrcbroward.org/report-elder-abuse. To Report Elder Abuse, call 1-800-96-ABUSE (1-800-962-2873).

Looking ahead: Florida was recently identified as one of five states with an increase in COVID-19 infections. According to CDC data, less than 20% of all Broward residents have been vaccinated, and the number of cases has increased slightly. Following COVID-19 safety guidelines such as wearing a mask, safe distancing and getting vaccinated is essential in protecting yourself and others. For seniors, it is critical as individuals over the age of 65 represent more than 80% of all COVID-related deaths. If you have not yet received your vaccine and would like assistance, please call the Area Agency on Aging at 954-745-9567.

Nancy Metayer, city commissioner, Coral Springs

Last week: The environmental disaster at Piney Point presents a wide array of environmental, economic and public health concerns. Piney Point, a former phosphate plant, experienced a breach, the second of its kind this decade, despite previous warnings by engineers and environmental activists alike. Hoping to avoid a catastrophic flood, state leaders approved an emergency discharge, pushing wastewater into surrounding areas, endangering our environment and many lives. Evacuated residents have now returned to their homes and millions of gallons of wastewater containing elevated levels of phosphorus and nitrogen, which can feed the algae that causes red tide, may have a longer-lasting impact. Only time will tell how severe the consequences will be.

Looking ahead: Stronger environmental standards are needed in Florida. I applaud Gov. DeSantis, House Speaker Sprowls, President Simpson and

Senate Democrats for the steps they have taken, but the urgency of the moment calls for more-profound action. Piney Point should serve as a learning moment to compel lawmakers throughout the state to prioritize the protection of the environment for the betterment of all residents. Florida admires its incomparable natural beauty yet continues to neglect it. Our environmental laws are based on the concept of cooperative federalism, which includes a primary role for states to implement standards grounded in legislative accountability, yielding positive outcomes without raising costs, hurting the economy or killing jobs.



Peter Moore, president, Chen Moore and Associates

Last week: I was very disappointed in the House State Affairs Committee this past week. In a 12-8 vote, they moved HB 1131 through the committee. The sole purpose of the bill is to remove the requirements for the State University System to follow FS 287.055 – the Consultant’s Competitive Negotiation Act. This state law requires public agencies to hire architects and engineers on qualifications first and price second. Do you want your high-rise building or bridge designed by the lowest bidder? This is required for federal funding and is overall bad policy – why start the slippery slope?

Looking ahead: Next week, we’ll continue to see the state House and Senate get together on budget appropriations. With water in the forefront of everyone’s policy, right now only about 12 of the hundreds of budget requests are in the draft funding list in both chambers. While this isn’t a death sentence for these projects, it is a step in the wrong direction. The appropriation requests were already reduced with the impacts from COVID unknown at the end of 2020. The time for our Legislature to get together and make water a priority is now.



Frank Ortis, mayor, Pembroke Pines

Last week: Water safety bills, passed in the House and Senate, really caught my eye. The bills would provide K-12 students and parents water safety education and allow public and private schools to confirm with parents whether their child has had swimming lessons, providing options for low- to no-cost lessons if not. Not a swimming mandate, this is a great first step to opening the door for a future statewide water safety program. Surrounded by water, intracoastal waterways and pools throughout, it's no wonder Florida has the highest drowning rate among children in the nation. Water safety should be a priority.

Looking ahead: Tax stress and anxiety may not take hold this week if you take advantage of the IRS and Treasury Department's postponement of the April 15 tax-filing deadline to May 17. To make sure you're following these changes properly, it's best to check with the IRS website. This extra month to file taxes is reportedly happening to help taxpayers navigate pandemic circumstances, but it's also to help the IRS address the backlog of the previous years' returns. For whatever the reason, the certainty of taxes remains; it's just delayed a bit. We need to remember it's still on the to-do list.



Tina Polsky, member, Florida Senate

Last week: Here's an update on Senate Bill 86 – the controversial Bright Futures bill that has been making its way through the Florida Senate. A very watered-down version has officially passed the Senate floor, and because of

everyone's persistent advocacy, it no longer includes language that would prevent certain majors from receiving financial aid. However, it does, unfortunately, leave the funding up to the budget each year. Bright Futures has been rightfully earned by Florida's top students, and the promise of a scholarship should be guaranteed. I will continue to fight to the end to keep Bright Futures as it was promised.

Looking ahead: This past week, the state of Florida barely missed being a part of a disastrous environmental catastrophe with the breach at Piney Point. We talk about Florida being the Sunshine State, where our pristine beaches marshes and springs bring millions of tourists to bask in its beauty. However, what happened last week is unacceptable. A similar leak occurred in 2011, and a solution was never fulfilled then. Corporations should not be able to declare bankruptcy and leave dangerous messes like these behind. We need more comprehensive regulation and accountability from stakeholders to protect our environment.

Harold Pryor, state attorney, 17th Judicial Circuit, Broward County

Last week: Congressman Alcee Hastings was the collective community's patriarch, governing with strength, care, fortification and an abundance of life stories. No one could tell a story or build up to the moral of a story like Congressman Hastings — his punchlines were epic. Our community mentor, hero, voice for the voiceless and civil rights giant is now gone. He opened the doors and created so many possibilities for me and so many others in the Black community. Alcee's relentless perseverance is an inspiration to the next generation. We owe him a debt to continue to help others reach those heights.



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

Last week: Oceanexplorer arrived in South Florida this week. The superyacht/research vessel has evolved yachting, bringing the unexplored mysteries of the ocean to the world. Marine institutions globally can conduct groundbreaking research using the state-of-the-art equipment on board, including four laboratories, a helicopter, two deep-dive Triton submarines and a fleet of drones. The cost for access: Share your research with the world. The onboard media studio developed in partnership with filmmaker James Cameron can deliver scientific news at the exact moment of discovery. Oceanx joins the Marine Research Hub and Ocean Exchange, making Florida the center of marine research and the blue economy.



Larry Rein, CEO and President, ChildNet

Last week: The recently approved coronavirus relief package includes \$123 billion targeting schools nationwide. Of these funds, 20% must address pandemic-related learning loss. This is necessary and intelligent. Use of the remaining discretionary 80% needs to be equally necessary and intelligent. The mandatory 20% should eliminate gaps created by the move to distance learning, but the balance should go toward eliminating gaps that have existed historically for many students and their families. These funds must ensure that everyone benefits equally, and fully, from our public education systems – that all children are equally well-prepared to become effective adults.



Mike Ryan, mayor, Sunrise

Last week: American justice demands those responsible for deaths and injuries be held accountable. Yet, protecting bad nursing homes, bad agriculture employers and big businesses who failed to act reasonably, Florida's legislature passed a new immunity law denying justice for families who lost loved ones or those still living with the long-term consequences due to COVID-19. The Legislature claimed a flood of litigation, but 95% of COVID cases are business disputes, insurance litigation, evictions, consumer refund cases and the like. Using a cure searching for a disease, Florida is denying justice to families from businesses proven to have failed to act reasonably.

Looking ahead: Businesses catering to customers who want vaccinated-only events or experiences are now prohibited from requiring proof of vaccine under the governor's executive order. Some businesses may see this as an illegal or unconstitutional encroachment on their right to make decisions for the safety and protection of their staff, customers and their families. Vaccine-only cruises or restaurant, theater, arena experiences may be sought by customers. Yet businesses requiring proof of vaccination could be denied licensure and permits by the state agencies and will be ineligible for state grants or contracts; they could also be sued. Businesses are caught in the middle.

Daphnee Sainvil, government and external affairs manager, Fort Lauderdale

Last week: Unfortunately, this week, I and the South Florida community lost an icon in politics. Congressman Alcee Hastings was not only a fearless advocate for his district, he was an advocate for all those he came into contact with. I remember meeting him, and I could feel his genuine energy of integrity, passion for change, honesty and mentorship. He bravely fought stage four pancreatic cancer, and while many will write that he lost the battle, I believe he won the war. The legacy he leaves behind spans generations; we

cannot let his fight for equity for lower- and middle-income families die with him. We must stay strong, vigilant, knowledgeable and kind. Congressman Hastings taught me to keep your head up and have the courage and passion to fight for what you believe in, no matter who tries to tear you down. My deepest condolences go out to his family, staff and close friends. May you find strength in the memories to get past these dark days. One last time, I can say thank you for being a role model and public servant our future generations will emulate.



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

Last week: Got the shot! I'm thankful for scientists who have given us three effective vaccines. For all the frontline workers who have fought COVID from the start. For all the folks working to get shots in arms and vaccinations into communities. For the tireless reporters who are the reason I even knew about the vaccination site I went to. There has been so much loss in these 13 months, and it's going to take us a while to recover. Some never will. But here we are, the light at the end of the tunnel. Please do your part – get vaccinated.



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

Last week: The Orange Bowl Florida High School Basketball Showcase will be held on Saturday, April 10 at the David Posnack JCC in Davie. This free event for high school seniors and juniors welcomes educational institutions in Division II, III, NAIA and junior colleges from across the country; hosts games, tests and drills to best display each player's various skills; and, provides opportunities for the participating players and universities to discuss scholarships and financial aid. The Orange Bowl Committee proudly hosts this opportunity for student-athletes to use their basketball and academic skills to attend college and ultimately earn a degree.

Looking ahead: The International Monetary Fund predicts President Biden's \$1.9 trillion stimulus package will boost the U.S. economy and drive faster global growth this year, while warning that many countries continue to suffer and are at risk of being left behind. The IMF also predicts the U.S. economy will surpass its pre-pandemic size as growth reaches 6.4% this year, and the rebound will help the global economy expand 6% in 2021, which estimates are in line with Wall Street's expectations. The IMF stated the unprecedented policy response to the pandemic means the recession will likely leave smaller scars than the 2008 global financial crisis.



Barbara Sharief, member, Broward County Commission

Looking ahead: Equal pay for equal work still isn't a reality for many women in the workforce today. And with COVID-19 still affecting all of us, there remains a disparity in how men and women are paid when all comparable factors are controlled, meaning that women are still being paid less than men due to no attributable reason other than gender even when

doing the exact same job, are equally qualified and sometimes better qualified. To achieve equal pay, we must strengthen the equal pay laws so that pay discrimination stops and women are finally respected and paid accordingly.



Tom Shea, chairman & founder, Right Management

Looking ahead: With pandemic restrictions being lifted, businesses reopening and socialization increasing, there is a real shortage of staff and supplies, and a new rise in COVID cases. Employment in leisure and hospitality is down by 3.1 million workers nationally since February 2020. In Florida, health care workers have been lured away by higher pay. Job ads remain unanswered due to career changes or home-schooling issues. Transportation has truck driver shortages due to age and limited training available. Stores and factories are seeing slowing supply. It's time for some creative and safe innovations encouraged and funded by our public and corporate leaders.



Howard Simon, retired executive director, ACLU of Florida

Last week: The 60 Minutes examination of Gov. DeSantis' rollout of COVID-19 vaccinations mistakenly focused on his selection of Publix supermarkets and the contributions the company made to Friends of Ron DeSantis, his re-election campaign organization. But this company and its owners would have made the contributions to support DeSantis regardless. Whether there is "vaccine favoritism" in the governor's "Seniors First" program depends on the criteria used to select which seniors came first. That he sent vaccines and located pop-up sites early on to wealthy gated communities in the Keys and Manatee County where DeSantis donors resided is hard to deny.

Looking ahead: The Florida legislature seems poised to expand the so-called "Right to Farm" law to bar what sponsors label "nuisance lawsuits" brought against farming and agribusinesses. Blocking access to the courts for these lawsuits will bar challenges to agricultural practices that fill the air with black ash and smoke from sugarcane burning or that pollute the waterways with fertilizer run-off. These are lawsuits that challenge practices threatening the long-term health of nearby residents. In America, the courts have been the last resort for individuals seeking to protect health and receive compensation for injuries. Soon, this will be less so in Florida.



Kelly Skidmore, member, Florida House of Representatives

Last week: As we enter the second half of the legislative session, Floridians still face hardships such as unemployment and challenges meeting daily needs. The good news is that the American Rescue Plan signed by President Biden is a helping hand to our state government. With these funds, the Legislature has prioritized providing first responders a \$1,000 direct payment,

modernizing the reemployment assistance system, and funding economic development initiatives such as infrastructure and workforce development projects. These funds come at an appropriate time, as this year's state budget process has begun in earnest this week.



Eleanor Sobel, former member, Florida Senate

Last week: The House recently passed the Senate's civics education bill, which would require civics education for high schoolers. The civics program allows students to further their studies with community service and a civic literacy project. Schools that adopt the program will be designated "freedom schools," a new term separate from the freedom schools of the 1960s that educated African Americans in the South. Gov. DeSantis has proposed \$16.5 million to increase civics education in schools and is expected to sign the bill. However, DeSantis objects to civics education that includes critical race theory and will withhold funding based on this criterion.

Looking ahead: Florida lawmakers voted to spend millions to prevent a half billion gallons of wastewater at the Piney Point processing plant from leaking into Tampa Bay. Previous dumping of the wastewater has damaged surrounding waterways by releasing the equivalent of 60,000 bags of fertilizer and causing algae blooms. After a drone identified a breach in the wall of the reservoir, Gov. DeSantis declared a state of emergency and ordered 300 homes to evacuate. Piney Point has been a catastrophe waiting to happen, but public officials have refused to close the site. Shut Piney Point down before further environmental catastrophes occur.



Gregory Stuart, executive director, Broward Metropolitan Planning Organization

Last week: Last week, the Biden administration unveiled its \$2 trillion infrastructure plan, which seeks to improve the interconnectedness of the entire transportation system. Our traditional transportation (roads, bridges and ports) has always been included in infrastructure packages. This new plan also includes modern solutions to modern problems: broadband to connect people and businesses, funding to combat climate change and new programs to increase affordable housing stock. When the traditional and the new are combined, we will have created a modern transportation system that can advance us into the 21st century.



Gregory Tony, Broward Sheriff

Last week: This week, Broward County and the United States lost a gigantic community pillar and trailblazer in Congressman Alcee Hastings. His lifetime of public service was defined by his tenacity, his focus on moving ahead with purpose, forging a clear path of progress so that others could follow. He broke racial barriers as a judge and a congressman, spending his life championing the rights of the underrepresented. I was fortunate to meet with Congressman Hastings several times as sheriff. He was a mentor and beacon of truth on so many important issues. He will be greatly missed.

Dean Trantalis, mayor, Fort Lauderdale

Last week: I was deeply saddened to learn of the passing of U.S. Rep. Alcee Hastings on April 6. As Florida's senior member of Congress, Hastings fought fiercely for the interests of his constituents and for the natural environment of South Florida. As a civil rights leader, he worked tirelessly to ensure equality and racial justice in our community. Personally, I greatly appreciated his work on behalf of LGBTQ+ and HIV-health related causes. He fought with conviction to the very end. He will be greatly missed but never forgotten.

Looking ahead: Inter Miami CF is kicking off the 2021 Major League Soccer season in partnership with AutoNation to promote the year-round initiative of breast cancer awareness. Starting in April, Inter Miami Stadium will be named DRV PNK Stadium in a purpose-driven collaboration between the futbol team and AutoNation to raise continuous awareness surrounding breast cancer. Since 2015, AutoNation has raised more than \$25 million for cancer research through its Drive Pink campaign. And with Inter Miami's team colors already being black and pink, it's powerful to know that the pink now stands for the mission of defeating breast cancer.



Michael Udine, vice mayor, Broward County

Last week: Broward County's Port Everglades wears many hats. This week, I had the honor to visit with the crew of the United States Coast Guard Cutter Forward as they made a stop here in Fort Lauderdale to offload six tons of contraband from their most recent mission. The crew spends weeks to months at a time offshore protecting our coastlines and ensuring that contraband does not enter the country. It was great to see the coordination between our port, law enforcement and the Coast Guard. I thank them for their incredible service and wish them safe travels back to their home port.

Looking ahead: The Piney Point Reservoir breach is an environmental tragedy for the state of Florida. Outside of Tampa, residents were ordered to evacuate homes, and toxic water is at risk for leaking into nearby waterways. An uncontrolled flow could lead to damaged habitats, dead sea life, and affect the tourism industry. Broward County continuously monitors our waters and remains in contact with state agencies about any potential impacts. We cannot compromise when it comes to protecting our residents and environment from potential catastrophes.



Randall Vitale, president, Hoffman's Chocolates

Looking ahead: The NFL draft is quickly approaching, and the Miami Dolphins are well positioned to make some big splashes for the upcoming season. Between free agent signings and trades in the draft, the Dolphins are ready to further improve from last year's 10-6 season. As a lifelong Dolfan, I can confidently say that I have not been as excited about an upcoming season for the Dolphins in a long, long time. General manager Chris Grier and head coach Brian Flores deserve a lot of credit for the team they are building – and how they built it. The future looks bright!



Robert Weinroth, member, Palm Beach County Commission

Last week: Living up to its reputation as the most dangerous 60 days in Florida, this year's legislative session has seen a flurry of bills that continue the steady erosion of cities' and counties' home rule authority. One bill, Senate

Bill 268 (and its House companion, HB 735), would prevent local governments from regulating many aspects of businesses operating within residences. The most precious powers a local government in Florida has are its home rule powers. These bills impede the ability of leaders to enact ordinances and codes, fundamental to local government.

Looking ahead: Producing approximately 2 million hatchlings annually, Palm Beach County beaches are home to more sea turtle nests per mile than anywhere else in the United States. Approximately one in every 1,000 hatchlings survives, with fatalities higher on popular beaches, where nest disruption is more prevalent. It is imperative for beachgoers to keep our shores clear of trash and other potential obstacles. When leaving the beach, remove recreational beach equipment, fill in holes, clean up trash, dismantle sandcastles and turn off artificial lighting to offer the hatchlings a fighting chance for survival as they make their pilgrimage to the opens waters.



Matt Willhite, member, Florida House of Representatives

Last week: Florida lost a giant of a public servant. Last week, U.S. Rep. Alcee Hastings, a civil rights activist and the longest-serving member of Florida's congressional delegation, lost his battle with cancer. He was 84 years old. Hastings was appointed to the Florida federal bench by President Jimmy Carter in 1979 and became the state's first African American federal judge. His career is defined by his strong advocacy for the state of Florida and the nation as a whole, being an outspoken champion for the rights of minorities, women, the elderly, children and immigrants. My thoughts are with his family. May he Rest in Power.

Looking ahead: With the House giving its initial approval of its \$97 billion spending plan, and the Senate passing its \$95 billion plan, the table is set for budget deliberations in the Legislature. Both budgets were based on the initial prediction that there would be a budget shortfall of \$5.4 billion for this current year and the coming fiscal year because of the COVID-19 pandemic. As we continue to debate and negotiate the budget for the upcoming fiscal year, I'll advocate for working families that the pandemic has hit the hardest by strengthening our unemployment system and providing more resources toward building our infrastructure.



Ghenete "G" Wright Muir, attorney, LGBTQ advocate

Last week: Our community is mourning the loss of a lifelong advocate and fearless leader, U.S. Rep. Alcee Hastings. While he was best known as a congressman, he is also a founding member of the T.J. Reddick Bar Association — the Black Bar Association of Broward County. He remained connected to us over the years, attending events and sharing his experiences with segregation and other forms of discrimination. I was inspired by his accounts of his time as a young civil rights attorney. Although he achieved political success, Hastings remained accessible, often engaging us and pushing us to pursue our endeavors.



Thomas Wenski, archbishop, Archdiocese of Miami

Last week: There is a crisis on the Southern border – with thousands of unaccompanied minors ill-housed and poorly supervised in crowded

makeshift shelters along the border. As Democratic Congresswoman, Frederica Wilson has said: it is time to reactive the unaccompanied minors shelter at Homestead Air Force based operated by two former administrations, first Obama's, then Trump's. This 3,200-bed facility would go a long way to easing the situation along the border. But since some politicians (including now VP Harris) once opposed the shelter when run by the Trump administration, they are reluctant to support its reopening. Kids should come before politics.

Looking ahead: The proposed Equality Act (H.R. 5 / S. 393) is a bill in Congress that President Biden and Dems in Congress claim is necessary to protect people who self-identify as LGBT from discrimination. While all people should be treated with respect, sensitivity, and compassion, this bill would trample conscience rights doing more harm than good. The bill would require Americans of all faiths to assent to government views on such things as abortion, same-sex marriage and transgender ideology – or risk adverse action by the federal government. This is a fundamental threat to the Religious Liberty promised by the First Amendment.