

Continued page 5

CEP CHAMBER NEWS
MATT MCCORMICK, IOM, CCE



The signs have been out, the mailboxes have been full and another primary election is officially behind us. Now, attention turns to November.

At the CEP, our interest in election season is centered on public policy and its impact on the business community. Decisions made in Tallahassee and here at home can affect businesses, employees, property owners and communities in ways both large and small. Part of our role is helping Marion County's business community stay informed about those issues and better understand what they could mean locally.

And this November, there is more to watch than the names on the ballot.

Florida voters will consider three proposed amendments to our state constitution, each bringing a different conversation with potential implications for businesses and communities across the state.

One deals with Florida's Budget Stabilization Fund, commonly known as the state's "rainy day fund," and how much the state can set aside to prepare for economic downturns, hurricanes and other unexpected needs.

Another hits especially close to home here in Marion County. Voters will consider a proposed property tax exemption for certain tangible personal property used in agriculture and agritourism. With agriculture and the equine industry playing such a significant role in Marion County's economy and identity, this is an issue with clear local relevance.

The third proposed amendment brings property taxes into the conversation more broadly. Changes to property tax policy can have implications for homeowners, businesses and local governments, making it an issue that touches many parts of a community. As with any proposed constitutional amendment, understanding both the immediate and longer-term impacts is an important part of the conversation.

That is where statewide issues become local ones.

Much of the CEP's work involves issues that intersect with public policy — from workforce and infrastructure to economic development and the overall business climate. We regularly work with businesses, local governments and community partners, and we know these issues rarely have simple

Continued page 5

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TODD BELKNAP

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE
VETERANS HELPING VETERANS USA



Join us for the 25th anniversary 9/11 Remembrance Ceremony on Saturday, September 5, 2026 at 10:30 am. Venue is Highland Memorial Park, 1515 NE 3rd Street, Ocala 34470. The public

is encouraged to arrive by 9:30 am to witness hundreds of motorcycles majestically escorting Old Glory into the Park.

This annual ceremony is purposely placed on the weekend prior to September

11 to maximize community awareness and attendance. The alternative is to hold this sacred event during the week at a time when most of the community is working or attending school. Explore www.patriotday.info for all event info!

The month of September is steeped in military history, ranging from the bloodiest single day in U. S. history (Civil War/Antietam 9/17/1862) to the beginning of WWII (Germany invades Poland 9/1/1939). 6 years and 1 day later, Japan formally and unconditionally surrendered to Allied Forces aboard the USS Missouri (9/2/1945).

The most glaring single day event in our modern history took place right here on our home turf and it murdered 2,977 Americans. Come join us on Saturday, September 5 to remember and honor. Bring the family.

See you next month.

OFRS Lanmark Contract

Ocala Fire Rescue Secures Landmark Contract Positioning Them Among Top Recruiters in North Central Florida

(OCALA, FL.) Aug. 18, 2026 – Ocala Fire Rescue (OFR) has taken an emphatic step forward with the ratification of a **new collective bargaining agreement** at the city council meeting on August 18. The agreement sets the stage for enhancing recruitment and retention of high-quality personnel.

Beginning October 1, 2026, the department will implement competitive starting pay rates that will position OFR as a top choice for firefighters in North Central Florida. **Firefighter/Paramedics will start at \$77,890.67, and Firefighter/EMTs at**

\$66,270.27 - competitive compensation aimed at attracting the finest talent in the field.

The agreement also includes a groundbreaking **transition to a D-shift schedule, evolving to a 24 hours on, 72 hours off work model by September 30, 2029**. This change demonstrates OFR's unwavering commitment to the health and well-being of our firefighters and to preventing the physical exhaustion and stress imposed by demanding professions like ours.

Additional contractual highlights include an annual 3% COLA for the duration of the bargaining agreement, 88 paid holiday hours, and vacation buyback availability.

"We are eager to begin recruitment of the next generation of public servants that will guard our community," said Fire Chief Clint Welborn. "Investing in our present and emerging workforce reinforces our commitment to public safety, ensuring both those receiving services and those providing them are well-supported."

As Ocala Fire Rescue continues to adapt to the community's evolving needs, this ratified agreement marks a crucial step in building a resilient, well-compensated team dedicated to excellence in fire service.

For more information about Ocala Fire Rescue's upcoming recruitment opportunities, please visit www.ocalafl.gov/employment.

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Tom Loury *Tom Loury Long time member of CEP/Ocala Chamber of Commerce, Past President of the Ocala Business Leaders and current member, Co-Founder and past President of Select Business Associates, Past President of the Lady Lake Chamber and current member. If you want to make contact with the newspaper / Tom Loury email TLoury@att.net*

PUBLISHER'S NOTES



By TomL

Here we go again... To you who fought the gas line? They are back! Dunnellon people are telling me they got a letter. The gas line agents want us to give them permission...I give them permission for nothing! They want permission to mow NO! They want permission to survey NO! They have no business on my land! They decided that we believed their trickerey and now they want to convince us again that they are good guys. I will never believe anything they say. The Marion County Commissioners said they would never approve it, THEY DID so what does that make them? They Dunnellon city council said they would not let them go through our district THEY DID what does that make them! They said they would like to put something long the gas line right

away. IT IS NOT A RIGHT AWAY. It is a ONE time lease for one gas line. They said they want to put something in 2029 don't believe it they it's a trick. They will be going through two ten acre pieces and a 5 acre piece, on my sister in law and ten acres on our family farm. That depreciates the land and if the gas line blows up, what happens to the people that live along side of it?

Next I want to talk about Robert Balfour (Military)

When I met him he was a great story teller and a great writer. He lived everything he wrote a great warrior. He would write every month about the military episodes he was involved in, all while playing golf every day in the Villages. He had a love for golf and was good at it! We work together for several years and one day he called and said I need a favor? I said name it! He was diagnosed with cancer and was going to die, At best he had a year maybe, I was shocked. He went on to say he wanted to send more than one letter/column per month and would like me

to run his letters and columns after he was gone, I agreed, I really was honored that he would ask me to do that. He last ten months then I saw his obit . in the daily Sun and I ran his Obit. He had a road in the villages named after him.

I ran his work for two years, even then I would repeat something he wrote once in a while. I miss his work and him. I'm sure he is Teeing off somewhere up there! Bless him!

NEXT Let's talk about Ken Tipper

I was sent some work from a ex-military man that was in the Royal Navy. He was writing a column for me. His name was Ken Tipper, he liked to hang around the Veteran Park with the other veteran. He survived the

sinking of the trial-class destroyer HMS Punjabl after colliding with the HMS King George V in 1942. I remember him telling me that they huddle together in the dark of night in the water after sinking. There were hundreds of them and every once in while you would hear a scream and knew a shark was taking one of them. They were rescued by an American ship. He would finish serving intercepting wireless transmissions.

He was a great writer and we worked together several years. One day he said he did not want to do a monthly column any more but would send soething when he got inspired and he did. He is gone now. He is missed!

Continued page 5

Newspaper Deadlines

Editorial & Ad Copy for October

Seniors Voice & Ocala DownTown

Noon, September 25th

Lady Lake Magazine & Village Spectator

12am, September 30th

Seniors Voice of Ocala/Ocala Downtown Products of TomL Publishing, LLC

P.O Box 1698, Dunnellon FL 34430

Publisher: Tom Loury

Phone: 352-804-1223 | Fax: 352-489-7208

Email: tloury@att.net

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Orchestra

Continued from page 1

by calling the box office at 352-351-1606 or by visiting in person during operating hours, Tuesday through Friday, 9 AM to 1 PM. Season subscribers can save as much as 42% over single tickets, and they also enjoy priority seating, free ticket exchanges, and other exclusive perks.

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Webber Suit

Continued from page 1

proposed for the Sports Complex, to low-density residential.

The complaint states: The land development approvals are legally invalid and were unlawfully approved for numerous reasons:

Golden Ocala violated a 2016 agreement with Plaintiff (Charlotte Weber) in which Golden Ocala agreed to limit the use the same property to large-lot residential Equestrian Estates;

So Weber agreed to allow the land use next to at the request of Golden Ocala and the land use where Marion County had to rule. So now they are not putting in large lot equestrian lot Estates but Weber charges a Sports complex. So Weber is suing Marion County, Golden Hills and WEC! What a confusing mess. If Marion County allow for the land use change they are guilty like they have been so many other times. THANK YOU Charlotte Weber for putting the Marion County in their place. Remember WEC is a big money driver but so is Live Oak Stud farm. Who is at fault I do not know that is for the law to decide.

In another project Marion County said they would not approve the gas line that went through my land. Swore up and down they were on the land owners side. Based on that I threw the gas line people off my property. Next thing I was in court fighting the gas line by myself, the county was no where in sight. There were many people lied to so, don't feel alone. We got paid but I did not want a gas line running through my farm. I went to town meeting and called them liars to their face. Dunnellon town fathers also said no way will they let them go through, they did,. A lot of bluster but they

did not saddle up!. When there was a meeting at the high school and they heard my name coming in the door they ask to talk to me outside, I did not get loud or excited I just said no. Inside my lawyer showed up and the project manager that I threw off my property come up to me with a smirk on his face and said well are you going to agree to let me on your property now, I turn to my attorney and said what do you think. She was raise on a farm and wanted to put them in their place, she said you will make an appointment with Mr Loury and then you can meet with if he is available. I am living with people coming on to my land because there is a gate at every land owner fence line and is the same gate code across several states. Last month had a dozen cows out. Someone or something left the gate open! Now we receive a letter saying they may want to run something along the Gas Line. That is not theirs to decide, here we go with another legal battle!

THANK YOU MARION COUNTY!

CEP

Continued from page 2

Over the next several months, there will be plenty of attention paid to the candidates running for office. We also hope to use this space and our other CEP platforms to share information about the issues appearing alongside those names on the November ballot and why they may matter here at home.

You don't have to follow politics every day to recognize that decisions made at the ballot box can eventually find their way to Main Street.

With the primary behind us, there is plenty to learn and discuss before November.

Publisher's

Continued from page 4

NEXT I met Nick Navetta a man with an extensive military back ground. He served his country with honor! Our connection was

he met his wife in the grocery store where my wife and I shopped at some years ago. He would go on with his great military career. He is an Edward Jones business investor. We have a little bit of money, I love it when he calls me and says what do you want me to do with this money you earned? It happens on a regular basis. I like him, he is my kind of person. I said one day I would like to do something for the veterans,

NEXT Nick told me to call Todd Belknap we started a veterans column in my newspapers with Vet's helping Vets. To me it's very rewarding and Todd does a good job writing the column. He had eight years military back ground. He joined our non-profit business club "Select Business Association of Ocala" it is a referral group where we try to help or use each other's services and referral our members to people who needs for what they do. One category no competition all category's are exclusive. We meet at MOJO's twice a month. If your category is not taken you can apply.

Continued page 8



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- Walk Don't Run Travel (Sue Fullerton)
- Walt's Brake and More (Water Krumm Jr)
- YMCA of central Florida (Leda Perez)
- Computer Tech (MoE Methen)
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If you would like to know more about us call TomL 352-804-1223

Marion County Pool Teams Wins Money

Marion county pool teams come home in the money

Special to the Ocala DownTown news.

Five Marion County amateur pool teams traveled to Las Vegas in August to compete in the World Pool Championship, American Pool players Association world finals that took place August 4-15, and each team won cash prizes.

In the 8-ball competition, Best Served Cold and Ohana finished in their respective

divisions in the 385th spot, winning \$350, and Racks on Racksss finished 65th, winning \$1,500 for their team.

In the 9-ball competition, Cue Carnage finished in its division at 518th, and X-Cues Us finished 385th. Both teams won \$350.

Area league operator Claudia Cardinal said, "We're so proud to send our teams out to Vegas for this honor. Each team won its local division then moved up through regional contests and then world qualifier

tournaments to win. The hard work and dedication to the sport they've all shown is phenomenal."

Local APA teams play in various venues around the county including Downtown Billiards, Snowbirds Billiards & Good Time Bar & Grill. The fall season begins on August 31st and all skill levels are welcome.

"Many of our players are beginners," Claudia said. "Because of the APA's equalizer handicapping system, all players

have a legitimate chance to win a match."

This year, the APA hosted over 1,900 teams comprised of 14,152 players during its annual world competition held at the Westgate Resort.

The APA is the world's largest pool league, with players from the United States, Japan and Canada represented in team play. More information on joining a local league is available from (352)546-2123 or at poolplayers.com/locator/





Häagen-Dazs Ribbon Cutting

Life just got a little sweeter in Ocala!

We had the pleasure of celebrating the Grand Opening and Ribbon Cutting of Häagen-Dazs, officially welcoming another exciting business to our community.

From the first scoop to the last smile, it was a great afternoon celebrating with local leaders, partners, and community members. We're thrilled to see Häagen-Dazs join Ocala's growing business community and can't wait to watch them thrive.

Help us congratulate the Häagen-Dazs team, and if you haven't stopped by yet, consider this your excuse to treat yourself!



Legacy in Motion Dance Center Ribbon Cutting

Ocala Metro Chamber and Economic Partnership Celebrating a new chapter for Legacy In Motion Dance Center. Congratulations on your ribbon cutting and the incredible impact you're making by inspiring dancers of all ages to grow in confidence, creativity, and community. We're excited to officially welcome Legacy in Motion Dance Center to the Ocala CEP family and can't wait to see all that's ahead. Join us in congratulating them in the comments and wishing them continued success!



Ocala Massage and Integrative Therapies Ribbon Cutting

Congratulations to [Ocala Massage and Integrative Therapies](#) on their ribbon cutting and official welcome to the Ocala CEP family!

Dedicated to helping our community feel and live their best through personalized therapeutic care, they're a great addition to Marion County's growing business community. We're excited to celebrate this milestone and look forward to their continued success.

Help us welcome Ocala Massage & Integrative Therapy by congratulating them in the comments!

FROM THE DESK OF

CONGRESSWOMAN KAT CAMMACK



Cammack Delivers: More Than \$42 Million in Rural Health Investments for North Central Florida

Cammack helped craft and shepherd the Rural Health Transformation

Program through committee, securing more than \$200 million for Florida and delivering critical resources to rural communities across FL-03.

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Congresswoman Kat Cammack (FL-03) today announced more than \$42.2 million in Rural Health Transformation Program investments benefiting health care providers and communities across North Central Florida, following her work in Congress to help craft and advance the legislation that created the program.

As a member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee and its Health Subcommittee, Cammack helped shape the rural health provisions and shepherd them through the committee process as part of the Working Families Tax Cuts law. The resulting Rural Health Transformation Program secured \$209 million for Florida in its first year alone, with funding now reaching rural hospitals, physicians, health systems, and communities across the state.

At least \$13.4 million is directly tied to providers with locations in Florida's Third Congressional District, while additional regional investments will strengthen health care infrastructure serving rural communities throughout North Central Florida.

CommunityHealth IT received more than

\$26.7 million across Florida's Northeast and Northwest regions to strengthen health information technology systems supporting rural providers, including those serving FL-03.

"This is exactly why I fought to make rural health care a priority in this legislation. I helped craft these provisions and shepherd them through Energy and Commerce because North Central Florida needed more than another study or another promise—we needed resources," said Congresswoman Cammack. "We secured more than \$200 million for Florida, and now more than \$42 million is being put to work benefiting the communities I represent. That means stronger hospitals, better technology, more access to specialists, and more care delivered closer to home. We fought for these dollars, we secured them, and now we're bringing them home."

Direct Investments in FL-03

Providers headquartered in Florida's Third Congressional District receiving directly attributable awards include:

Medlink Management Services (Lake Butler Hospital), Union County — \$6,989,484.92 across two awards.

North Florida Pediatrics Associates, Lake City, Columbia County — \$5,999,924.26 across two awards.

Trenton Medical Center (Palms Medical Group), Gilchrist County — \$439,775.40.

Lake Butler Hospital's larger award supports preventive and at-home care, including mobile health, community paramedicine, remote patient monitoring, on-site pharmacy services, and retail clinic care.

North Florida Pediatrics Associates' larger Lake City award supports specialty

Continued page 12

FAIRtax



Ethics is the branch of philosophy that deals with the questions of right and wrong conduct, moral duty, justice, fairness and the principles that should guide human behavior. Ethics asks: What should we do and why is it the right thing to do? It focuses on moral standards, not on government rules. It is the study and application of moral principles that determine what is right, fair, just, honest and responsible in human conduct. So what would an "ethical" tax system look like? It would be a tax system that is more consistent with principles such as fairness, honesty, transparency, equal treatment, respect for privacy, limited coercion and protection of human dignity.

Our current income/payroll tax system requires every American to report details of his or her earnings, deductions, investments, business expenses, family status and financial life to the federal government every year. This is some of the most sensitive and private data we have. Under an ethical tax system, that would be none of the government's business.

Enforcement requires government inspection, forced disclosure and the assumption that citizens must prove they have paid enough in taxes. A tax system that requires constant surveillance of private income is inherently disrespectful of

personal liberty. That's not ethical.

The FAIRtax takes a different approach. It taxes consumption, not productivity. Under the FAIRtax, Americans would no longer be punished for working, saving, investing, building a business, earning overtime or improving their financial position. People would only be taxed when they choose to purchase new goods and retail services for final consumption.

The FAIRtax doesn't penalize the creation of wealth. Almost everyone agrees that work and savings are socially beneficial activities; taxing them discourages the very conduct that strengthens families and the economy. The FAIRtax is also more transparent. Under the income/payroll tax, much of the tax burden is hidden inside payroll withholding, corporate taxes, compliance costs and embedded taxes in prices. Many Americans never see the full cost of the federal tax system. The FAIRtax would make the tax visible at the cash register. Voters would know exactly what the federal government costs them. Transparency is an ethical virtue because democratic consent is meaningful only when citizens can see the burden being imposed.

The present income tax also gives Washington enormous power to reward favored groups and punish disfavored ones through deductions, credits, exemptions, phaseouts, audits and special rules. Our present system guarantees lobbying, manipulation and political favoritism.

The FAIRtax would greatly reduce that power by applying one broad national retail sales tax with universal prebate to protect basic consumption.

The FAIRtax would be a simpler, broader tax system that would be less vulnerable to corruption and special interest engineering. The FAIRtax is more ethical than the present federal income tax system because it treats citizens as free individuals rather than as financial subjects of the government.

For more information, please go to FAIRtax.org

Publisher's

Continued from page 5

tloury@att.net

Hope to meet some new people in our lunch group!

Send me your email and I'll email you a digital newspaper Ocaladowntown.com

I have been so lucky to meet these guys with military backgrounds they inspire me to keep going!

I have several more military stores I want to repeat next month. I met one of the military man that help put up the flag at Iwo Jima. Until next month!

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BENEFITS OF PARTNERSHIP

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Love is just a leash away!!

The HSMC is here for you and the animals who depend on us. We wanted to share that we will continue to be here to help unwanted pets during this pandemic while following all Marion County and Florida state guidelines.

As this situation is constantly changing, we ask that you continue to visit our Shelter using the safety guidelines in place.

How can you help?

Pet Food Bank: Help stock our Pet Food Bank with pet food and supplies for people who cannot afford them due to job loss or other reasons. You can also bring donations to our Shelter daily from 10-6. Masks required please! If you need help keeping your pet with you during this time, our Happy Paws food program is here for you.

Volunteer: A small number of volunteers have returned to help in various departments. We are accepting volunteer applications but do not yet know when we will schedule orientations for new volunteers. Please contact us for more information about volunteering. We are currently working on a digital orientation.

Opt to adopt: According to the Centers for Disease Control and the World Health Organization, there is no evidence that companion animals such as cats and dogs can spread the virus that causes COVID-19.

Donate: We know there is a lot of uncertainty right now but homeless and unwanted animals still need us. Donate to help the Humane Society of Marion County so we continue our lifesaving work and make them feel safe and loved.



Bilbie

Bilbie is a 14 weeks old male brought to the HSMC with her brother Wombat! We believe they could be Xolaitzcuinli, or Xolo, which is Mexican hairless dog breed.



Fuchsa is a 15 week old paralyzed kitten full of love.



Ninja is paralyzed in his hind legs but enjoys runs with his wheels.

Your donations make it possible to provide medical care, food and shelter to animals in need. On behalf of all the animals, thank you for caring.



Humane Society of Marion County
PO Box 1542 Ocala, FL 34478
Mail check or complete the credit/debit card payment form.

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Visa ☐ M/C ☐ Discover Card # _____ Exp date: _____ Code: _____

Donations to the Humane Society are tax-deductible. Check with your accountant for more information. No goods or services have been provided to the donor as a result of this gift.



FROM THE DESK OF ATTORNEY GENERAL UTHMEIER



Attorney General James Uthmeier Issues Investigative Subpoena to KIS Consulting Over Deceptive Practices to Protect Homeowners from Increased Costs

Attorney General James Uthmeier issued an investigative subpoena to KIS Consulting, LLC as part of an investigation into the company's advertising of property inspection services, referrals of Florida consumers to attorneys and engineers for construction, design, architectural, and engineering defect claims, related sales tactics including door-to-door solicitation, and fees associated with those referrals.

"Florida homeowners deserve transparent and fair treatment when addressing potential defects in their homes—not practices that drive up the cost of homeownership," said Attorney General James Uthmeier. "My office is investigating these inspection and referral operations to ensure they truly serve the interests of the families they claim to help."

The subpoena requires production of documents from August 20, 2022, through the present by September 21, 2026, including:

- Advertisements to Florida consumers related to property inspection services or construction defect claims;
- Documents provided to consumers regarding the referral of attorney services, including Attorney

Selection Forms, and all related communications with consumers and attorneys;

- Documents and communications related to the referral of engineering services;

- Estimates for repairs and documents identifying completed repairs to Florida consumers' properties, including supporting documentation such as invoices, permits, engineering reports, photographs, and payments;

- Written policies, procedures, guidance, and training manuals related to referrals of legal and engineering services and to door-to-door or other sales tactics;

- Documents sufficient to identify all Florida consumers provided with property inspection services, all employees or independent contractors soliciting business, and all fees received for attorney or engineering referrals;

Documents concerning complaints, reports, investigations, and dispositions related to the company's services involving construction defect claims.

This action reinforces Attorney General Uthmeier's commitment to enforcing Florida's consumer protection laws and protecting homeowners from unfair or deceptive trade practices.

Attorney General James Uthmeier Announces Conviction of Leesburg Woman for Elderly Exploitation

Attorney General James Uthmeier announced that the Office of Statewide Prosecution secured a conviction against

Kimberly Ruth Bitting of Leesburg for exploiting an elderly widow by abusing a power of attorney and position of trust to steal approximately \$350,000.

"This defendant systematically exploited a vulnerable senior widow grieving the loss of her husband, abusing a power of attorney to drain her life savings, purchase property for herself, and isolate her from family," said Attorney General James Uthmeier. "Florida will not tolerate those who prey on our elderly under the guise of caregiving or trust. I thank the Leesburg Police Department, Senior Assistant Statewide Prosecutor Taylor Chatting, and Special Counsel Ana Sacco for their outstanding work securing this conviction."

According to the investigation, Bitting obtained power of attorney over her elderly neighbor—a senior widow—shortly after the victim's husband died in August 2021. Over the next 15 to 18 months, Bitting used that authority to issue numerous checks from the victim's accounts to her own accounts and those of others, make repeated ATM withdrawals confirmed by surveillance video, and transfer funds from investment accounts.

Bitting used more than \$137,000 of the victim's money to purchase two parcels of land in Calhoun County that were titled to a trust in Bitting's name. Substantial sums also went to her daughter and a paid caregiver, often framed as payments for services.

Evidence established that Bitting restricted the victim's communications with family, controlled access within the home, and threatened to have the victim declared incompetent and committed. The victim ultimately left of her own free will, revoked the power of attorney, and relocated to New York to live with her sister. Bitting

subsequently reported the departure as a kidnapping.

Bitting was convicted of:

- Elderly Exploitation (Breach of Power of Attorney), a first-degree felony
- Elderly Exploitation (Position of Trust or Confidence), a first-degree felony
- Elderly Exploitation (Negligent or Intentional Misuse), a first-degree felony
- Cashing or Depositing an Item with Intent to Defraud, a third-degree felony

Senior Assistant Statewide Prosecutor Taylor Chatting and Special Counsel Ana Sacco were designated as a Special Assistant State Attorneys by State Attorney Bill Gladson in the Fifth Judicial Circuit.

Attorney General James Uthmeier Announces Arrest of Over 2,000 Child Predators; Charges Middle School Teacher with Possession of Child Sexual Abuse Material

Attorney General James Uthmeier announced that over 2,000 child predators have been arrested since he took office in February 2025. The milestone reflects the aggressive work of the Office of Statewide Prosecution in partnership with state and local law enforcement agencies to identify, arrest, and prosecute those who sexually exploit children.

These prosecutions are part of a broader surge in results. Since February 2025, the Office of Statewide Prosecution's Crimes Against Children efforts have secured nearly 693 years of prison sentences—more than four times the previous monthly rate—while case filings have increased dramatically.

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FROM THE DESK OF

GOVERNOR DESANTIS


Governor Ron DeSantis Highlights Florida's Nation-Leading Education Successes Leading into 2026-27 School Year

Governor Ron DeSantis celebrated the start of the 2026-2027 school year by highlighting Florida's continued leadership in education. The event showcased Florida's commitment to putting students first by supporting teachers, empowering parents, and maintaining high academic standards that will continue to produce nation-leading results.

"We've led the way to champion policies that expand opportunities for students, strengthen workforce education, support great teachers, and ensure every child has access to a high-quality education that prepares them for success in life," said **Governor Ron DeSantis**. "As students across the state get ready to go back to school, we wish them a successful year ahead. We appreciate the parents, educators, and school leaders whose dedication to students is leaving them better prepared than ever, and we will keep working to ensure that the best days for education in Florida are still ahead."

"Education changes the trajectory of a child's life. Every classroom, every lesson, every parent, and every educator help shape opportunities that extend far beyond the next grade level or graduation," said **Commissioner of Education Henry Mack**. "As we begin this school year, we remain committed to building on our successes and strengthening Florida's education system as a national model of excellence—challenging students to reach their highest potential, equipping them with the knowledge and skills to succeed in their future careers, and preparing them to make meaningful contributions to Florida and the United States as productive citizens."

As students return to classrooms across Florida, Governor DeSantis reaffirmed his commitment to building on Florida's momentum by continuing to invest in teachers, expanding educational opportunities through school choice, strengthening workforce education, and ensuring every student is prepared for success in college, career, and life.

Governor DeSantis highlighted Florida's historic student achievement gains. For the first time ever, more than 60% of Florida students are performing on or above grade level in both English language arts and mathematics. Since 2023, student performance on Florida's nation-leading progress monitoring assessments has increased in both English language arts and in mathematics.

Governor DeSantis also emphasized Florida's historic investment in educators. Since 2019, the state has invested more than \$7 billion through the Teacher Salary Increase Allocation to raise teacher pay. As a result of these investments, Florida's average starting teacher salary has increased from \$40,000 to \$50,200 since 2019. Additionally, the 2026-27 budget includes \$1.56 billion for teacher salary increases, including \$200 million dedicated to raising the salaries of experienced teachers with at least 10 years of service in Florida public schools.

Governor Ron DeSantis Announces \$60 Million In Cancer Innovation Awards And Opens \$70 Million Application Cycle

Governor Ron DeSantis announced \$60 million in awards through the Fiscal Year 2025-26 Florida Cancer Innovation Fund and opened the application cycle for Fiscal Year 2026-27, with \$70 million available for new awards, a \$10 million increase over last year.

"Today, I was proud to announce the winners of this year's Florida Cancer Innovation Fund awards and the opening of applications for next year's awards. This

promising initiative now has \$70 million in funding for groundbreaking cancer research projects, \$10 million more than the previous cycle," said **Governor DeSantis**. "Congratulations to the awardees, and thank you for all you do to make Florida a beacon of hope in cancer research and treatment." Since 2019, Florida has invested more than \$1.4 billion in cancer research and treatment, and funding for cancer research programs has increased by more than 175 percent under Governor DeSantis. In Fiscal Year 2026-27 alone, Florida committed nearly \$228 million to cancer research and innovation.

"Governor DeSantis and First Lady Casey DeSantis have shown tremendous leadership in making cancer research a priority in Florida, and I'm incredibly grateful for their continued commitment," said **State Surgeon General Dr. Joseph A. Ladapo**. "These investments give researchers the freedom to ask important questions, explore new ideas, and allow the evidence wherever it leads"

The Florida Cancer Innovation Fund was established in 2023 with an initial investment of \$20 million to support Florida-based researchers, institutions, startups and other entities pursuing innovative approaches to cancer prevention, treatment and cures.

"Governor DeSantis and First Lady Casey DeSantis had a bold vision for what Florida could accomplish in the fight against cancer, and nearly 150 funded projects later, that vision is paying off for families in every part of our state," said **Agency for Health Care Administration Secretary Shevaun L. Harris**. "From rural communities to major cancer centers, Florida patients are getting access to groundbreaking research and life-changing care close to home. This is what happens when a state decides cancer research is not optional. It is a priority."

Following a rigorous and competitive review process, \$60 million was awarded through the Fiscal Year 2025-26 application cycle to researchers and institutions advancing the next generation of cancer prevention and treatment strategies. The awards support a diverse group of grantees

across Florida, from established research institutions to emerging innovators pursuing promising new approaches in the fight against cancer.

The Fiscal Year 2026-27 application cycle is now open, with \$70 million available for new awards, representing a \$10 million increase over last year. Funding will continue to support innovative research in areas including preventive nutrition, emerging medical treatments, data infrastructure and patient-centered solutions designed to improve outcomes. The Florida Cancer Innovation Fund is part of the state's broader commitment to advancing cancer research and collaboration. Through the Casey DeSantis Cancer Research Program, Cancer Connect Collaborative and other targeted investments, Florida is working to break down barriers between researchers and institutions and accelerate the development of new treatments.

Cancer remains the second leading cause of death in Florida, and nearly 40 percent of Floridians will face a cancer diagnosis during their lifetime. Florida's continued investments are designed to ensure researchers have the resources to pursue breakthroughs while giving patients and families greater access to innovative treatments and hope for the future.

GOVERNOR RON DESANTIS ANNOUNCES NEARLY \$188 MILLION TO EXPAND RURAL HEALTH CARE ACCESS ACROSS FLORIDA

Governor Ron DeSantis announced nearly \$188 million in awards to strengthen health care in Florida's rural communities by expanding access to care, supporting rural hospitals and clinics, and growing the state's rural health care workforce.

The funding will support more than 80 awards serving communities across 31 rural counties, home to nearly 1.2 million Floridians. Awardees include hospitals, Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), rural health clinics, and other health care providers and community organizations working to meet the unique needs of rural Floridians.

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Cammack

Continued from page 8

and acute care through diagnostic technology and telehealth.

These investments directly address one of the most persistent challenges facing rural North Central Florida: distance. For seniors, working families, and patients managing chronic conditions, access to more services locally can mean fewer hours on the road and faster access to the care they need.

On Tuesday, Governor Ron DeSantis announced nearly \$188 million in the latest round of Year 1 awards, supporting more than 80 projects across Florida's 31 rural counties. The Northeast Region, which includes portions of FL-03 and surrounding

North Central Florida communities, accounted for approximately \$50.7 million of the awards.

"Washington doesn't know Lake Butler, Lake City, or Trenton better than the people who live and work there. That's why we built flexibility into this program and fought to get Florida the resources to put solutions on the ground," Cammack added. "I helped secure more than \$200 million for our state, and Governor DeSantis, Secretary Harris, and our local providers are turning that investment into care. This is what legislating is supposed to look like: identify the problem, build the solution, fight for the resources, and deliver results back home."

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