



Carmage Walls
Commentary Prize

2018 Entry Form

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Is your newspaper under 50,000 circulation or above 50,000 circulation? Under

Please give a brief explanation of issues discussed and the results achieved. (This space will expand as you type in your comments.)

A shoot-don't-shoot demonstration for the local chamber of commerce turned tragic when a police officer, portraying the bad guy, fatally shot an elderly librarian volunteer, playing the cop. Witnesses, including the woman's husband, at first thought it was play acting and then realized the volunteer participant had been shot dead. The investigation that followed, and the lawsuit, stretched out for months while the police chief and officer who fired the shot, were put on paid leave.

The community and the city manager, a close friend, defended the chief although he had no safety procedures in place for the demonstration. The investigation revealed no one checked the gun used by the officer, who said he thought he used blanks but instead loaded wadcutters into the gun.

Our editorial team railed against returning the chief to his job, saying his credibility was too badly damaged. And we pleaded for the officer's firing -- it was not the first time he had been in trouble or had been the target of a lawsuit.

In the end, the chief was let go and the officer fired.

VIEWPOINT

Publisher — Robert E. Lee
 Executive editor — Jim Gouvellis
 Editorial page editor — Stephen Baumann
 Commentary Editor — John Hackworth

Email letters to letters@sun-herald.com

OUR VIEW

More horrifying insights into PG shooting

OUR POSITION:
Institutionalized incompetence. No checks. No double-checks. No responsibility.

Anyone who thought the case of the August 2016 shooting death of Mary Knowlton could not become more disturbing got a jolt recently with the release of Punta Gorda Police Department interviews conducted by state investigators.

The transcripts showed an alarming carelessness toward gun safety at this public event. The apparent reality of responsibilities assumed but not actually designated.

Routine safety procedures — familiar to anyone with a modicum of firearms training — were ignored. The apparent reality that actual, formal protocols did not exist.

This was unimaginable. Horrifying. Inexcusable.

A story printed in the *Sun* on April 21 and written by WGCU News reporters Michael Hirsh and Amy Tardiff revealed details of the investigation by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement into Knowlton's shooting death during a Chamber of Commerce "shoot/don't shoot" demonstration on the evening of Aug. 9. The story is also available on the WGCU website. Also at that website (<http://tinyurl.com/lhwsyzq>) are long clips of the police interviews.

Knowlton was the citizen-participant at the educational demonstration. She was shot by Punta Gorda police officer Lee Coel as more than 40 citizens and police department officers looked on. Coel has been charged with felony manslaughter.

Among revelations from the interviews:

- Police Lt. Christopher Salsman, the director of employee development and training, said he didn't insert himself into a safety check routine because he arrived late to the scene of the demonstration and assumed it had been done already by others.

FDLE investigator: "Did anybody ... did they check the gun beforehand?"

Salsman: "I don't know which officer was checking the weapon with him when it was loaded."

Asked if that typically would have been his responsibility, or that of Capt. Jeffrey Woodard, Salsman said, "In this particular case ... it would have been incumbent on both of us."

Arriving late, Salsman said, "My presumption was that — that because everything was in place, that these safety checks had already been completed."

An assumption when, in fact, none had.

- Woodard, who oversees much of the daily operation of the department, told the FDLE agent that he knew Coel had

a .38-caliber revolver in his waistband. But he also did not conduct a safety check.

When asked who was in control of the "scenario," Woodard said, "I'm not."

The state investigator asked who, in fact, was.

FDLE: "Somebody owned that scenario. Who — who owned it?"

Woodard: "I don't think that was ever discussed."

An astounding admission.

And precisely the problem. Despite the presence of four senior law enforcement officers, it seemed no one had clearly delineated responsibility for public safety. No one had been specifically assigned to double-check Coel's weapon. No one did.

- Woodard subsequently told state investigators he knew of no written protocols for this type of demonstration.

They were, essentially, winging it.

- Further, he told the FDLE, the department devised its operating procedures from internet videos.

"They were YouTube scenarios that some other agency did," Woodard said.

And, according to Woodard, the YouTube-based video scenario was supplied by Chief Tom Lewis (before he became chief).

Among other disturbing revelations:

- No one thought to question why Coel was using his personal revolver.

- This wasn't the first time this happened. According to Woodard, this demonstration was conducted previously — at least once and perhaps as many as three times — with Coel in the shooter role, using his .38-caliber revolver, with ammunition Coel believed were blanks.

In Woodard's words, immediately after the shooting, Coel said, "I just don't understand what happened. These are the same rounds that I use all the time."

- According to Woodard's statement to the FDLE, there was no designated safety officer at the demonstration.

"Everybody acted as safety officer," he said.

Or, in this case, everybody believing someone else was responsible. No one assigned specific responsibility.

In sum, no one imagined this was possible, so no formal protocols were in place.

Which is mind-boggling. The use of a working firearm, a personal handgun, at that. Blanks or not. The assumption by Coel, and his supervisors, that the gun wasn't loaded with live ammunition. Assumptions without accountability. A slipshod system; death resulting. The city is conducting an

internal affairs investigation, and city officials have said they will wait until criminal charges are resolved before taking further action. How long will that be? Until that happens, the city of Punta Gorda cannot begin to restore public faith in the operation. Until that happens, four officers involved with the scenario remain at the highest levels of the department's command structure. One, Capt. Jason Ciaschini, is acting police chief.

Meanwhile, Lewis has been charged by the State Attorney Steve Russell with misdemeanor culpable negligence, and he has been placed on paid leave by City Manager Howard Kunik. At this point, it is impossible to imagine he might return to the department.

In light of these revelations — and who knows what else to come — it seems fitting that strong disciplinary action will be taken against the other ranking officers who might have stepped in, conducted a simple safety check and prevented the shooting.

It is also inconceivable that anyone from within the department will be promoted to chief permanently. Someone from outside, untainted by this horrific incident, will have to be brought in to begin to restore credibility to a police department that has lost public trust.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Human nature to hate a winner?

Editor:

Isn't it curious that we want less taxes, easier reporting, more jobs and economic stimulation?

We are all in favor of the average person getting a break, but God forbid that the company building the cars, developing the drugs, searching for fuel sources, developing property so that people have a place to live, should make a profit.

We all want our taxes to go down, but we'll be darned if we are on board with anybody related to, or Donald Trump himself making one penny more.

So, how will that work? We'll embrace the new tax proposal if it has a clause saying it applies to everybody except those listed? Who else will be on the list? Where is the cutoff?

I know it is human nature to hate a winner, but, jeez, if a proposal is good for the country, it is good for all.

Don't people realize that if they have a few more dollars to spend at the mall, some bigwig somewhere might make a little more money? And if he or she makes a little more money, they might build a new store or hire some more people. But we wouldn't want that, would we?

Malcolm Williams
Englewood

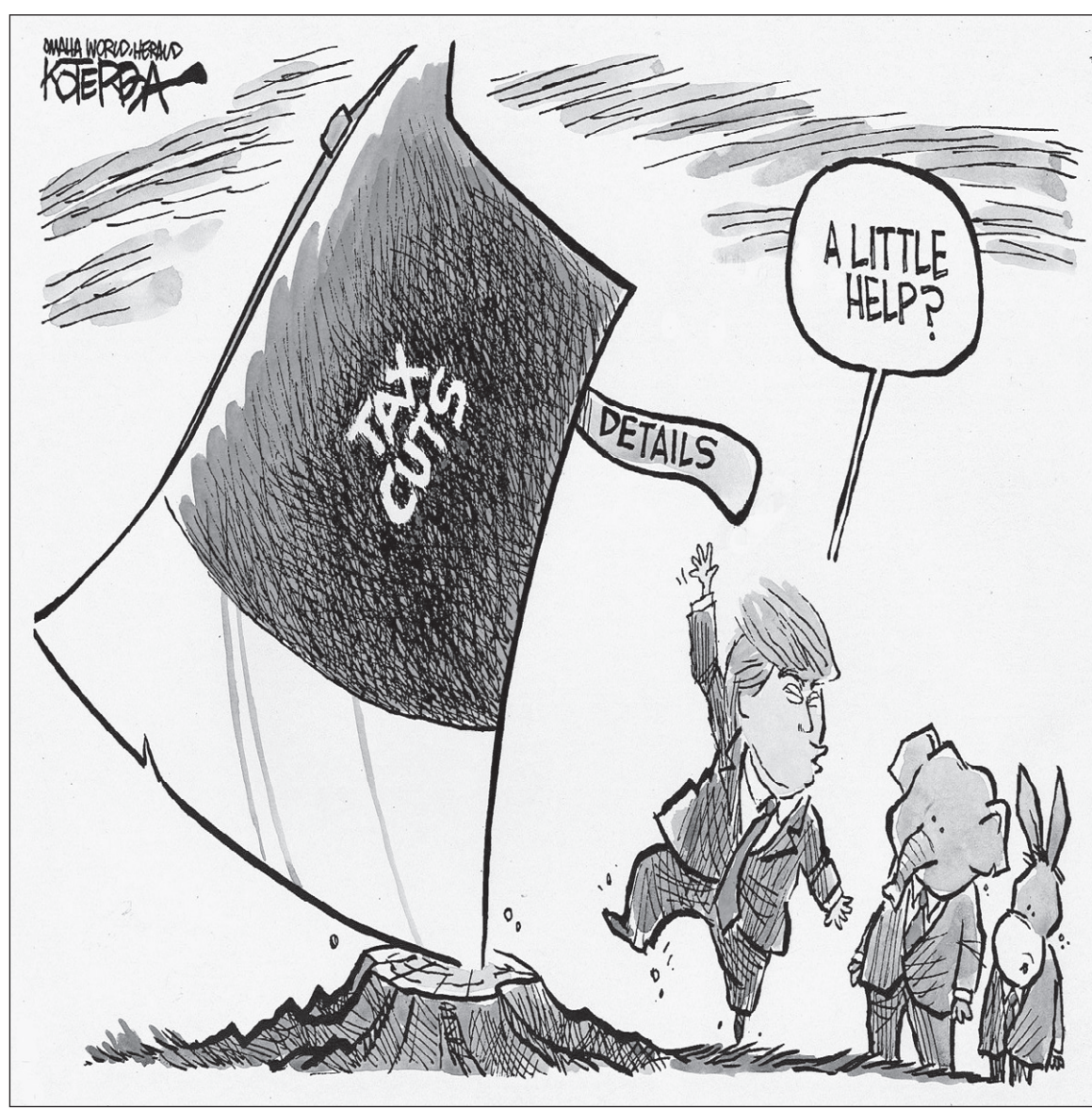
Battle plan is working

Editor:

If it isn't broke, don't fix it. And the strategy of charging conservatives with sexual harassment is working.

No need for proof, no need for a man's day in court, no need for waiting to see the process played out.

These are textbook Saul Alinsky tactics who said, "Pick



the target, freeze it, personalize it, polarize it."

Why would they change their battle plan? It's working, folks, recently two big names have been brought down.

Whether or not the messenger is flawless, the message is still important.

With the help of Newt Gingrich, Bill Clinton was a pretty good president but a very flawed human being.

The problems in this country are too monumental to be focused on rumors and allegations.

Let's fix problems and let the tabloid stories play out as they will.

Wayne A. White
Englewood

From beards to fishing

Editor:

Why do we see, and worldwide, so many males sporting facial hair these days? Does this represent laziness to avoid the morning shave, association with these Islamic terrorists should they be captured or even a subliminal response to do something the female cannot as she moves steadily into areas previously all male?

The current regulation permitting equal access for bicycles on public highways is misguided and is resulting in deaths and injuries. Bicycle paths are one solution, but funding should be from the users and not the general public. Publishing minimum

speed limits on our public roads would also be a method to control who uses these roads.

Adult emotional display for loving a pet including face-kissing, taking walks in public with the dog in a baby stroller, dogs in public places, dogs fouling the public walkways, etc., all seem to display humans incapable of relating to their own specie.

If those topics do not excite perhaps this killing for entertainment, called hunting and fishing, could profit from some reporter's writing skills? Adults getting their jollies from killing some poor dumb fish is one thing, but making a party from this activity and teaching children to continue the practice seems odd. Fishing seems the prime motivation for these millions of dollars spent

to dredge Stump Pass, another strange human activity. Nature will win.

John P. Derr
Port Charlotte

Wonder what, who to believe

Editor:

Am I the only one in the world who didn't understand or really even know about bots until recently? And, I'm not sure I fully grasp the concept now. What I do comprehend is that one thing they do is manipulate data to get a desired result.

A survey can be blasted by bots to skew the results. So surveys asking our impression of everything from new products to political opinion can, and are, infiltrated by robotic results to produce a specific response.

Anything that you hear about public opinion on presidential performance to whether Americans prefer oranges or apples should be suspect in your mind. It is very likely the results are not based on actual human beings.

Which should leave you wondering what and who to believe.

Andy Bishop
Englewood

Thanks for treat at Easter dinner

Editor:

On Easter Sunday, my wife and I went to Outback for dinner. When I asked for the bill, the waiter told me it was paid for by a couple seated near us.

I thanked the couple and told them that I was wearing my World War II hat because they do not teach anything about World War II in schools. Young people do not know that 60 million people lost their lives in World War II and America lost 400,000 military. They don't know the enemy was Japan, Germany and Italy.

Thanks again to that couple.

John Arnott
Port Charlotte

HOW TO SUBMIT A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

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The Letters to the Editor section is designed as a public forum for community discourse, and the opinions and statements made in letters are solely those of the individual writers. The newspaper takes no responsibility for the content of these letters. Please send or bring correspondence to the *Sun*, Letters to the Editor, 23170 Harborview Road, Charlotte Harbor, FL 33980. Readers may email Letters to the Editor at letters@sun-herald.com. Further questions or information, call 941-681-3003.

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OUR VIEW

The time for healing still pending

OUR POSITION: Punta Gorda Police Chief Tom Lewis was acquitted of culpable negligence in the death of Mary Knowlton. But the bad dream is not yet over.

This should be a time for healing. Tom Lewis, one of Punta Gorda's favored sons, has been found not guilty of culpable negligence in the death of Mary Knowlton. Knowlton, a 73-year-old retired librarian, was shot to death last August by former Punta Gorda police officer Lee Coel in a civilian demonstration. He was one of Lewis' officers.

But the wound in the side of the city still seeps. Lewis' job as chief of police still hangs in the balance, pending the outcome of an internal affairs investigation by the city.

As long as the results are pending, so is the healing.

A jury's decision Thursday to acquit Lewis did nothing to bring together a town sharply divided. The trial lasted five days, but it was over in five minutes when Judge Devon George ruled the state would be required to prove that Lewis knew or should have known Mary would come to great bodily harm.

The day bled into lunch and the middle afternoon. The jury deliberated for three hours, asking to review the video of the shooting, doing its job. But there was no way those six jurors could have returned a conviction. Tom Lewis had known nothing of what would unfold that fateful night.

There are those who believe Lewis should never have been in court, should never have been charged in the first place. He acted properly in the wake of the shooting. A good man was betrayed by those he trusted, people he had worked with for years, an officer he had protected following an indiscretion involving a K-9 and a drug addict.

Lewis could not help it that his aides suddenly stopped doing their jobs, that safety protocols — written or unwritten — were shrugged off. He could not be blamed for Coel's lack of common sense in using his own revolver in the demonstration.

His supporters backed him with energy. They staged public demonstrations. They held fundraisers to help pay for his defense. They rooted for him on social media.

Mary Knowlton was not the primary consideration. And that offended her survivors — husband, Gary, and sons Steve and Bill — who believed it trivialized Mary's death.

Mary, after all, is the victim here.

Others believe Lewis is ultimately responsible for Mary's death because he was the man in charge. Period. It goes no further than that. A tragedy occurred on his watch. This was no dog bite. This was a shooting death.

He is 100 percent accountable. He said so himself.

Tom Lewis has been on paid administrative leave since he was charged in February. He may get his job back. He may go on to repay the city's loyalty by serving it. But no matter what the decision, his reputation is forever tarnished. He will always be the commander whose soldier shot an innocent woman to death.

Coel may have pulled the trigger, but Lewis allowed it to happen. How could he? How can Lewis be trusted to lead here again? Many believe he can't, that despite the verdict he should resign. This newspaper has presented this view in the past and remains steadfast in its belief. It's not a matter of guilt and innocence. It's a matter of right and wrong.

Until the right thing is done — until Lewis steps down or is let go — the time for healing must wait.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Democrats: Work to solve problems

Editor:

Borrowing the first four words from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., I have a dream; that Democrats will put aside hate and resistance and join together with Republicans to work on solving our country's problems. By joining forces look what they might accomplish.

Peace among all people, stop the racism and realize that there are good and bad in every race.

A health system that works for all people.

Work together on a good plan to protect our nation from terrorists.

We need a better system for helping people to enter our country legally and pledge their allegiance to this country.

We need to protect all life from conception to death. Killing unborn children is not the answer to irresponsible sex.

We need a better system of welfare that helps and encourages people to get jobs to support themselves and their families.

We need to be friendly but firm with foreign nations and protect our citizens who travel abroad.

My list could go on and on. We do not need party against party. We need to join

together.

Below is a saying I learned at a conference: TEAM — Together everyone achieves more.

Carol Mulholland
Port Charlotte

Many questions to be answered

Editor:

Where were those calling for affordable housing when prices tanked and there were affordable properties at low mortgage rates? Is it, when we don't need it we have it and when we need it we don't have it, a reasonable answer?

What happens to the Charlotte Mall if most retailers close or leave?

Do "planners" consider drastic changes in our shopping habits to determine how much retail/commercial space we need?

If traffic circles are a good idea, why all the confusing approach signs?

Does anyone monitor park usage reviewing results for closings, expansions or new uses?

Have you benefited from the huge increase in value of Amazon, Apple, Google and other tech stocks, or are you just increasing their value by using their products and services?

Can Englewood Beach be expanded by acquiring adjacent properties?

How can visitors to our area find the new All Veterans Memorial Park in Placida?

Will North Port suck surviving major retailers from Port Charlotte?

Can West County be a regional destination for tourism and home buyers if separated from Charlotte County with a good marketing plan?

Did you know searching our county appraiser's site for all types of vacant lots you get 134,000?

Is the 1 foot difference in the driving lanes on Boundary Boulevard and Rotonda Circle causing so many damaged mail boxes?

Andy Leonard
Rotonda West

Treasonous acts in the White House

Editor:

We know that Russia tried to influence our election and that they favored candidate Donald Trump.

Trump openly encouraged Putin to hack Clinton's emails and display them for the world to see. Once in office, Trump mocked the intelligence agencies for doing their jobs in exposing the interference and has tried to block the investigation.

He fired the FBI director and twice stated his reason being the Russia investigation. He handed classified

information to Russian officials in the Oval Office. Before and after the election, Trump praised Putin and other despots while insulting many of our allies.

In a few hours, I compiled a list of over 20 individuals, including Trump, his family, appointees and campaign officials and their connections with Russia, including business dealings, representation of Russian interests or frequent contacts with Russian officials, often unreported and sometimes secretive. The list of individuals and their connections with Russia runs 17 pages, single-spaced. Many of those people now have security clearances that allow them access to classified information necessary to protect America, if that matters anymore.

Trump's lack of curiosity about the Russian attack on democracy may be because he already knows all the answers. Yet, his chumminess, past and present, with Russian spies/diplomats, oligarchs and Putin doesn't faze his supporters.

Had Obama or Clinton acted anything like Trump and his inner circle, either would have been accused of treason — for good reason. He or she would have been called a Russian agent — for good reason.

Tom Butler
Port Charlotte

ANOTHER VIEW

Using Twitter as an act of kindness

The following editorial appeared in the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*:

Within 24 hours of President Donald Trump's disgusting Twitter outburst targeting MSNBC's Mika Brzezinski and Joe Scarborough, two stories making the rounds on social media provided a very different take on life in America in 2017.

That got us thinking: What if Trump used Twitter as a tool to hold up acts of kindness and generosity instead of as a vehicle to attack those who have in some way offended his delicate sensitivities? What if he used Twitter to highlight what's already great about this country?

Sure, it's naive to think a

Minneapolis Star Tribune
Another View

Trump social media transformation will begin anytime soon, if ever. But let's just ponder those two aforementioned stories for a minute and consider the impact they might have had on the president's nearly 40 million Twitter followers.

There's motorist Andy Mitchell, who could have ignored Justin Korva, the young man in a fast-food uniform he recently noticed walking along a road on a 95-degree day in Rockwall, Texas. Instead, he offered Korva a ride and learned that

the 20-year-old made the 3-mile walk to and from work each day. Mitchell recounted the experience on Facebook, prompting strangers to donate more than \$5,000 to buy Korva a new car.

Then there's Major League Baseball umpire John Tumpane, who instinctively grabbed a 23-year-old woman who had hopped over the railing of the Roberto Clemente Bridge in Pittsburgh on Wednesday and appeared to be planning to take her own life.

"You'll forget me tomorrow," the woman said, asking Tumpane to let her go. "I'll never forget you," he told her. "You can have my promise on that."

The woman was eventually

lifted back over the railing, and Tumpane tried to comfort her before paramedics took over. "I told her, 'I didn't forget her, and we'd be here, and she's better off on this side than the other side.' I just want her to know that," he recalled in an interview with the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*.

Trump's use of Twitter amplifies his voice while revealing much about his character. He too often comes across as a self-absorbed, insecure bully. In other words, the antithesis of Andy Mitchell and John Tumpane — two everyday heroes whose stories would have provided a refreshing change of pace for realDonaldTrump.

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OUR VIEW

'Elephant' must be recognized

OUR POSITION: Before Punta Gorda City Manager Howard Kunik's future is discussed, the Tom Lewis matter needs to be resolved.

There's been talk of the Punta Gorda City Council allowing City Manager Howard Kunik to retire when he is eligible in May 2018, and then offering him a contract to continue in the position he's held for the last dozen years or so.

According to reports, already the city's finance and personnel departments are looking into it. The city attorney has been instructed to draw up the contract.

"As City Council, we haven't had any conversations," Vice Mayor Gary Wein has been quoted as saying. "But maybe now is a good time to have those conversations rather than in the 11th hour."

In fact, now is not a good time to discuss Kunik's future. There is an elephant sitting in the room. Before any decisions are made about Kunik's future, a decision must be made on the future of suspended Punta Gorda Police Chief Tom Lewis.

Lewis was acquitted by a jury last month of culpable negligence in the shooting death of retired librarian Mary Knowlton. Former Punta Gorda Police Officer Lee Coel shot her during a civilian demonstration last Aug. 9. Coel is facing manslaughter charges.

Lewis, who organized the event and was in charge that night, has been on administrative leave since the charge was filed in February. His job hangs in the balance, pending the findings of an internal investigation.

And that matter needs to be concluded.

Back in February, Kunik expressed his support of Lewis, calling him a fine man with the "best interests of the community at heart. If you believe otherwise, you just don't know him. Let me repeat that. If you believe otherwise, you just don't know him."

If those statements are a measure of objectivity, then Kunik is not objective when it comes to Tom Lewis. But Kunik has publicly stated he — and he alone — is in charge. He should be held to that.

Early on, Lewis acknowledged he was "100 percent accountable," and he should be held to that.

Many Punta Gorda residents believe that Lewis should go, that he can no longer lead in this town. Others believe both Lewis and Kunik should step down. Still others think the police department in its entirety should be disbanded and law enforcement in town turned over to the Charlotte County Sheriff's Office.

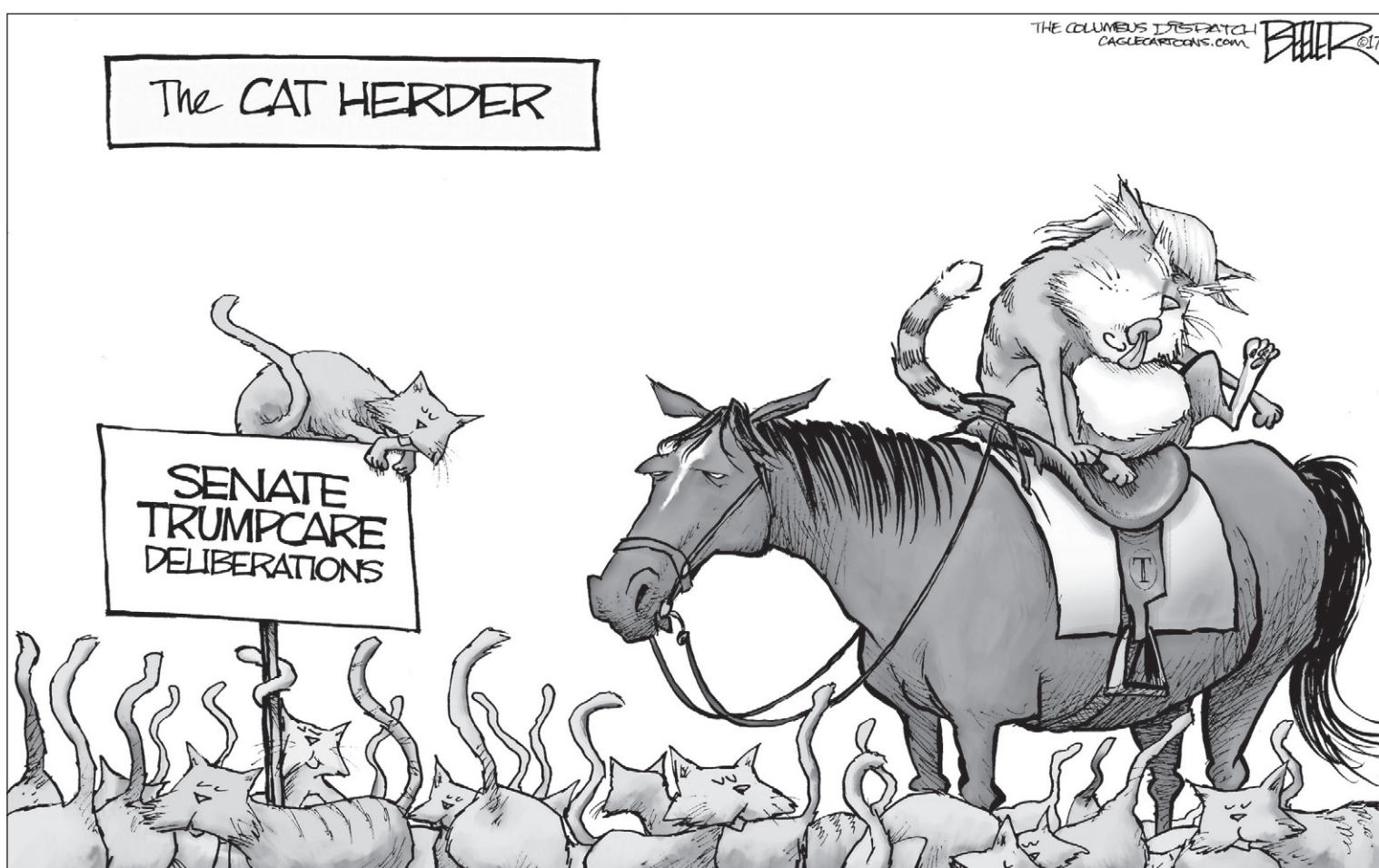
The City Council lately has shown an ear for selective hearing. It has been sensitive to the small percentage of voters who don red shirts and complain about their peace and quiet being disrupted.

The council needs to listen here.

Kunik has had many successes during his tenure as city manager. For example, apart from the police department, he has one of the finest working staffs in the country, small town or no. Some of the employees he inherited, some he brought on-board.

The police department under Lewis' leadership has become an embarrassment to the city. It needs to be set right, with responsible leadership concerned more with public safety than public relations.

Before anything is done about Kunik's future with the city, that needs to be done.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Shop, dine somewhere else

Editor:

We voted for medical marijuana almost eight months ago. The votes were counted and the bill passed.

We, the patients who need this prescription have waited long enough. If this would have been a tax bill, the money would have been taken out of our checks immediately.

The state of Florida has failed the people once again by passing the bill down the channels to where it is at a complete standstill. Now we are at the point where Charlotte County does not want to have dispensaries, making the patients have to drive a hour away as it stands now.

Politics can be very nasty at times, because people won't put themselves in others' shoes. Maybe it's time for the people to shop, dine, grocery and gas up in the county that helps the patients.

Teri Freed
Port Charlotte

More input from citizens

Editor:

I generally keep up on political issues in Charlotte County, but when I read many of your op-ed editorials, I can only guess that somebody picked a timely topic, spent an hour on research, and then just blathered away until the word count was met.

Specifically, I refer to your editorial on choice of school textbooks. Incredibly, you feel that allowing more citizens within the school district to participate in how their children are educated is an imposition of a "state decision-making system on local districts." You should be aware that the process of textbook selection was already determined by the state.

HB989 changes the current process by allowing any local taxpayer access to the school district's educational materials, and requiring the school system to hold a hearing on the merits of any complaints. It establishes hard and fast rules for making materials available, accepting objections, scheduling and advertising hearings. The bill requires hiring an "unbiased and qualified hearing officer,"

not a school employee, to moderate such a hearing. The bill also says that after such a hearing, "the school board's decision is final and not subject to further petition or review."

So who loses? The school board still has the final say, albeit they must adapt to a new process, and more citizens are allowed to comment on the quality of local education. Our United States became the greatest and most free nation on Earth because citizens could and did have relevant input to their governance.

John R. Doner
Port Charlotte

Tourism has a big impact

Editor:

Read your article in July 13 paper today re tourism.

Just out of curiosity, last "season" I tracked license plates I saw in the county. A total of 46 states and three provinces. The only states I didn't see were Nevada, Arizona, Hawaii and Utah.

Hard to deny the impact tourism has on our area, for better or worse.

Mike Jensen
Punta Gorda

For the old days of self-discipline

Editor:

After reading the letter to the editor in Wednesday's paper, in which the author stated what she didn't have back in her day, I decided I would like to share some of my memories of what we did have in my day.

We all had respect for the office of the president, whether we agreed with him or not. We had reporters who had respect for that office and showed decorum for themselves and each other by obeying the laws that were in place, whether or not they agreed with them.

Educators were allowed to tell students the rules of the school and were able to hold students responsible for their behavior. We had classes that taught children the history of this country, including the significance of the Pledge of Allegiance.

We had rights as long as the rules were followed but those rights did not include swearing in public, breaking

property, name-calling in public and taking embarrassing pictures of others and sharing them with the world. Lawbreakers were held responsible for their actions.

Last, but not least, children were not in charge. Most couples knew they were to prepare their children to be responsible adults making sure they obeyed the laws. The children also knew if they wanted their own money they would have to work to earn it.

It was far from a perfect world but we learned self-discipline and respect and everyone had rights but not the right to insult and do bodily harm to others in public.

Louise Napolitano
Englewood

Public schools controlled from afar

Editor:

Charter schools are an "excuse," said the *Sun*. The state is siphoning the funds from public schools to fund schools that "cherry pick" their students, thereby leaving to the public schools the "less desirable." (Quotes mine.)

We are also told that the legislative body seems to be in "cahoots" with some senior legislator whose spouse is making a living using education as a means to line their pockets, because some charter schools are "for profit." We are so imbued with "public education" as to believe it is the "only" method and should be preserved in perpetuity.

Charters came about because the so-called "public" schools were removed from local control, became part of the "education industrial complex" and were controlled, not by the parents, but by political entities of the state and the federal government.

If the schools want the funds they need, they should demand that the Department of Education be disbanded and the funds returned to the local level. All this weeping and gnashing of teeth over loss of funds. If the teachers and the "educators" had been smart, they would have tried to make their individual fiefdoms the prime example of excellence.

Had they done that, parents would have been only too happy to pay the teachers to stay at the schools. Unfortunately, they succumbed to the lure of "union control" while they

sit in the "one size fits all" cubicle. No wonder they are uncomfortable.

Hats off to those legislators who saw the handwriting on the wall.

Richard J. Pitz
Punta Gorda

'Care' bill mistreats seniors

Editor:

It is laughable that "care" is even in the title of the new health care bill. Many people in Port Charlotte, Charlotte County, and the surrounding areas and Florida are going to be adversely affected if "Obamacare" is repealed.

I don't know if the majority of politicians in Florida and in Washington really understand what life is like now for retirees, seniors, fixed-income people of all ages and conditions. If the medical/health care industry are more interested in the bottom line or serving the people they are paid to serve.

Open your eyes and really see what life is like for so many. In the "greatest" country in the world, the way we treat, or should I say mistreat, our fellow Americans this way.

Truly, now more than ever, God bless America.

William J. Leonard
Port Charlotte

Will of voters not respected

Editor:

What has happened to "government of the people, by the people and for the people?"

Four idiot commissioners can decide what's best for the 70 percent of the residents of Charlotte County? They are allowed to override the will of the voters?

Wake up, people! We did not vote for open drug sales. We voted for a medical use. It can be governed and controlled. Oh, yeah, also taxed. Think about that, you four brainiacs.

Amazing, we fight Cuban suppression for 60 years and exercise the same form of government right here at home.

State law says the counties can opt out of allowing dispensaries, but I think that move would require the will of the majority of the voters.

Wake up, America!

Butch Erny
Port Charlotte

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OUR VIEW

Moving on, one year past Knowlton tragedy

OUR POSITION: Mourning Mary Knowlton, asking for justice.

As anyone who has unexpectedly lost a loved one understands, the first year is always the hardest. Each day can be difficult. Every holiday, every anniversary is a jab in a fresh wound. Pain is an everyday companion, never more so than on significant dates.

A Page 1 story today by *Sun* correspondent Rusty Pray addresses the experience and pain of Gary Knowlton, whose wife was slain one year ago in bizarre circumstances during a public safety demonstration in Punta Gorda.

We know the outline. The community-minded Mary Knowlton, a retired librarian from Minnesota, was participating in a Chamber of Commerce get-to-know-your-city-better event. Dozens of other citizens were there. City officials were there. Punta Gorda Police Department brass were there to lead the group in what is called a "Shoot/don't Shoot" demonstration.

You've seen those before on TV. They are intended to show regular people how difficult it is for police to exercise judgment in a pinch and make correct instantaneous decisions during street confrontations with someone who may or may not be armed.

A year ago this evening, something went terribly wrong.

The officer playing the role of the "bad guy" used a real gun that was loaded, somehow, with real bullets during the play-act. Mary Knowlton, who had volunteered to play the role of "police officer," did not have a real gun or live ammunition. The real officer, Lee Coel, shot the pretend officer, Mary Knowlton, as all those other people — city officials and police brass — looked on.

She was pronounced dead a short time later at Lee Memorial Hospital.

That happened a year ago this evening. This is, likely, the most painful date for Gary Knowlton, Mary's husband of 55 years; his son, Steve Knowlton; and the Knowltons' many friends and relations back home in Minnesota and here in Florida.

As Gary wrote recently, "When I wake up in the morning and her usual smile isn't there to greet me, I get busy with something else. I have many things to do to take care of the rest of the day, but nothing replaces her personality, her caring ways. Life will never be the same."

Our deepest sympathy and blessings to Mary Knowlton's loved ones. May Gary and Steve Knowlton find peace.

May they also find justice. May we all.

Lee Coel has been charged with manslaughter. He is awaiting trial. He has been fired by the city.

Punta Gorda Police Chief Tom Lewis — among the police brass looking on that night and the person in charge of the situation — was tried on a misdemeanor charge of culpable negligence but acquitted by a jury in June.

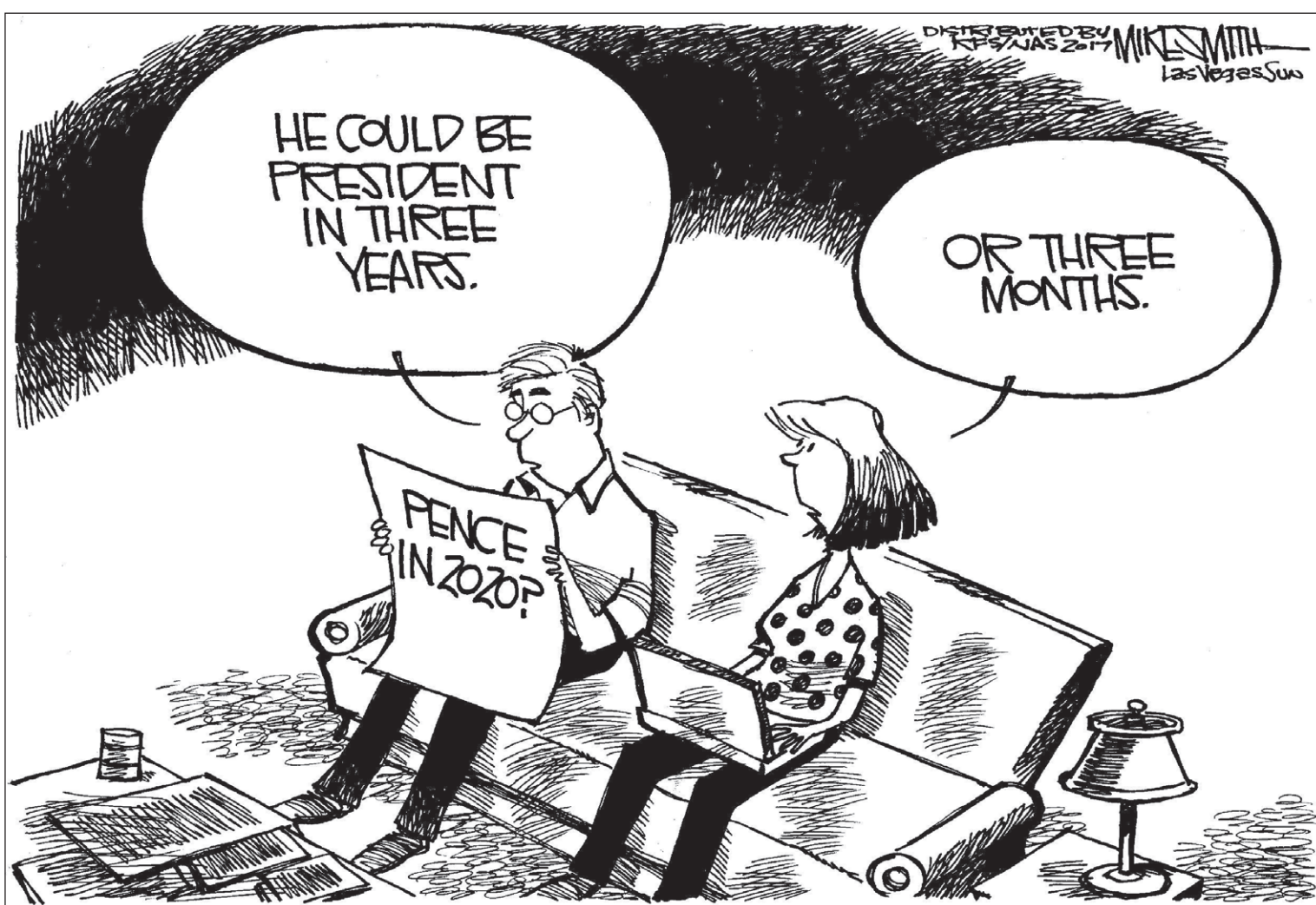
He is on administrative leave. A year after Mary Knowlton's death, the man in charge is still receiving his salary as police chief of the city of Punta Gorda.

The decision on Lewis' fate rests with City Manager Howard Kunik. Kunik is awaiting the results of an internal affairs investigation he set in place.

Still waiting.

The city of Punta Gorda will not be able to move on past this unimaginable incident until Kunik acts. We believe fully Lewis must go.

Justice will not be served until Lewis' tenure as Punta Gorda police officer is severed. This fraction of justice must be done and should be done now.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Health care fixes possible

Editor:

A letter was submitted regarding the lower level of care if we had single-payer, "Medicaid for all." The premise was that it would result in less coverage for some people.

Then a response was penned that some people should be willing to accept less services so that others could have health care.

That is an interesting take on life. I have worked and sacrificed to be a responsible adult.

One of those things was to carry insurance — health, life and auto. In order to do so, we did without new cars, cellphones, flat screen TVs and Disney vacations. I didn't drink, smoke or do drugs. I made a choice.

And I was far from high income.

And, in my taxes, I paid for indigent health care by the tax money taken for hospitals to treat the uninsured.

No one is saying that we don't need to do better at caring for the uninsured. We are just saying that the Affordable Care Act is too expensive and creates too much expansion of government agencies.

The cost per person is ridiculous.

Two simple and common-sense fixes are still available if Congress has the will and the backbone.

Open the insurance market across state lines and do tort reform. Throwing money at a problem seldom fixes anything.

John Bryant
Rotonda West

Trump brought shame on Scouts

Editor:

I am appalled at the comments of President Trump while addressing a National Boy Scout assembly.

I achieved the rank of Eagle Scout in Troop 34 of Linden, New Jersey, in 1959, was a Camp Winnebago staff member for two summers, cub master in Palmyra, New York, and helped with a Scout troop in Shawnee, Oklahoma, in the 1980s.

Scouting cannot condone or support the outrageous comments of this man.

You should personally

expect from your staff the principles enumerated in the Boy Scout Oath and Law and not tolerate "hate speech" expressed by President Trump.

Trump brought shame on our organization and principles.

Donald Sexton
Punta Gorda

Mainstream media trolling president

Editor:

Another day, another *Sun* newspaper to peruse. I immediately yanked out the USA Today section, trying not to read the ongoing daily dreaded Trump rage page; journalistic sophistry at large. Alas, I got caught up with the breaking news of mainstream media trolling the U.S. president, his family members, et al. I didn't read it all and got it firmly placed in the bottom of the bird cage. My satyagraha evident, I pressed on with my day. Another day, another 50 cents.

Alan P. Lessman
Punta Gorda

Be careful what you wish for

Editor:

I write in response to your July 29 edition, which was chock-full of support that seems designed to get some summer momentum going about allowing tall buildings in Punta Gorda. You completely miss the point of residents' support for our "low-profile" visage.

Article after article compares Punta Gorda unfavorably to other cities near and far, as if it would be a good thing for us to be like those other places in permitting tall buildings. One of the best parts of our low profile on the riverfront is that it is now so rare. If you want tall buildings and their bigger tax revenues, you'll also sacrifice our distinct competitive advantage over other urban waterfront communities. We have plenty of brain power to build on that distinction rather than toss it in the trash.

And also, get ready for increased: traffic, crime, civic discord and harm to water views for those who do not live in the tall buildings.

As my dear dad used to say when I offered a bone-headed idea as a child: "Wassamataforyou? You crazy?" We have a very good

thing going here. All those whom you quoted singing the praises of being more like Naples or Fort Myers ought to go get jobs there. Or read again the fables of the "Goose that Laid the Golden Egg" and "The Dog and Its Reflection." Those fables have endured for many centuries because they toll a bell that rings true.

Anne Camille Talley
Punta Gorda

We are our own killers

Editor:

Do I hear the sound of distant war drums again? What are the mothers and fathers telling their children? Do our societies ruin the children of the world with religion, nationalism and politics? Do societies just look for reasons to hate and kill each other?

Young minds are easily taught to hate and kill by the old who profess their love and then send them off to kill or be killed.

People, let's use logic, science, technology and start to communicate. These cellphones and computers can let the people of the world see through what the leaders want us to believe: faith, myth, fantasy. Please use logic.

Did we really win in Korea? Did North Korea win? Did we really win in Vietnam? Did the Vietnamese win? What about our 15-year war? Are we winning? Are they? Do you too hear the drums?

Wait! Stop, stop! I have read the history of the planet. It appears to me humans are natural-born killers. If we can't kill each other with clubs, swords or bombs, we will kill ourselves with alcohol, suicide, guns and drugs. More people died of drug overdoses last year than died in the Vietnam war.

Between guns, drugs and obesity-related illnesses, we are our own killers.

John Vacha
Port Charlotte

Trump is king of name-calling

Editor:

A recent letter flogged others for calling Trump names. Name-calling — Lyin' Ted, Little Marco, Crooked Hillary, Low-Energy Jeb, Crazy Bernie, Pocahontas Warren — is his singular talent. Almost

daily, Trump calls someone a "loser." He publicly described his daughter as a "piece of ass." Judges are "so-called." News outlets that quote him are "fake news."

One article listed 351 people, places and things that Trump has insulted. Only 351? He insulted allies — England, Canada, Australia, Germany — but praised Putin as a strong leader, congratulated Erdogan on gaining dictatorial powers in Turkey, and applauded the Philippines' Duterte for killing over 7,000 people without trials. Trump thinks insulting the Chinese will inspire them to help with North Korea, exhibiting no knowledge of the Chinese idea of "face."

He pulled us out of the Paris climate change accord, ceding leadership on the issue and, by extension, on science in general. There's a name for that.

A recent survey of 37 nations showed favorable ratings of the United States has dropped from 64 percent to 49 percent since his inauguration. What happens when a real external crisis erupts and we need allies? Trump has no idea how to build a coalition of nations.

Intimidation is his chief legislative tool. Ignorant of content or process, he only wants wins. He dictates policy without consulting qualified advisers on military and travel bans. He has no interest in learning the massive amount of information he lacks.

So, no, ma'am, some of us don't stand behind this national embarrassment.

Tom Butler
Port Charlotte

President acting like dictator

Editor:

I keep hearing how President Trump was elected to make drastic changes. How can this be, as he did not receive a mandate?

In fact, he received less than 50 percent of the vote, hardly an overwhelming mandate. Further, someone else received more votes than Donald Trump.

Under the circumstances, he should be acting presidential and representing the American people, rather than acting like he was elected dictator.

Joe Rihn
Englewood

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