

VIEWPOINT

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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.

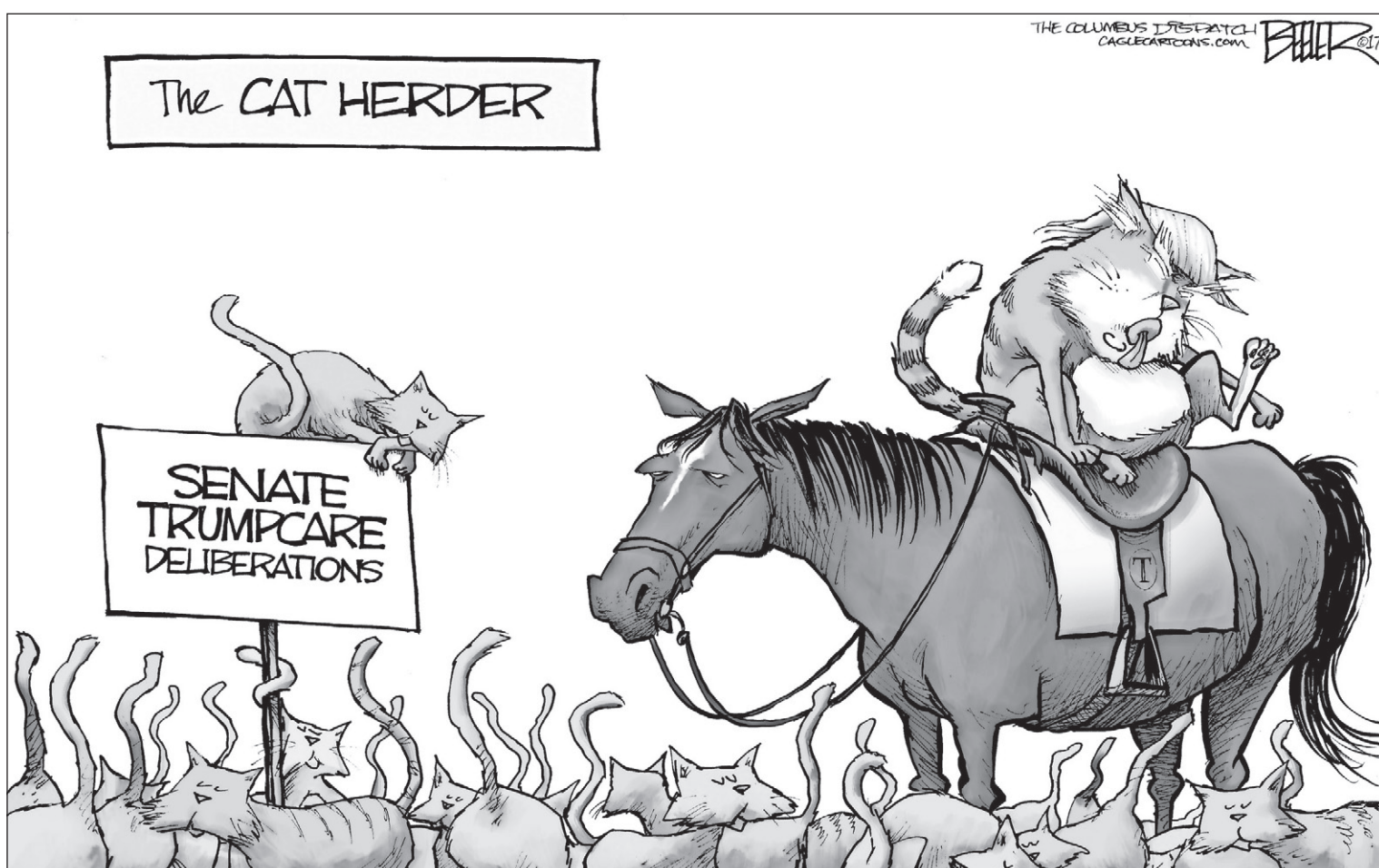
The City Council lately has shown an ear for selective hearing. It has been sensitive to the small percentage of voters who don red shirts and complain about their peace and quiet being disrupted.

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

HOW TO SUBMIT A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Letters are welcome on virtually any subject, but we do have some rules. Please keep them to less than 250 words. Letters will be edited to length as well as for grammar and spelling. All letters must be signed with full name — not initials. An address and telephone number must be included. The phone number and address are not for publication, but must be provided. Due to the number of letters received, we are able to run only one letter per person per month.

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.