

VIEWPOINT

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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.

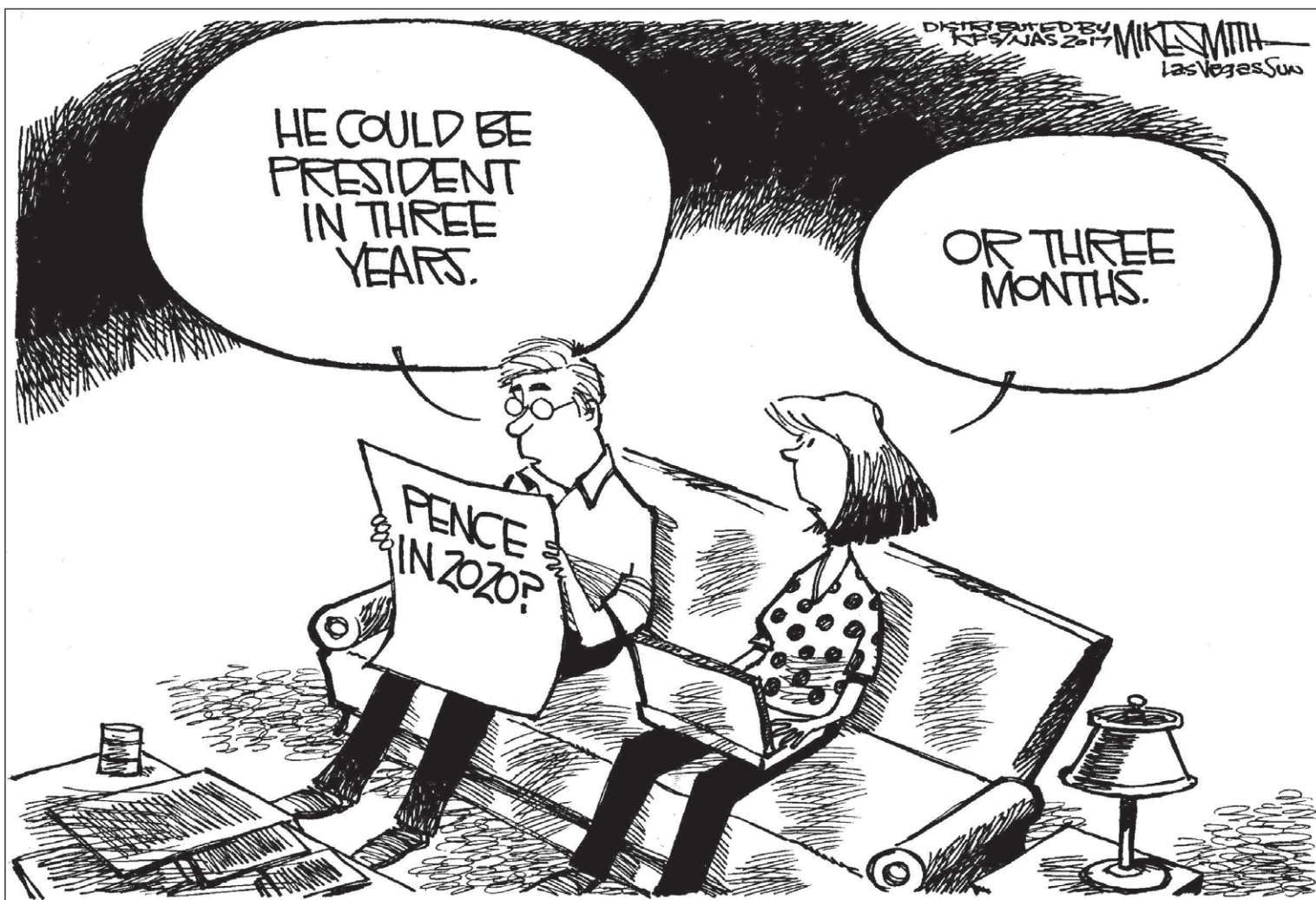
He is on administrative leave. A year after Mary Knowlton's death, the man in charge is still receiving his salary as police chief of the city of Punta Gorda.

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: "Wassamatafor you? 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

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.