

# The Informed Democrat

~ of SWFL ~

## Everglades restoration bill SB10 signed



Lake Okechobee boat outing, from: "Florida: A Winter Playground"; *The Outing Magazine*, Jan. 1909

Governor Rick Scott signed a bill into law last week that funds a \$1.5 billion plan to restore the Everglades and stop polluted water in Lake Okeechobee from pouring into the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie rivers. The law pledges roughly \$800 million to restore the Everglades over the next 10 years. The centerpiece of the project—the cost of which will

be split between the state and federal governments—is a 78-billion-gallon reservoir south of Lake Okeechobee to store and clean water. That reservoir will send clean water into the Everglades and prevent toxic discharges from polluting the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie rivers.

## HB969 'crisis pregnancy' bill withdrawn, dead?

On May 5, the Florida Senate indefinitely postponed and withdrew from consideration **HB969**. It provides funding for pregnancy support, but prohibits the Department of Health from partnering with organizations that provide abortion services. It must "subcontract only with providers that exclusively promote and support childbirth."

## 'Informed Dem' launches

Welcome to Lee Co Dems' new monthly local issues roundup, *The Informed Democrat of SWFL*. Created by a small staff of volunteer citizen journalists, we aim to help Democrats be the best-informed person in any discussion of local issues, to help spark positive change in SWFL.

*Got an issue we should cover? Interested in joining our team? Email [informeddem@gmail.com](mailto:informeddem@gmail.com)*

### KEY DATES: ELECTIONS 2017

#### CITIES OF FORT MYERS & CAPE CORAL

29 Jul.: Ballots mailed to military & o/s (Primary)

14 Aug.: Voter registration deadline (Primary)

#### 12 Sep.: Primary

22 Sep.: Ballots mailed to military & o/s (General)

3 Oct.: Ballots mailed

10 Oct.: Voter registration deadline (General)

30 Oct.-4 Nov.: Early voting (10am to 6pm daily)

**7 Nov.: General Election (10am to 6pm)**

## SWFL seniors lose vital CSFP food support

The Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) has been providing 2,284 seniors in Lee, Collier, and Charlotte Counties with about 35 pounds of food a month since 2015. The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (DFACS) has decided to stop distributing CSFP food here, effective July 1.

About 1 million pounds of food aid will no longer be available to hungry seniors in our community. Those affected are among our poorest and most vulnerable residents.

## Stay informed

Politics moves fast. Get the latest updates at:

[leecountydems.org](http://leecountydems.org)

or follow 'Lee County Democrats' on Facebook

## Lee County conservation

Conservation 20/20 bought Caloosahatchee Creek Preserve, and parcels in North Fort Myers and Sanibel, and is working to buy Edison Farms. Locals are fighting to save the old golf course in Cape Coral.

## A New Day for FMPD?

With elections coming up for Fort Myers Mayor, Randy Henderson, and City Council Wards 1, 3 & 5, questions remain regarding their effectiveness with the Fort Myers Police Department (FMPD).

In a unanimous vote in September 2015, a Mayoral task force was created to partner with a Lee County task force with a goal of reducing gun violence and getting violent offenders off the street. This plan, however, suffered a huge backlash and was labeled ineffective. Citizens complained to the Mayor and City Council about harassment and abuse of power by Fort Myers police officers. In an interview with News-Press in March, Mayor Henderson responded to questions on the effectiveness of the task force and citizen complaints: “The citizens do not bring in sufficient evidence to back up their claim, but an investigation is done when they have the facts.”

### Better oversight is needed.

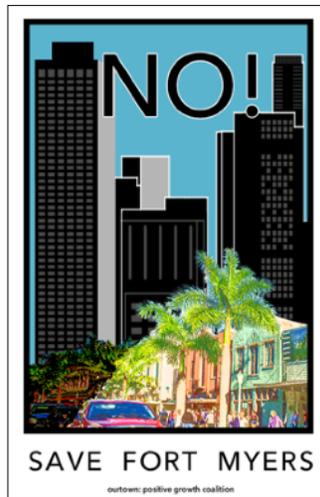
So, what are the facts? Fort Myers City Council has limited authority over the police department. There is a Citizens Police Review Board which acts only as an advisory to the Chief of Police. The Board reviews unsworn citizen complaints not currently under police investigation, and also reviews closed investigations.

The Freeh report showed that the police department actively covered up the city’s violence problem in order to appear safer.

A new Chief of Police, Derrick Diggs, was hired in August, and on May 15 the City approved a new deputy chief: Randall Pepitone from Toledo, OH. Calls for a Department of Justice Investigation continue, but it is considered unlikely to happen.

## City promises housing workshops for ‘Midtown’

Fort Myers City Council has promised to conduct workshops with local residents before it changes the City’s Comprehensive Plan, after community outcry over its ‘Midtown’ plan. The plan was proposed by a local developer in September, and aims to help build more high-rise apartments by increasing density, reducing rules, simplifying costs, and removing public hearings.



Opponents say the City needs attainable workforce housing, not luxury towers. They point to the large number of unsold high-rise units already built, subsidized by \$20M in property tax refunds.

Only citizen pushback avoided Council approval of the plan, with the next vote tabled until August 7th. Workshop dates have yet to be announced.

## Mining in Lee Co.

Lee Co’s Board of Commissioners overturned a recommendation from its Local Planning Agency to expand the area where limerock mining is allowed.

## Register to vote, now!



Image: Flickr user 'justgrimes'

Too many times City, county and state elected officials are elected to office with minimum voter involvement. Meaningful change often begins with local officials, who create laws, policies and budgets that directly affect our day-to-day lives.

*Watch this space for in-depth coverage of this year’s Fort Myers and Cape Coral elections.*

## Charter schools: separate, unequal



Image: Bryan McDonald via Flickr

State funding increasingly goes to schools that may exclude the most needy and vulnerable students. Charter schools are free to deny admittance to any student, as they see fit.

Lee County Schools has the authority to approve and renew a school’s charter, but otherwise the schools mostly run their own affairs. This includes deciding which students are admitted.

Regular public schools are barred from discrimination in any form when admitting students, but charter schools are not subject to such a requirement.

A fair society begins with fair and equitable access to education.