

Editorial Opinion

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Affordable housing

An impressive start on Collier's problem

What took minutes to decide Tuesday will take months to come to fruition, but its effects may benefit the workforce in Collier County for years to come.

Collier government housing staff deserves kudos for delivering to county commissioners a sound approach to identifying and addressing what to us is the most pressing issue in 2016 — providing homes affordable to workers in all wage ranges and for senior citizens.

What's most impressive about the approach is that it broadly involves the public, private and nonprofit sectors in Collier, creating a task force that involves major employers and stakeholders whose livelihood is at risk if there aren't affordable places for folks to live.

Commissioners wisely moved the recommendation forward with minimal discussion, rather than engaging Tuesday in a debate of some of the charged issues surrounding Collier's housing costs. One of those is where in the county any of the more-affordable housing should be built — there has been much discussion of late whether East Naples has more than its fair share. Another charged issue surrounds the income level of workers who are in need of relief.

Stakeholders

The commission's decision enables county staff to begin assembling a task force that includes representatives of major employers, such as international medical device manufacturer Arthrex, Publix and the NCH Healthcare System.

Government agencies — they, too, are major Collier employers needing housing for their workers — are represented, including the school district, county government, the cities and the Collier County Sheriff's Office. Major industries are represented, including hospitality, the apartment association, realty boards, construction, banking and Greater Naples and Immokalee chambers of commerce.

Nonprofits such as the United Way of Collier County, agencies engaged in assisting the homeless and organizations that build affordable housing are represented, as are advocates for seniors.

The task force will help the county's staff and the commission's affordable housing advisory committee shape a proposal to hire a consultant who will coordinate putting together a county housing plan. The plan is expected to take a year to compile.

Math problem

The most recent real estate price report for Collier County shows the median single-family home resale price is \$465,000, which is 16.3 percent higher than \$400,000 a year ago. That's more than double the statewide median home price of \$213,000 that comparatively is 9.2 percent higher than \$195,000 a year ago.

The National Association of Realtors forecasts home price increases of 4.5 percent this year and 3.2 percent in 2017. Don't be surprised to see those percentages topped in Collier County by the time the housing plan is completed.

Housing prices aren't slowing down the demand for new construction. Collier building department records show May was the 16th consecutive month that the number of single-family building permits topped 200. So far in 2016, there have been 54 permits for multifamily projects compared with 35 in the same months last year.

Meanwhile, U.S. Census figures show the income for people to afford these places to live is headed in the opposite direction. Collier's median household income was \$58,106 in 2006-10 while the most recent census estimate puts it lower, at \$56,250.

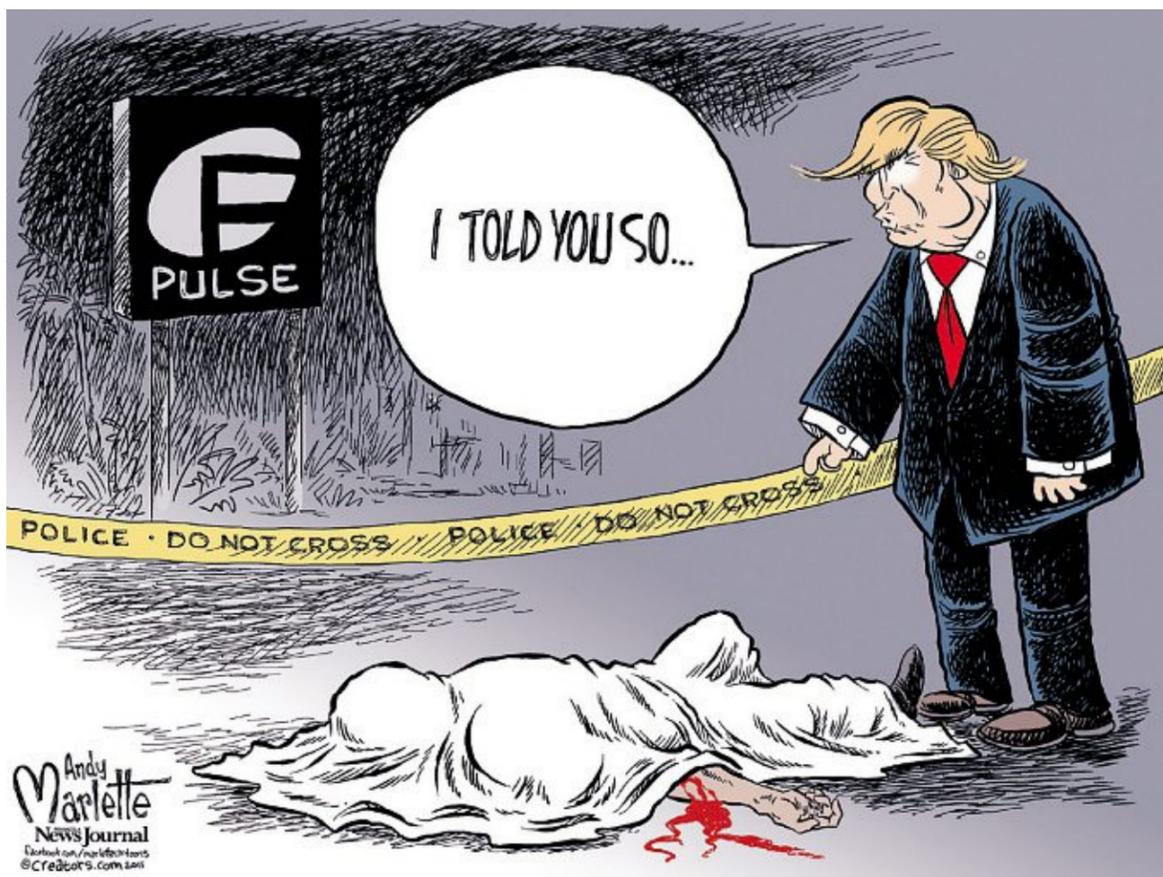
Rentals

While commissioners generally didn't predetermine Tuesday the direction the task force should go, Commissioner Georgia Hiller did aptly note that rental housing is a critical part of the equation.

A county government spokesman said Tuesday the staff's most recent survey of rental apartment complexes showed 99 percent occupancy. In the late-April survey, 25 complexes responded that there were 47 units available out of 4,597 total and three-quarters of the complexes had no vacancy at all.

2017

By the time the housing plan comes together, three or four faces will have changed on the five-member County Commission after the fall election. The current commission wisely didn't want to wait to hand off this decision. The need is too great to wait.



LETTERS

Patricia Freyberg, *Naples*

Repeated falsely

Adolf Hitler said, "If you tell a big enough lie and tell it frequently enough, it will be believed."

Letter-writer David Bolduc obviously believes this in continually repeating that Collier County Public Schools Superintendent Kamela Patton has engaged in a "failed billion-dollar digital-learning experiment."

In efforts to drag down Collier County schools and their outstanding superintendent, he does not think people will fact-check his statements.

First, it should be noted that the largest budget of the four years Patton has supervised budget planning came this year — \$887,615,327 in the general fund. Since 76 percent of the general fund expenditures go to salaries, benefits and substitutes, is the letter implying that paying teachers was a waste of money?

Even if all four budgets were at that same level, only \$85,211,068 was available after staff costs to spend on technology, transportation and every other expense of the district, somewhat less than \$1 billion.

If we really look at the budgets in detail, \$3,197,000 was budgeted for classroom technology this year and \$3,575,830 last year from the capital budget. Unless the tooth fairy left around \$93 million for technology between 2012 and 2014, then the letter is grossly exaggerating or distorting the truth.

Why he wants to paint the image of his community's schools as a failure remains a mystery. If he is so enamored with the Massachusetts public schools which he cites, why isn't he there?

Possibly it's to avoid the \$5,120 average property tax per homeowner and the 5.1 percent income tax rates which allow the state to pay teachers an average of \$72,334 vs. Florida's average of \$46,598.

Virgil Cottongim, *Naples*

Brock over Hiller

I've never seen a more lopsided political campaign story than one on a recent front page of the Naples Daily News.

It seemed like a regular article until Page 4A. There, in big type: "I understand them both very well. Brock, I think, does a great disservice to his office ... Georgia Hiller is more levelheaded and knowledgeable of the laws that govern the clerk's station." — Fred Coyle, former commissioner. Bosh!

Truth — Collier County Clerk of Courts Dwight Brock's duty sets him as trustee of taxpayer funds. To pay bills, the law is specific on how Brock is to handle payments. If anything is in question, he must see to it that it is corrected before he allows tax funds to be released.

Brock found discrepancies, withheld payments and asked the County

Letter of the Day

Vince D'Angelo, *Naples*

Put it to rest

Periodically, letters castigate Naples drivers for not using their turn signals when appropriate, claiming it's worse here than most anywhere in the country.

Some even accuse us of doing it out of orneriness. How ridiculous!

It's such a simple thing to do requiring almost no effort, so why don't we? I'll tell you why: We're old, we forget and easily are distracted.

We have more elderly drivers than most places. That's why we're the "Use-No-Turn-Signal" capital of the nation. Put it to rest.

Commission to clarify them. Coyle and three others (except for Commissioner Tom Henning) became arrogant — not concerned as a commissioner elected the same as Brock should be, but instead became aggravated that Brock had the audacity to question them.

Instead of working with Brock to protect taxpayers, they filed a lawsuit to block the clerk from doing his job and tried to force him to violate his duties. That suit lasted 10 years and cost the taxpayers more than \$8 million; Brock was upheld at every level of the court process to the Florida Supreme Court.

Coyle has a beef with Brock and is taking his last shot to get one over on him. Brock is an outstanding clerk. Commissioner Georgia Hiller has been a loose cannon.

No to Hiller/Coyle.

Wayne Fuller, *Naples*

No action

A letter writer asked for my interpretation of my word "properly" when used in a prior letter to describe Hillary Clinton's non-action on the Benghazi, Libya, turmoil.

Her non-action, as I described in my original letter, was "no action" months before when these same men (now dead) and others pleaded with her for help and all she did was sit on her hands.

Have you (or the parents of the dead men) ever thought that had she heeded the requests of these and others for help, the "Benghazi attack" may never have materialized, thus four more American lives may have been saved. Had any one of these dead men been your son, would you still feel her non-actions were in the best interests of the country and its people?

Taken one step closer: Why did she (and the Obama administration) still send no immediate help on the night of the attack? Why did she email her daughter that the film was not the cause of the attack, but for

days said it was? She could not answer that one during her testimony.

Add on to this disgrace her email scandal, about which she has been caught distorting the truth again — this is presidential and commander in chief of our armed forces material? How about her involvement in the Clinton Foundation misuse of funds and possible illegal actions?

I guess the response to "properly" may be "What difference does it make?"

Never Hillary Clinton.

Michael G. Valente, *Naples*

What makes a nation

Radio talk-show host Michael Savage defines a nation by "its borders, its language, its culture."

If you accept this definition, I would say that we are in trouble maintaining our nation.

Our southern border is so porous that it looks like a huge revolving door with people coming and sometimes going with impunity.

What about our language? Spanish is the predominant foreign language spoken here. Most businesses ask you, when you call their number, to press "two" or "nine" on your phone, which is said in Spanish, if this is how you want to conduct your business.

Signs are in English and Spanish and voting places have bilingual assistants if needed. Shouldn't you have to understand and speak English to vote if you are an American citizen? No other foreign immigrants have had this done to this extent for their benefit. What I believe this does is curtail assimilation, and that brings us to "our culture."

There is nothing wrong with keeping your culture as an immigrant to America.

What is wrong is keeping this culture over assimilation to the American way of life. We've made it so easy on Spanish-speaking people that many have no interest or desire to be Americans.

They do not have to speak our language or accept our culture to survive.

I think it's time to stop this dual language. We should have one language, one nation, and then we will truly be Americans under God!

Mike Flounlacker, *Naples*

D-Day ignored

Shame on you.

No article in the June 6 newspaper celebrating the sacrifice made on a beach in France on June 6, 1944 — D-Day.

Did you forget a free press didn't come free?

Thanks to all who served and serve to protect our freedom both here and abroad.

Not all have forgotten you.