

VIEWPOINTS

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What happens 10 years after a proposed Fla. property tax cut? | Column, August 14

Surprisingly agreeable

I almost fell out of my chair reading former Republican state Sen. Jeff Brandes’ viewpoint on the proposed Florida property tax amendment. I have to admit, it’s not often — actually, almost never — that I find myself agreeing with a Republican politician. But this is the second time I’ve agreed with Mr. Brandes. The first was when, as a state senator, he was the lone Republican to vote against the bill targeting Disney’s self-governing privileges. Now he’s making sense again.

Voting against this proposed property tax amendment is a no-brainer. As Mr. Brandes points out, who knows what Florida will look like in 10, 20 or 30 years? Heck, at the rate we’re going, half of Florida might be under water by then. And somehow I doubt the Legislature will be eager to explain where the money will come from to replace the property tax revenue we gave away.

So, as painful as it is for me to say this: Hats off to Mr. Brandes. He never represented my district, but he appears to possess something that seems increasingly scarce among Florida Republicans: common sense. I never thought I’d be writing a letter thanking a Republican for making sense. Maybe there really is hope for Florida after all.

David Burg, Tampa

Committee with ties to Clearwater candidate has ties to Scientology | August 16

Shadowy politics

Thank you for exposing the web of political committees taking over campaigns in the two Sunday articles about Scientology and the Clearwater candidate and the St. Petersburg mayoral candidate’s contributions from Ark Invest. These shadowy committees have further corrupted politics with mazes of donations to each other that only a big-time newspaper with sufficient resources can really untangle. The voters are fighting for democracy with one arm tied behind our backs. We can’t compete with \$50,000 donations. Tallahassee and Washington, D.C., need to dig deep, find some humanity, and put voters before the money. End Citizens United and the corporate and super-wealthy control over elections, and make Florida’s election laws fair for citizens.

Linda Cobbe, Orlando

What Trump’s new vaccine order means for Florida | August 14

Trust experts

One of the most important lessons I have learned is that I have to recognize what I don’t know. For example, I am not an expert in medicine, science, war, engineering, finance, physics or law. When I encounter debates on those subjects, I generally find myself siding with the consensus positions of the intellectuals, experts and scholars who have dedicated their lives to studying those issues. I often hear people who are not experts assert that their “street smarts” or “common sense” tell them that the experts must be wrong.

I believe the most important points to

remember about the Trump administration’s release of recommended changes to the childhood vaccine schedule are that neither Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. nor President Donald Trump has any formal education or professional training in medicine or science. They are not experts, and they should be smart enough to recognize that.

Alas, they are not.
Terry R. Arnold,
Treasure Island

Aren’t you exhausted by all the balderdash? | Column, August 16

Good question

Your headline on Daniel Ruth’s column asked an important question. I thought it over and the answer was “yes.” I immediately skipped the column. Thank you for that.

John S.V. Weiss,
Spring Hill

My laundromat takes Apple Pay. Why won’t they take my cash? | Column, August 12

Cash is king

I enjoyed Mary Ann Mancuso’s column about not using cash, and she made salient points. I think, however, that she missed one. Why are businesses that refuse to take cash then allowed to charge a credit card service fee? Seems like highway robbery to me.

Joe Schumacher, Valrico
A question of value: The Woodson is so much more than a museum | Column, July 24

Woodson Museum

In the case of the Woodson African American Museum, the solution is obvious. The museum’s important story of telling the world of the mistreatment of our Black neighbors is in the beautifully renovated Manhattan Casino.

The Casino — originally a dance hall and community center, never a casino — has been a debacle for the city since Cab Callo-way left the building. Now, after spending \$7 million of taxpayers’ dollars, the city has a building that will continue to fail. Two-story retail/entertainment venues don’t work. It will remain unrented and underused. It will once again fall into disrepair under city management.

The proposed new Woodson Museum, with a now grossly inflated cost of \$40 million to 50 million, will never be built. All the gorgeous renderings won’t change the reality that the money won’t and shouldn’t be there, and that version’s operating cost would require the city to subsidize it by \$3 million to \$4 million per year.

Enter the Manhattan Casino.

It’s built and ready to occupy. It might cost another \$1 million to \$2 million to adapt to the museum’s needs, but that’s a pittance compared to the impending disastrous costs that will destroy the museum and cost taxpayers millions in continuing subsidies.

Yes, the Manhattan Casino-based museum will require subsidies, but they will be in the hundreds of thousands, not millions of dollars.

City and museum leaders, it’s your turn to get real and see the obvious.

Scott Wagman,
St. Petersburg

Letters are edited for clarity and length.

Column

The future of your children’s hospital hides in the fine print

The starvation of the Medicaid program has begun, and the fine print shows children will be the biggest victims of defunding public health insurance.

The dramatic cuts enacted in last year’s “One Big Beautiful Bill,” are now coming due. Buried in the law’s 870 pages and almost \$1 trillion dollars in reduced funding is a provision that undermines the nation’s children’s hospitals and will impact all children needing healthcare, even if they aren’t covered by Medicaid.

Last year’s legislation curbed funding for State Directed Payments — a way states supplement Medicaid financing and a major fiscal support for children’s hospitals. However, earlier this summer, the federal government proposed curtailing these payments even more drastically than did last year’s law. The loss of these dollars will inflict major harm to children’s services — negatively impacting the care any child receives when ill.

Drastically cutting State Directed Payments sounds like a technical footnote buried deep in a mountain of healthcare jargon. But these cuts, estimated at \$137 billion over 10 years, will reach far beyond accounting ledgers. Medicaid is an essential program for kids and the single largest insurance provider for pediatric care — covering 40% of all U.S. children.

Medicaid covers almost 2.4 million children in Florida alone, including those with disabilities, chronic diseases and complex health needs. These payments make up the difference between what Medicaid — the nation’s lowest-paying insurer — reimburses for care and the actual higher costs of providing high-quality children’s healthcare.

As a pediatrician, I know firsthand that children’s hospitals already are creating financial contingency plans. Nursing positions are being reduced, retiring pediatricians are not being replaced, and physical, occupational and speech therapists — all with advanced pediatric training — are either not being hired or having contracts terminated.

The end result: worse healthcare for all children in the region. Destabilizing the local pediatric department must be reconsidered, and the costs are not just financial — but are paid in delayed care, like the missed opportunities to



Cuts to State Directed Payments, a way states supplement Medicaid financing, are estimated at \$137 billion over 10 years. Medicaid is an essential program for kids and the single largest insurance provider for pediatric care — covering 40% of all U.S. children. (DIRK SHADD | Times)

manage a child’s diabetes or asthma. Legislators and the general public must understand that, like rural hospitals, children’s hospitals provide a safety net for entire regions and states. They provide trauma care, neonatal intensive care, pediatric cancer treatment, organ transplants and countless other child-specific services not offered in community hospitals and large adult-centered academic centers.

State Directed Payments are a lifeline for our hospitals because the economic model of pediatric care is unique. Unlike adult hospitals, our children’s facilities cannot offset lower-paying Medicaid reimbursements with higher payments from Medicare or commercially insured patients. As Medicaid funding lags, State Directed Payments stabilize hospitals that otherwise would close or stop providing pediatric programs. These funds underwrite pediatric burn units, behavioral health services, and keep our pediatric emergency room open 24/7.

Absent this money, access to child health services will erode over the next decade. Programs for autistic children will be scaled back. Child psychiatrists will be let go and wait times for specialty appointments will grow. Pediatric hospitals invest in innovative treatments like novel pediatric cancer trials, provide public health services — like educating parents about avoiding child drowning and offer preventive care. These unpaid services will evaporate. There will be no one to pick up the phone when a rural hospital calls for advice about a critically ill child because fewer telehealth and outreach

resources will be available. When those services disappear, they are gone for all children.

The effects will be even more drastic in the South. Florida is growing rapidly and as its child population expands, the demand for pediatric subspecialty care already is outpacing supply. Florida has only one developmental specialist per 200,000 children — and these financial stresses will only worsen shortages.

A broader principle is at stake in these specific cuts. When the federal government guts Medicaid programs that disproportionately serve my young patients, they are making a public statement about how much they value all our children. All the effects of these drastic measures — reduced access to care, longer wait times, financially challenged children’s hospitals — are cold political maneuvers. The victims of these cuts — toddlers, babies and infants from low-income families do not have a loud, powerful advocacy voice. Parents of my patients are too busy working two jobs to afford their child’s medications, getting their child to appointments and simply providing the care their chronically ill babies need to push back.

Parents, physicians, teachers, grandparents and all those who value kids must remind policymakers that balancing a budget and protecting children’s health are not mutually exclusive.

The quality of healthcare for all our children is hidden in the fine print.

Shetal Shah, MD FAAP, is a practicing pediatrician and former chair of the national Pediatric Policy Council.

Column

Why red states are winning green economy

Across the American Heartland, a different industrial revolution is quietly reshaping the landscape. Down rural highways, heavy haulers roll past grain silos toward rising gigafactories, battery hubs and advanced nuclear sites. In towns long defined by legacy manufacturing, the modern workforce is building next-generation clean power and tech facilities — yet the officials in those statehouses remain overwhelmingly conservative.

Call it the Heartland Energy Paradox. While national politics treats clean energy as a partisan battlefield, red America is quietly becoming the engine room of the green transition.

The numbers tell a story that cuts straight through cable-news talking points. According to nationwide project tracking by the nonpartisan business group E2 and Rhodium Group, conservative-leaning congressional districts host 80% of major new clean energy infrastructure investments — spanning utility-scale solar, battery manufacturing, advanced nuclear and hydrogen projects.

“Private capital doesn’t care about red or blue bumper stickers,” said Bob Keefe, executive director of E2. “There should be nothing partisan about creating jobs, driving economic growth and cutting costs for consumers — and that’s why the vast majority of major new clean energy factory investments are landing in conservative districts.”

Take Dalton, Georgia. Known for generations as the carpet manufacturing capital of the world, this conservative industrial stronghold is now home to North America’s largest solar panel manufacturing site. South Korea-

based Qcells poured \$2.5 billion into expanding its operations across Whitfield and Bartow counties, filling former textile corridors with automated production lines that churn out nearly 30,000 solar panels a day and employ thousands of local workers.

For Whitfield County commissioners, the facility isn’t an ideological climate statement — it’s a reliable 30-year tax base that funds local schools and emergency services without raising property taxes on farmers.

Farther west, a similar transformation is happening in Kemmerer, Wyoming. Long anchored by coal extraction and ranching, this deeply conservative, high-desert town is now the site of TerraPower’s \$4 billion Sodium advanced nuclear plant.

Built directly adjacent to a retiring coal-fired power station, the advanced reactor project preserves the region’s identity as an energy powerhouse. It taps into the existing high-voltage transmission grid while bringing 1,600 construction jobs and retraining veteran energy workers for high-wage, next-generation 24/7 power production.

Skeptics naturally push back. In a political environment where national leaders routinely mock wind energy, attack electric vehicles and question climate policy, can conservative America truly sustain this role? How can red states lead a transition that their own national party rhetoric routinely dismisses on television?

Because the view from a rural county commission room looks entirely different from a cable television studio in Washington.

While national commentary focuses on symbolic culture-war battles, local leadership zeroes in on ratepayer costs, infrastructure resiliency and expanding the local tax base. State lawmakers

may publicly rail against federal energy mandates, but behind closed doors, they fight tooth and nail to keep a multi-billion-dollar advanced manufacturing facility from locating across the state line.

As Heather Reams, the president of Citizens for Responsible Energy Solutions, frequently emphasizes in her outreach to policymakers of all stripes, right-of-center energy leadership focuses on practical results rather than ideological debates. When electricity demand spikes and utility bills rise, pragmatic local leaders focus on expanding energy capacity to ensure reliability and create jobs.

California may dominate headlines for setting aggressive environmental mandates and leading software design, but the industrial realities of the modern energy economy tell a different story. Regulators in Sacramento can pass targets, but it is the Heartland — with its abundant land, fast-track permitting and deep manufacturing roots — that is actually building the physical facilities. Coastal policy might set the direction, but conservative America is fueling the results.

When the national noise dies down, economic gravity takes over. Technology isn’t driving the transition; balance sheets, land availability, fast grid interconnections and local economic survival are powering the changes.

The future of American energy dominance won’t be decided on Capitol Hill or cable news studios. It will be built by the American Heartland — the machine shops, transmission corridors and rural industrial parks that pump blood and oxygen through the national economy.

Ken Silverstein has covered energy and international affairs for years. He wrote this for InsideSources.com.