

Orlando Sentinel

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FRONT&CENTER BARNEY BISHOP

# Getting Florida smart on justice

Bloated corrections budgets have prompted many states to seek alternatives to incarceration. Enter "smart justice."

These corrections reforms favor treatment to reduce recidivism, shortened sentences for nonviolent minor drug offenses, and wider use of electronic monitoring in felons' communities — all without compromising public safety.

Orlando Sentinel Editorial Writer Darryl E. Owens conducted an email interview with Barney Bishop, president and CEO of Florida Smart Justice Alliance, about the future of reforms here. Here are excerpts.



Bishop

**Q:** Why should Florida adopt these reforms?

**A:** Florida taxpayers are spending more than \$2.1 billion annually to warehouse prisoners, and the recidivism rate for state-operated prisons is still extremely high — 30.5 percent after three years. We can — and must — cut this down to a more acceptable level. Nonprofits have a much-lower overall recidivism rate for the same type of prisoners in the same transitional programs — only 18 percent. Why should we continue to spend hard-earned tax dollars for poor outcomes when we can spend the money in a smarter fashion and get the outcomes Florida taxpayers deserve?

**Q:** Why have state lawmakers been slow to embrace corrections reform?

**A:** Smart Justice has met resistance almost from the beginning, and that's because the status quo (state agencies, their

employees and unions) rarely wants change.

Our opponents suggest — falsely — that prisoners will not be kept in secure prisons, that these reforms will reduce public safety, that the Department of Corrections would not control which prisoners get treatment, that this is prison privatization, or that the treatment regimens are soft.

Transition programs have been around since 1985, and the Department of Corrections' own statistics show that private programs have much lower recidivism rates than DOC-operated programs.

**Q:** Are there particular reforms you're championing in this year's legislative session?

**A:** Our primary focus this year is on behavioral health care, including treatment for substance abuse, mental health and co-occurring disorders. If we can treat inmates and resolve these underlying issues, we stand

a better chance of them not committing new crimes. We also support the Department of Juvenile Justice's initiative to divert nonviolent juveniles to treatment programs. Right now, half of those who enter the juvenile system end up in adult prisons, and this initiative will ensure that fewer "graduate" to prison. Expansion of drug courts for veterans and others will also be an important goal, as DOC's statistics show that two of five current inmates are nonviolent drug abusers.

**Q:** Gov. Rick Scott was criticized last year when he vetoed a popular smart-justice bill to allow a limited number of non-violent drug offenders to finish a portion of their sentences in cheaper community drug treatment facilities. What did you think of Scott's veto?

**A:** Last year's legislation moved in the right direction, but the governor vetoed it

because law enforcement believed the bill violated the so-called 85 percent Rule (all inmates must serve at least 85 percent of their sentences). We agree with the governor and law enforcement and do not advocate any change to the 85 percent Rule, so this year's legislation will call for treatment to be done behind prison walls.

**Q:** What's your sense of the reception smart justice can expect this year in Tallahassee?

**A:** The reception has been very positive, since legislators are now more familiar with the issue. Nevertheless, unions trying to protect state government jobs oppose this common-sense approach. A recent independent Florida poll shows overwhelming public support for Smart Justice — including 78 percent who say an elected official can support these cost-effective proposals and still be considered "tough on crime."

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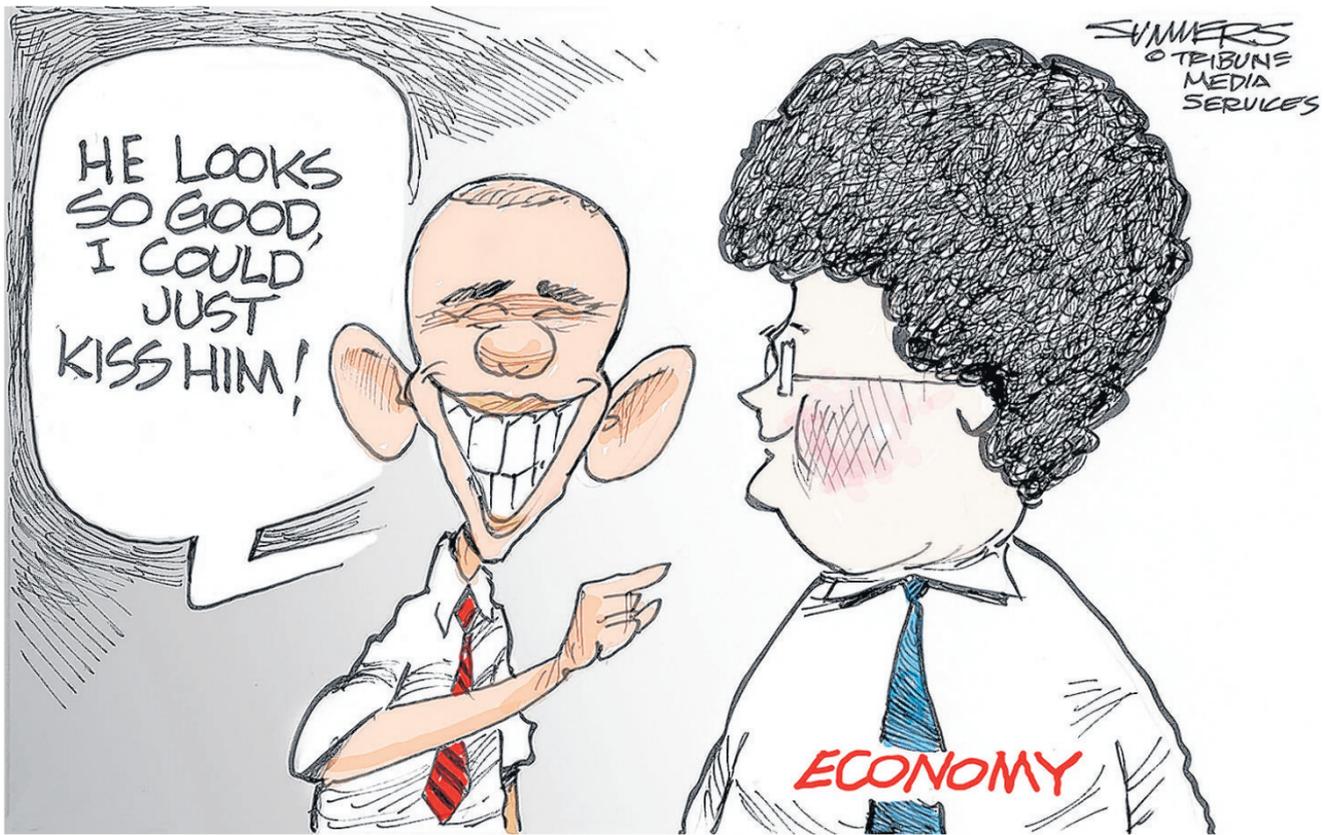
## The Needle

Wow, finding Richard III buried in a parking lot — in England, they have kings buried in parking lots! We just have teamsters."

— Bill Maher tweet

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said he would like to become the first Iranian to go into space. And today Israel said, 'Flight's on us! No problem. We've got everything covered.'"

— Jay Leno



DANA SUMMERS/TRIBUNE MEDIA SERVICES

## Letters

# Comics commentary

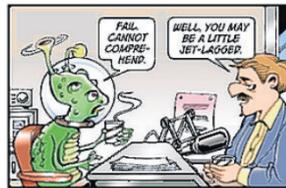
Once again, the best analysis of the news is presented in the comics section.

Garry Trudeau pointed out in a Doonesbury strip two years ago that after Sept. 11, the U.S. was attacked by terrorists and 3,000 people died. "In response, we started two long, bloody wars and built a vast homeland security apparatus — all at a cost of trillions!"

On the other hand, "during those same nine years, 270,000 Americans were killed by gunfire at home. Our response? We weakened our gun laws."

The alien in the comic strip says he fails to comprehend this. We Americans understand. Unlimited rights for gun owners including zero control of gun ownership is supported by the National Rifle Association, and our elected officials don't have the intestinal fortitude to do what is required to address the gun problem.

The American people are giving our representatives and senators excellent pay and benefits to make decisions that are best for us. We are not paying them to be led around by their noses by the NRA.



Bill Lorson Leesburg

## Here's a liberal whose aim is socialism

In response to Connie Shultz's column, "'Liberal' label doesn't begin to describe who people are" (Orlando Sentinel, Saturday): We need to be flabbergasted by the way liberals and their doctrines are infiltrating every aspect of our society.

There is one such individual who has gained power within our country to push his socialist agenda. He is even being lauded to our children by certain teachers who are determined to entice our children away from their conservative heritage.

Here are just a few of the liberal things he proposes:

■ That we give our possessions to our lazy neighbors who don't work.

■ That we desert our capitalist past and embark on some sort of love fest.

■ That we ignore the conservative wisdom of our parents and follow his socialist doctrine.

■ That we give to strangers whatever they ask.

The examples go on and on. It is time we asked ourselves how long we can exist as a nation if we allow our enemies to attack us without retaliation, and if we meekly pay the government whatever it demands in taxes, for the socialist state that he wants.

Liberal "pie in the sky" philosophies cannot be tolerated in Florida. We are a proud conservative

state, and we need to fight for our heritage.

Please do all you can to talk your neighbors into resisting the socialist teachings of this liberal character, who goes by the name of Jesus Christ.

Maloe E. Jones Clermont

## Protect our children from women, doctors

It is ironic that Joy Stricker's letter to the editor on Saturday attempting to justify abortion was followed by a letter from Thomas Boyd about our moral duty to protect our children.

Stricker's contention that only the woman and the doctor have standing to decide if an abortion is

indicated obviously disregards the life of the unborn child. I guess he or she doesn't get a vote. How sad, how selfish.

Boyd, in his letter, contends that it is a moral duty to protect our children, through force of arms, if necessary. Because there are more than 300 million guns in private ownership in the U.S. that are not going away any time soon, his contention makes considerably more sense than protecting children by registering guns or limiting their sale.

Roe v. Wade is unfortunately alive and well to protect self-serving women and greedy doctors.

I suppose if one takes Stricker's argument to its logical extreme, there would be no need to protect our children and no need to restrict gun sales, because there would be a noticeable lack of children.

In the meantime, though, women and doctors are considerably more dangerous to children than maniacs toting guns.

John Lorenz Leesburg

## Where Rubio lives

Monday letter-writer Frank Jett is upset at Sen. Marco Rubio because he wants to move his family to the Washington, D.C. area.

Rubio's South Florida dwelling is on the market, and Jett tells us that the Republican senator will maintain a token residence in his home state.

I will forgive Jett for not knowing that the majority of U.S. senators maintain residences in the D.C. area.

Sadly, we are often asked to take our eye off the ball by concentrating on nonsensical circumstances like this one. I find it more useful to evaluate our freshman senator's

job performance and how well he represents the interests of the state.

It's better that we don't follow red herrings like this one. They lead to nowhere.

Linda Smith Casselberry

## Senators unite, offer hope for the future

When I saw the headline "Senators unite on immigration" in Sunday's Sentinel, my heart beat a little faster.

As I started to read, I smiled, and at the end, I said, "Good for you." This is the direction for our country and the American people that both sides love to declare they are speaking for and protecting.

I sit in a pew at Northland, A Church Distributed each week under the teaching of the Rev. Joel Hunter.

I am not a conservative Christian, a Republican or a Democrat. I am just one of the many Americans who are crying out for everyone to just play nice and the process of varying ideas will come together with solutions.

Thanks to the senators. Let's hope this trend continues.

Mary Lopesilvero Casselberry

## The value of pi

I had to laugh when I read in Tuesday's "This day in history" that "In 1897, the Indiana House of Representatives unannouncedly passed a measure redefining the area of a circle and the value of pi; the bill died in the state Senate."

Until I realized the members of the 1897 Indiana House have all been reincarnated and serve in the current U.S. Congress.

Don Saporito Leesburg