

# The Ledger editorial page

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## EDITORIALS

LEDGER OPINIONS

### [ OPEN GOVERNMENT IN POLK ]

# Lakeland, W. Haven Reticence

The relationship between people and their governments in Florida — city and

county commissions, school boards and the Legislature, for instance — is meant to be straightforward.

Part 2 of 2

Meetings of various elected and appointed bodies must be given public notice — often an agenda is posted — and most governmental records, with some narrow exemptions, are open to people to review and copy.

In Polk County's two largest cities, Lakeland and Winter Haven, this simple recipe has become scrambled. The taste is bitter.

This is Sunshine Week, which began Sunday. News organizations and others use the week to stress the importance of open government and access to public records.

Among the matters taken up by Part 1 of this Sunshine Week editorial duo were important decisions of the Winter Haven City Commission. They were voted upon without the matters being listed on the commission meeting agendas, reported The Ledger's Ryan E. Little in an article Feb. 10.

Also analyzed was the withholding of portions of public records by the Lakeland Police Department. They are connected to the case of Bernardo Copeland Jr. of Lakeland, reported The Ledger's Jeremy Maready in an article Jan. 6. Copeland was accused of shooting a man in Lakeland in August, and then charged with attempted murder and armed robbery in the shooting of another man in November. Only afterward was he charged with aggravated battery in the first shooting.

### BATTERY TO MURDER

Another long period between commission of a serious crime and the person accused of the crime being charged by Lakeland police in a shooting was reported by Maready in a Feb. 23 article.

Adrian Nesbeth was hit in the head with a sledgehammer Aug. 27, 2010. The case was not assigned to an investigator until Oct. 18, 2010, was not completed until Nov. 18, 2010, and a warrant for the arrest of Reginald "Snooky" Enzor was not issued until Dec. 20, 2010.

On Jan. 2, 2011, Enzor killed his wife, Radiah Anquetette Craft-Enzor, by stabbing her with a knife. He pleaded guilty and is serving a life sentence in prison.

When asked by The Ledger for its Enzor records, the Lakeland Police Department said there were none.

### GRAND JURY

Following the articles about Lakeland police records, a grand jury began an investigation, which included testimony by Ledger Editor Lenore Devore and five reporters — a "very unusual step" to protect public information, said Publisher Jerome Ferson.

The grand jury made no criminal charges, but made a presentment. That report is sealed, as the law requires, and time was allowed for appeals. It may be unsealed by court order.

### LOOKING FOR LOOPHOLES

Winter Haven has been trying to finalize a deal for a developer to transform its Chain O' Lakes Complex — at U.S. 17 and Cypress Gardens Boulevard — into The Landings: shopping, dining and lodging.

On March 14, 2011, the City Commission voted to sell the land to a company owned by Taylor Pursell of Birmingham, Ala. On Jan. 28 of this year, after ongoing disagreements between the two parties, the city sent Pursell a letter terminating their contract.

Then City Attorney John Murphy asked the City Commission to hold off on eviction and allow "remediation discussions." The commission approved in a 3-0 vote Feb. 11, reported Little in an article Feb. 12.

Since then, the city has refused a Ledger request to see a letter sent by Pursell to the city. Winter Haven cited a state law giving confidentiality to communication related to mediation. One, remediation discussions are not mediation. Two, mediation is a process ordered by a court, which has not been done.

Government is powerful, so the right of the people to oversee its actions by attending board meetings and reviewing documents is critical.

Lakeland, Winter Haven and all local, regional and state agencies in Polk County should embrace these government-in-the-sunshine rights.

Art by Wash Post/IntereGroup

5/15/2013



LISA BENSON | SYNDICATED CARTOONIST

## VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

READER OPINIONS

### Lakeland Should Not Turn Itself Into A Speed-Trap Haven

Red-light runners are a menace to all other drivers on our streets. Tailgaters are a serious danger to the unfortunate motorist they happen to be following. Ignoring traffic-control devices or not using due care in construction areas are a danger to the workers on our roadways.

Blatant red-light runners are not the downside of red-light cameras. Front wheels simply crossing the white line as a motorist stops, prior to a right turn, is. Tailgating and road-rage tickets are not the problem, tickets from an interval detector on a high-speed highway are. Speeding or endangerment of our road workers isn't the issue. Issuing mass tickets to confused motorists in a poorly marked road-work area is.

In the city of Lakeland, there are half a dozen existing red-light cameras and as many as 19 more coming to an intersection near you. The utilization of following-too-closely detectors results in police issuing traffic citations on U.S. 98.

One hundred eighty-seven tickets in nine hours to confused motorists in an obviously poorly signed construction area, with no sign correction, no concern, no understanding and no attempts at correcting an obvious problem, by officials — just \$30,000 in traffic fines to the unfortunate citizens trapped in that mess.

Are our city leaders trying to become the new Waldo, Lawtey or Hampton? Overly strict enforcement of certain traffic laws are the anthem and, likely, the main source of revenue to several small, obscure villages on U.S. 301 in north Florida.

Lakeland isn't one of those villages. Lakeland is a large, busy, prosperous, bustling city. Do our city leaders really wish to be included in the AAA speed-trap list of places to avoid?

Selective-and-overzealous enforcement of minuscule traffic laws isn't the signature of a great city. Spitting on the sidewalk isn't either.

City leaders can do better than this.

**ED ABERNATHY**  
Lakeland

### Animals-as-Food Hypocrisy

Recently, food safety officials in the United Kingdom, France and Sweden found traces of horsemeat in ground beef sold across Europe. Massive recalls and lawsuits are ensuing.

Can it happen here? Horse slaughter for human consumption was banned in the U.S. between 2007 and 2011. Now, a New Mexico slaughterhouse is getting approved by U.S. authorities to slaughter horses for human consumption, and a Philadelphia restaurant has already announced plans to serve horse meat.

I marvel at our hypocrisy of rejecting the notion of horse or dog meat on our dinner plates, while condemning cows, pigs and chickens to the same fate. Obviously, we have established special relationships with horses and dogs as our companions, protectors and sports protagonists, rather than as food.

But where is the ethical and logical distinction, given that all these animals are endowed with individuality, sentience, and an ability to experience the same feelings of joy, affection, sadness and fear that we do?

Fortunately, our health-food industry has spared us from having to choose which animals to pet and which ones to eat. Their delicious soy and grain-based meat alternatives are available in every supermarket.

**LANCE LARSON**  
Lakeland

### Social Workers

Social workers play a vital role in society and work in a variety of fields. Most people associate social workers with child-protective services. Social workers do so much more.

Social work is one of the few profes-

sions that allows people to work in a range of different settings. Social workers often work in schools, hospitals, nursing homes, insurance companies, counseling centers, domestic violence shelters, prisons, military bases and a range of nonprofit agencies. They also are activists and advocates.

Social workers provide counseling and therapeutic treatments, along with family counselors. However, social workers are challenged to examine the total person along with the environment where they live.

They are keenly aware of resources within the community. Social workers also are ethically bound to work on social problems, promote social justice, serve others with integrity, advocate for marginalized or vulnerable populations, and promote the dignity and self-worth of others.

With all of the social problems in society, school violence, bullying, domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, tough economic conditions and the stress of everyday life, it makes sense to pause and recognize a noble profession that is dedicated to tackling these issues.

Social work is the profession of hope. Resilience and advocacy are key components. March is Social Work Month and the 2013 theme is "Weaving Threads of Resilience and Advocacy: The Power of Social Work."

Social workers are vital to the community. Let's honor those who strive to change the condition of the world today.

**MELODY B. FREDERICK**  
Winter Haven

### White House

President Barack Obama has announced that there will no longer be tours of the White House held because we can't afford to do so.

I would like him to explain this to the American people. The more I think about it, the angrier I get. I have been to Washington once and didn't get to take the tour because I didn't make the 30-day appointment to do so. I have a dream to do so, though.

The thing is, this is the Americans' house. It isn't Obama's. The tour is done through volunteers, so it shouldn't cost the taxpayers' money to allow us to visit the house.

I guess what I don't understand is why we cannot visit the White House because of waste in money and yet he can spend millions of dollars to run off to Florida to play golf with Tiger Woods. While he was doing that, the first lady darted off in the opposite direction with the kids to take a vacation on her own.

It seems every time we turn around the Obamas are taking a vacation, which runs in the millions of dollars.

It isn't that he doesn't deserve the occasional day off, but he is spending outrageous amounts of money that could be used in more important ways.

The American people make plans for months in the future to go to Washington and see the White House, and all the other sites. Don't take that away from us.

**JONI SHAFFER**  
Lakeland

### WRITE TO US

The Ledger welcomes letters for publication in the Voice of the People Column. Only original letters written directly to The Ledger will be considered, and preference is given to discussion of contemporary issues. Volume precludes acknowledgment or return of unpublished letters. All letters are subject to editing for clarity, length, taste and libel. Letters should be signed and contain the writer's full name, address and telephone number. Anonymity is granted only under unusual circumstances. Letters should be kept to 300 words or less, and brevity is encouraged.

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## COLUMNIST OPINIONS



Kathleen Parker

SYNDICATED COLUMNIST

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# A Dinnertime Optical Political Illusion

WASHINGTON

The media love optics. No one understands this better than President Barack Obama.

Thus, he invited a gang of Republican senators to din-dins at the swank (and legendary) Jefferson Hotel, one of the city's more discreet (and expensive) gathering places.

Upon exiting, senators were greeted by a hungry throng of reporters and photographers, their appetites whetted no doubt by the cold. How was it? What happened? Did you bond?

Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., already engrossed in a cellphone call, gave a thumbs up. Others in attendance granted post-mortem interviews. And the world was glad.

Could a grand bargain be far away? Hey, it was a free meal.

Indeed, the president picked up the tab, a gesture of generosity or, one might speculate, a tiny deposit on a big investment, the returns of which are already rolling in: The media extrapolation that the president is extending an olive branch to his adversaries in search of a solution.

A Trojan horse would have been a tad obvious, don't you think?

What Obama hoped for, Obama got: "Oh, look, he's going the extra mile."

Not to be cynical, but does anyone really suppose that a Republican congress-

### Obamacare, predicted to add 15 million (or more) new people to the Medicaid rolls, is the elephant in the room.

man or senator is going to go against the party because Obama gave him a call? The president is charming, all will concede. And his smile, such a delightful reward, tempts one to, well, give a thumbs up. It was fun. It was delicious. But read my wine-stained lips: No new taxes.

"It was nothing but a PR move," says one seasoned insider. "Obama wants to run against obstructionist Republicans. The fact of the matter is, unless something really bad happens, there's no reason for them at this point to cave on taxes. Why would Speaker of the House John Boehner ever cave on taxes at this point?"

Republicans simply are not going to budge on taxes without real entitlement reform.

This is not news. Boehner has said as much countless times, but the problem with Washington is that the same statements repeated endlessly begin to sound like the helicopters and sirens that punctuate the city's soundtrack. Background noise.

Where does this leave us? Anything can happen, obviously — who would have predicted that Dennis Rodman would become an emissary for North Korea? — but it is no stretch to imagine a stalemate until a clarifying 2014 election.

By then, the stakes will be clearer.

Despite a positive jobs report (236,000 jobs added to nonfarm payrolls in February), unemployment is at 7.7 percent.

Also, the real pain of the Affordable Care Act, aka Obamacare, will have kicked in by then, including about \$1 trillion in new taxes — from higher insurance premiums to a 2.3 percent levy on medical-device companies that will trickle down to patients.

Finally, many employees will have begun pushing employees into insurance exchanges because it will be cheaper to pay government fines, thus revealing a bigish inconsistency: Obama's promise that everyone can keep the insurance they have and like. They can as long as their employer is on board, but many companies won't be because they can't afford the higher cost.

Obamacare, which is predicted to add 15 million (or more) new people to the Medicaid rolls, is the elephant in the room and no one's budging. That means there likely will be no significant entitlement reform. That means there will be no tax increases. And no yellow-brick middle road is going to get us there between now and the midterm elections.

Whereupon, Democrats will run against those terrible Republicans who refused to raise taxes. Republicans will run on the Democrats' record of no growth and out-of-control spending, assuming, that is, they can figure out how to effectively communicate the message that no growth is connected to Obama policies.

Breaking bread with foes is always worth a few crumbs of good will, but the Jefferson Hotel dinner may have been the last supper.

