



From the President's Desk

By Rich Piper

The 2010 census figures indicate that Pinellas County has lost population since the previous census, dropping to 916,542 from 921,482. Not only is this the first time since Pinellas County was established in 1912 that it has suffered a population loss from one census to the next, but the loss marks us as the only large county in Florida to decline in population since 2000. Pinellas is now certain to lose political representation in both state and national politics with the redistricting that will have to take place before the 2012 elections. It is therefore more important than ever that we nominate the best possible Democratic candidates to represent Pinellas County in the future.

Based on the arithmetic, and the requirement that all districts be almost precisely equal in population, Pinellas will be entitled to about 1.3 U.S. House districts, just under two state Senate districts and just under six state House districts. It appears likely that the current U.S. House District 10 (held now by Bill Young) will shift somewhat to the south and become more Democratic in registration and that District 11 (Kathy Castor's) will become mainly or completely a Hillsborough County district. It also appears likely that we'll have two Senate districts in Pinellas (perhaps south and north, with the northern one extending into Pasco County, according to my informants in both Tallahassee and Pinellas County) and that we'll have six House districts (with at least one spilling over into Hillsborough or Pasco County).

The Fair Districts Amendments provide new requirements that will govern redistricting, though the Republicans who dominate the legislature show clearly that they intend to do everything in their power to gerrymander districts to favor their own interests, as they have been doing for some time. One certainty is that court battles lie ahead. The whole issue will probably not be resolved until June 2012. I have volunteered to help both the Florida Progressives and Fair Districts Now to shape the redistricting process and encourage you to do so also.

As a result of the redistricting process, candidates will be able to gather petitions state-wide to get on the ballot, simplifying that task. However, candidates will have only the time from June to November, 2012, to know with confidence what the boundaries of their districts are and how to mount their campaigns effectively.

Despite the challenges posed by redistricting, some candidates have already declared their candidacies for 2012. Two Republicans, Jim Frishe and Leslie Waters, have already thrown their hats into the ring for one of the Senate seats, setting up a primary competition; many other

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REMINDER

NEXT MEETING of the Largo-Mid-Pinellas Democratic Club.

Bring your donation of canned goods for the local food pantries.

DATE: Apr 18, 2011

TIME: 7:00 PM

PLACE:

Thirsty Marlin

351 West Bay Dr # 1, Largo, (727) 586-3474 or email Rich at

President@largodemocrats.com



Visit our website at:

www.largodemocrats.com

candidates are mulling their decisions. If you know of strong potential Democratic candidates for 2012, please encourage them to run and refer them to the Pinellas County Democratic Campaign Planning Committee that Paul Starr (our speaker last month) chairs and on which four of our club members serve.

The PCDEC is providing campaign training for those who desire it on a scale that we've never seen before, and the party leadership is strongly committed to recruitment and assistance.

We MUST be actively recruiting good candidates NOW and providing them with the resources to win in 2012! Though Pinellas is about to lose some of its representation in Washington and Tallahassee, we should treat the 2012 elections as an opportunity to get BETTER representation than we have at present, through the election of good Democrats.

Former Senator Charlie Justice, who ran for Congress in 2010 and has represented Pinellas County in both the Florida House of Representatives and the Florida Senate, will be guest speaker at our **April 18 meeting**. Charlie is a good Democrat whom we are hoping will lead us to victory in 2012. He has not yet decided whether he will run or what office he might seek. Please come out to hear what he has to say about the Florida legislative session and the current political scene in general. His presentation will be followed by a question-and-answer session.

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Calendar of Events

Date	Time	Event	Location
MONDAY, APRIL 18	7:00 PM - TBD	Largo/Mid-Pinellas Democratic Club	Thirsty Marlin Grill, 351 W. Bay Drive, Largo 33770
MONDAY, APRIL 18	7:00 PM - TBD	Greater Tarpon Springs Democratic Club	Walton Community Center (400 South Walton Ave., Tarpon Springs) For more information contact Gerald Goen - gjgoen@tampabay.rr.com
THURSDAY, APRIL 21	5:00 PM - 9:00 PM	Stonewall Democrats	Pinellas County Democratic Party Office - 2250 - 1st Avenue N., St. Petersburg Join the Stonewall Democrats for their regular monthly meeting at DEC Headquarters, 2250 1st Ave. N. in St. Pete. Social at 6:30, meeting starts at 7. Questions? Contact Rick Boylan at RQBoylan@gmail.com .
TUESDAY, APRIL 26	3:30 pm - 7:00 pm	Hispanic Caucus Meeting	Pinellas Co. Democratic Party Office, 2250 1st Ave. N., St. Petersburg Please attend so the Hispanic Caucus can be re-organized. We are looking forward to your participation
THURSDAY, APRIL 28	7:00 PM - 9:00 PM	PCDEC	St. Pete Marriott Hotel, 12600 Roosevelt Blvd. N., St. Pete
SATURDAY, APRIL 30, 2011	TBD	Greater Tarpon Springs Dem Club Annual Picnic	Check the Pinellas County Democrats website for details www.pinelasdemocrats.com .
WEDNESDAY, MAY 4	6:30 P.M. - TBD	St. Petersburg Democratic Club	Pinellas Co. Democratic Party Office, 2250 1st Ave. N., St. Petersburg. For more information, please contact Mike Fox at tampabaydemocracy@yahoo.com .
Thursday, May	7:00 PM -	Young Democrats	St. Pete Hilton @ Carillon Park

Date	Time	Event	Location
05, 2011	TBD	Mixer	

More Information available at:

<http://www.pinellasdemocrats.com/calendar.asp?nDate=2%2F1%2F2011>

Pinellas Democratic Party NEWS

SPEAKING OF RECRUITING GOOD CANDIDATES

Largo/Mid-Pinellas Democratic Club member Michael Smith will be on the ballot in the next Largo City Commission election and is already campaigning hard against Mary Gray Black, who has been in the office off and on since 1975. Here's our chance to help get some of that "new blood" we always talk about.

Michael is running as "A New Voice for the 'City of Progress,' and pledges to be "a commissioner who not only represents the citizens but one who works to get them more active in their government." Amen to that.

One of the Largo native's biggest claims to fame (no pun intended) is losing 137 pounds in the past two and a half years. "I will apply the same dedication and determination that it took to lose the weight to being a hard-working commissioner for the citizens of Largo," he says.

Michael is focusing on three areas:

BRINGING A NEW VOICE

I will be a commissioner who is open, proactive and willing to look outside the box to help our city.

I will be a commissioner who will build workable relationships with other commissioners, the mayor, city staff and the community.

BEING FISCALLY RESPONSIBLE

I believe in redevelopment, supporting the Arts/Parks, and providing basic living services for our city in a responsible way. When times are tough, we need leadership in looking for alternative ways to provide services and not being afraid to question the cost/benefit ratio.

SMALL BUSINESS AND CITIZEN FRIENDLY

I believe the commission must work very hard and very quickly to repair the damage that has

been done to our small businesses. This can be helped by improving communication between staff (i.e. City Hall and Code Enforcement) and local businesses. Also by reassessing current city ordinances/fees that are creating a negative impact on businesses and determining ways to keep from driving away jobs/revenue.

I would like to see the Largo City Commission take an even more proactive approach to involving citizens in their local government, especially the young people of our community, for example as park volunteers.

"I hope I can count on your support. Please contact me if you can help in any way or if you have questions or concerns. If you are on FaceBook, check out my campaign page at: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Michael-Smith-For-Largo-City-Commission-Seat-1/160864963956571>"



Largo City Commission candidate Michael Smith and club V.P. Lois Fries at the recent jobs rally. (Photo by Rich Piper)

EIGHT REASONS LARGO SHOULD BE ASHAMED OF ITSELF

By Wayne Garcia, Creative Loafing, March 7, 2007

"To God be the glory," is how Commissioner Mary Gray Black lauded her March 2005

election to the Largo City Commission. The Ronda Storms of Pinellas County was actually recruited for that campaign after the city considered adding employment and housing protections for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered individuals in 2003. During the campaign, she vowed not to vote for anything that was "contrary to God's will."

Black went after [Steve] Stanton from the git-go; in 2005, she picked a public fight with him over a \$75 check she tried to write to the city. This is Black's second go-round on the commission, and the *St. Petersburg Times'* editorial writers had a long memory when they wrote, "When Mary Gray Black served on the Largo City Commission in the 1970s and '80s, she was known for slowing commission meetings to a crawl as she lectured her fellow commissioners about policies and procedures or chewed interminably on minor issues."

In the matter of Stanton, however, Black did not slow anything down. She demanded a meeting to fire him less than a week after he revealed his transgendered status.

One more fun fact: Her city resume lists her as a board member of the (we're-sure-it's-misnamed) Florida Association for the Restoration of Ethics.

PARTY LINE VOTES PREDOMINATE ON KEY LEGISLATIVE ISSUES IN TALLAHASSEE

By Rich Piper

Though there is considerable talk of the "moderate" Republicans in the Florida legislature among some journalists and others, the reality of the 2011 session so far is of sharp partisanship. Almost all key votes have seen over 90% of the Republicans lining up against over 90% of the Democrats.

A recent example was evident on SB 736, the revived and slightly revised notorious SB 6 of last session, which was vetoed by then-Governor Charlie Crist. Like last year's bill, SB 736 ties teachers' pay to students' standardized test scores while making it easier to fire teachers – this in a year when the Republicans are also trying to cut education

spending, deny teachers the right to have their association dues deducted automatically, weaken the public schools by expanding vouchers and force teachers and other public servants to suffer a real pay cut by making them pay 5% per year (in Rick Scott's proposal) into their pension funds.

In the House of Representatives, the vote on SB 736 was 80-39, with **every** Republican voting Yes except for one who was absent and **every** Democrat voting No. The six Republicans from Pinellas County in the House eagerly joined their colleagues in this attack on public school teachers; both Pinellas House Democrats, Rick Kriseman and Darryl Rouson voted against SB 736. Over in the Senate, the scene was almost as strictly partisan, though there one Pinellas Republican Senator, Dennis Jones, who is term-limited, voted with the Democrats against SB 736. Disappointingly, supposedly "moderate" Republican Jack Latvala joined the anti-teacher Republican vote, despite having received the endorsement of the teachers' union in the 2010 elections. Supposedly "moderate" Republican Mike Fasano also voted for SB 736. I suggest that teachers and all who favor the cause of public education pay close attention to these votes.

On most other key bills, every single Pinellas Republican has marched in lock-step with their Republican colleagues, while Reps. Kriseman and Rouson in the House and Sen. Arthenia Joyner have sought in vain to stop the GOP steamroller that is crushing the middle class of Florida. On SJR 2, the resolution designed to destroy the Obama Administration's Affordable Care Act in Florida, all of our Pinellas Republican legislators favored this outrageous measure, with only the Democrats opposing it. On SB 142, weakening consumers' product liability lawsuits, we again saw our local Republicans lining up in support of big business and against the middle class, with Sen. Joyner standing alone against this bill among our local Senators. SJR 958, the so-called "Smart Caps" amendment, modeled on a truly disastrous Colorado measure that nearly wrecked that state's economy and has been rejected everywhere else, won the support of all Pinellas Republican Senators while being opposed by Senator Joyner. These

last two measures have not yet come to a floor vote in the Florida House of Representatives.

Meanwhile, all Pinellas County House Republicans have united in support of privatizing Medicaid to force thousands of recipients into HMOs, despite warning flags in the pilot privatization programs that have been attempted. Moreover, many analysts have seen a personal profit motive for Republican Governor Rick Scott in this effort to privatize Medicaid, given his obvious ties to Solantic (<http://motherjones.com/politics/2011/03/rick-scott-florida-medicaid-solantic>). The vote in the Florida House was 80-38 in favor of Scott's plans – completely along party lines.

Probably the worst measure yet to pass both the Florida House and Senate was the bill overriding Charlie Crist's veto of the so-called "leadership funds" that will allow legislative leaders of both parties to raise huge slush funds from lobbyists to dispense among other

legislators. Howard Troxler accurately called this bill "legalized bribery," and another article in this newsletter elaborates on its bad features. In the House, all Pinellas Republicans voted for it and both Democrats against it on a straight party-line vote. In the Senate, Republicans Jack Latvala and Dennis Jones favored it, while Democrat Arthenia Joyner and Republican Mike Fasano opposed it.

For those who think that party differences don't matter very much, I say "Think again." Look at the voting records in Tallahassee and Washington, DC, and you will see that almost all of the Republicans almost all of the time vote the party line in support of their big business paymasters and against the middle class. It is the Democrats, with but very few Republican allies, who stand up for public education, for the unions and for the middle class in general. .

Club News

VP HEADLINES NELSON RALLY IN TAMPA

A couple of hundred party faithful – including Largo Club President Rich Piper, new board member Deb Anderson, and members Bonnie Sklaren, Dan Sorkowitz, Jennifer Chang and Kathleen Jamison, former state representative Janet Long and PCDEC state committeewoman Linda Lucas – attended an afternoon fundraiser for Sen. Bill Nelson at the Embassy Suites Downtown. Earlier, Biden and the Nelsons attended another fundraiser near Orlando.

The Vice President called Nelson one of the best and most decent senators he has ever known, then added, to the applause of the crowd, "I wish your governor would listen to him more."

The vice president said he was stunned that Rick Scott rejected more than \$2.4 billion in federal funding for a high-speed rail line between Tampa and Orlando.

"Your governors, God bless him — I don't know him — but I don't get it," Biden said. "You had the chance. You were the best

situated of all the states in the country to put a truly high-speed line from Tampa through Orlando that would have made money after the third year and through the 10th year. ... Even if you were doubtful, I don't understand how in this economy in Florida you could walk away from 24,000 high-paying jobs."



Vice President Joe Biden, Rep. Kathy Castor, Grace Nelson and Senator Bill Nelson. (Photo by Nina Hayden)

Unfortunately most of the news coverage centered on the strange case of the Orlando Sentinel reporter who was shut away in a storage closet at the Winter Park fundraiser,

apparently by an inexperienced staffer who didn't want him mingling with guests until the Vice President and Sen. Nelson arrived. Needless to say, there were plenty of mea culpas from the embarrassed VP office.



Back, Dan Sorkowitz, Front, Rich Piper, Kathleen Jamison, Deborah Anderson and Jennifer Chang

Pinellas Democrats Storm Tallahassee

Twelve members of the Largo/Mid-Pinellas Democratic Club were part of a group of 33 Democrats, mostly from the Pinellas County Democratic Party (with several Hillsborough participants, too), who journeyed to Tallahassee in March for two days of Politics 101. "It was an interesting and educational experience, but a little depressing," commented Club Director Ginny Nelson, summing up the feelings of many of the participants. The depressing part was the overwhelming evidence that the Republicans plan to ram through an array of really bad measures with their super-majorities in both the House (81-39) and the Senate (28-12).

After a grueling ride of nearly five hours, participants checked into the Doubletree Hotel in downtown Tallahassee, just a stone's throw from the Capitol. The main event Sunday evening was a buffet dinner at the hotel, after which Rep. **Darryl Rouson** (D, St. Petersburg) gave the group an overview of the current governmental scene and answered an array of questions. Then group organizers Linda Lucas and Rich Piper went over the busy schedule for the following day.

On Monday, participants took tours of the Old Capitol and the Governor's Mansion; heard

presentations and asked questions of **Steve Bousquet**, Tallahassee bureau chief of the *St. Petersburg Times*, **Karen Woodall**, director of the Florida Center for Fiscal and Economic Policy; **Scott Arceneaux**, executive director of the Florida Democratic Party, and an array of Democratic Party staff members, and Representatives **Rick Kriseman** (D, St. Petersburg) and **Darryl Rouson**. In addition, many of the delegation attended legislative committee hearings and expressed their concerns over bills dealing with such matters as restrictions on women's choice and the Pinellas County fertilizer regulations (the latter of which most Republicans want to have the state negate by preemption).

This trip was aimed primarily at educating ourselves, with efforts to influence a secondary purpose but a definite goal for the future. "I'd like to go again and make more direct efforts to influence the legislature," club member Louise Fletcher declared. Many others expressed similar desires, despite what they recognize are long odds against success on many key matters this year.

Club member Kyle Quattlebaum sent me the following note after the trip, along with an op-ed piece that is printed in the Letters and Opinions section.

"Thanks for the well planned trip. Please continue to help save our state.

"Marsha and I were both pleased and frustrated by our trip this past weekend. We gained a little insight, saw some interesting things and were frustrated that there is so little we can do to stop this out of control freight train plowing through our people. At some point there has to be a wake up alarm for the citizens to realize just what they have done by the choices they have made. I keep looking for the right buttons to push."

There will be several opportunities to exercise influence in the near future, as the AFL-CIO, Democratic Women's Clubs of Florida and Planned Parenthood are among the organizations of like-minded people who are planning such trips. Watch our website, www.largodemocrats.com, for updates on these and other efforts to influence the course

of government in both Tallahassee and Washington.

Health Care 1st anniversary event

St. Pete allergist Dr. Mona Mangat and colleagues with Doctors for America and the Community Health Action Information Network (CHAIN) threw a gala "birthday party" on March 23 for the first anniversary of passage of the Affordable Health Care Act



Helping her celebrate are Largo club members, l to r, Rich Piper, Doug Hickman, Belleair Commissioner Joe Barkley and his wife Mary Louise Ambrose, Kathleen Jamison and Deb Anderson.

Kicking off the 2012 Campaign Planning

Paul Starr, chairman of the Pinellas Democrats' campaign planning committee, was guest speaker at the Largo club's March meeting. His remarks about the importance of framing Democratic messages more effectively generated a lively debate. The following is a condensed version.

The Republicans love to misdirect people's attention and to deceive them with the small picture. That is why we must take better control of the message.

When the Republicans attacked us on abortion, we won by changing the conversation to one about choice. Now we must expand it into the larger context of all of a woman's rights. As the party of no choice becomes more extreme in their attacks on a woman's right to choose, we must point out that by protecting her right to choose, we protect and preserve all of a

woman's rights. For if she has no right to choose, then what good is a right to vote.

We must re-frame the health care issue with the words "Patient's rights, consumer protection, affordable healthcare, and fair treatment."

The Republicans are attacking again on the issue of gay rights. We must change this conversation. Do not be tricked into supporting "special rights for the GLBT community." Instead, stand up for equal rights and equal protections for all Americans.

But it is not enough to simply respond to their attacks. We must stand up and lead. We must demonstrate that the Democratic Party is the party that will restore American greatness.

The true power of America has always been our willingness to explore, to create, to try new ideas, to boldly go forward, and to ask the next question. The ability to create and innovate begins with education. The superiority of our education system is not based upon the ability to memorize and recite the correct answer on a test, but upon our ability to imagine and create the answers to questions that others dare not ask. While it is important to lay the groundwork of reading, writing and arithmetic, it is equally important to teach the ability to dream, imagine, and think new ideas. And now we must encourage a new generation of American innovation. We must accept our own responsibility for the future and search for the better answer, reach for the higher goal, and create a brighter tomorrow.



Paul Starr (right) speaking to a packed room at the March club meeting (Photo by Rich Piper)

We must also show that we are the true moral party by insisting that we uphold our end of social agreements. Social Security is not a gift bestowed upon us by the government. You worked for it. You earned it. It is no more an entitlement than a paycheck is. It is not the budget busting cause of our deficits either. For the past 25 years Social Security has created a surplus. One third of our national debt is owed to the Social Security and Medicare trust funds. It is fiscally strong, and to make it stronger we only need to create more high paying jobs.

The surest way to create high paying jobs is to have strong unions. So we must stand up for workers' rights, including the right to collective bargaining. Governor Scott says he wants state employees to contribute to their benefits in order to ease the deficit. This sounds reasonable on the surface. But he also wants

to eliminate taxes for corporations, including out of state corporations. So it's not really about the money. It is about punishing those who stand up for safe work places and fair treatment. We need to remind people that the quality of their work environment was created by the union workers who stood up not only for themselves but for all Americans.

We cannot change the future by hiding from the present. We must not be afraid to speak the truth. We must take ownership of our convictions, and calmly.... calmly but with conviction, shed light upon the truth. We must speak the truth to all who will listen. We must speak the truth to all who hunger for it. We must speak the truth, and we must do so often.

We are Democrats. That's what we do.

LETTERS and OPINIONS

FAIR DISTRICTS ARE CRITICAL TO DEM FUTURE

Florida's deadline for redistricting is June 18, 2012, the first day of qualifying to run. This will make it almost impossible for challengers or underfunded candidates (read Democrats) to know what their district is in time to mount a significant campaign.

According to Kenneth Quinnell of the Florida Progressive Coalition, "this isn't a coincidence and it's part of the explanation as to why Republicans win so much in Florida – they stack the rules in their favor."

GOP legislative leaders have finally restarted the once-a-decade redistricting process that was put on hold when Gov. Scott withdrew the application shortly after taking office. (Outraged supporters of the amendments have sued him for "obstructing the will of voters.")

According to the Tampa Tribune, "The state's new anti-gerrymandering amendments were resubmitted for federal approval on March 29, but in a way critics say seeks to allow the Legislature to continue drawing districts to benefit Republicans. The action means the amendments continue to be a political football despite having been approved by 63 percent voter majorities in the November election."

The Fair District Amendments are nonpartisan, but Republican incumbents – and a couple of Democrats – are guaranteeing a bitter partisan struggle to the bitter end.

(Editor's note: Let's face it. Democrats have more to gain from Fair Districts at this time. However, we need to keep the public [Dems, Republicans and Independents alike] focused on the long term benefits to the state from a viable two-party system).

REPUBLICAN BOSSES REVIVE SLUSH FUNDS FOR LEGISLATIVE LEADERS

By Mark Hollis, Communications Director, Democratic Office, Florida House of Representatives

Republican legislative leaders rushed through a campaign finance bill vetoed last year that will lift the lid on political fundraising to allow more special-interest cash to pour into Florida campaigns. Last year's House Bill 1207 recreates so-called "leadership funds" -- or slush funds -- banned two decades ago that would give the Senate president or House speaker power to raise unlimited soft-money donations to aid campaigns.

Opposed by House Democratic Caucus members, the slush funds bill was vetoed by

former Republican Governor Charlie Crist who said, "These accounts allowed legislative leaders to solicit and accept campaign contributions during the legislative session from lobbyists and interest groups outside the public view."

Here's a sampling of what some Florida news writers and editorialists have said about the slush-funds legislation:

FLORIDA TODAY:

"Peddled as reform to make special-interest campaign activity more transparent, the measure came with far too little emphasis on openness and actually gave top legislators new ways to wheel and deal with huge sums of money out of the public eye.

"More leeway for financial shenanigans is the last thing voters angry about the scandal over excessive spending and secret contracts at the Republican Party of Florida should condone.

"Deep-pocket business and development special-interest groups already pull the strings in Tallahassee with big donations to political committees..."

MIAMI HERALD:

"Whether it's pols going wild with the party credit card or the creation of slush funds for ranking lawmakers, Florida's leaders show a brazen disregard for standards of accountability and transparency."

THE BRADENTON HERALD:

"Instead of instituting the goal of greater transparency and accountability over campaign funding and political influence peddling, the House wants to bring back "leadership funds."

PALM BEACH POST:

"For an impressive display of political audacity, consider the move by Republicans in the Legislature to reinstate long-ago discredited leadership slush funds.

"The misdeeds of former House Speaker Ray Sansom, forced to resign first as speaker and then on Feb. 21 (2010) from the House while facing criminal charges, still are fresh. Yet the GOP wants to go back to a simpler time, when

leaders could solicit and distribute contributions at will.

"Republicans use transparency as a cover story for their proposal. It will be easier, they argue, for the public to know how much money is flowing and who the donors are if the GOP removes the ability of legislators to funnel donations through political parties. The true motive of the Republican leaders is to wrest control from party leaders after revelations of improper credit card use---into the hundreds of thousands of dollars—under former Republican Party of Florida Chairman Jim Greer."

YOU HAVE BEEN BRANDED

By Kyle Quattlebaum,

Member, Largo/Mid-Pinellas Democratic Club

You know what it's like talking to someone at their front door about your candidate. A significant percentage of the time you're rebuffed with the statement "don't bother me with your bleeding heart liberal stuff!" just before the door closes. They don't always say "stuff". You know that's not what you are but that is your brand.

It took decades to happen but Democrats are routinely branded as big government loving, anti-business "bleeding hearts" that want to tax and spend in order to re-distribute wealth to the undeserving lower income groups of our population. None of that is true but, again, it is our brand.

We have to change that image. We have to begin building a brand that reflects our true identity as the realists of our republic who speak for working, consuming Americans. We understand that our economic system is driven by encouraging entrepreneurial activity that will create increasing income for investors and workers alike.

We also understand that the worker and consumer focus of our capitalist system has shifted to emphasize the investor side of the capitalist equation over the last 30 years or so. That shift has accelerated during this century. Those promoting this investor or Wall Street driven capitalist system should be branded as such in speeches, communiqués and personal contacts.

What would best serve our country is a return to our consumer driven capitalist system. That system provides for good paying jobs with fair labor practices, a clean, sustainable environment, protection from lost wages, affordable healthcare and housing, good schools and redress from fraudulent practices in the market place. It offers support and a path up for even the most struggling members of our society. We will all benefit from a return to a consumer driven capitalist system.

We have let investors with great wealth and influence gain the upper hand by not offering a clear, understandable alternative to their message. We should take pride in our drive to re-establish a capitalist system that provides the benefits we all seek. We should be proud to be consumer driven capitalists and we should present our ideas within that framework.

ORDINARY CITIZENS LEFT OUT OF LAWMAKING

PCDEC member **Bonnie Agan's** letter to the St. Pete Times made the coveted "shaded box." In response to the March 10 article "Campus gun plan meets rare defeat," she wrote:

"Reading about the temporary setback to SB 234, which would have allowed guns to be carried openly on school campuses, the most astonishing part was Sen. John Thrasher's admission: 'Any other time I might support something like this, but I just can't.'

"The only reason he couldn't was because his close friend's daughter was shot with an AK-47 style rifle and killed on the Florida State University campus. The girl's father made an emotional plea to block the provision at a committee meeting. Thrasher was deaf to the strong opposition of students and the FSU police chief, but he will listen to friends. And lobbyists, of course.

"The takeaway here is that in order to get bills passed that protect a constituent's interests, one must befriend a powerful Republican senator. Teachers, Medicaid patients, firefighters, people who support environmental protection and reproductive rights, etc., have been going about it all wrong. Instead of

writing letters, making phone calls and waving signs, they should be playing golf with the likes of Thrasher and House Speaker Dean Cannon. Maybe a constituent could join a foursome and try to counter the lobbyist's pitch during a friendly round. Unfortunately, the constituents are too busy working and probably couldn't afford the club membership anyway.

"Thrasher's remark was a stark reminder of how left out ordinary citizens of this state and nation have become in legislative decision-making. Far too many politicians have no idea how most people live and are not looking for friends, or even acquaintances, in the working class so they can find out.

"It's too bad Thrasher doesn't have more friends who could tell him about the children they lost to guns on the street, drugs and the lack of health insurance and opportunities.

PILLS, PRIVACY, PREVENTION

Regarding Republican Rep. Ahern's recent assertion that a state-wide prescription drug database that would reduce crime and save lives is needless and wasteful, Largo/Mid-Pinellas Democratic Club member **Bonnie Sklaren** of Gulfport wrote in a March 29 St. Pete Times letter to the editor:

"With all due respect to state Rep. Larry Ahern, we do not have a database that tracks prescribing of controlled substances such as oxycodone. The pharmacies apparently collect information on individual prescribing practices (so much for privacy), information they share with insurance companies, but this does not track the prescribing and dispensing practices that would capture the abuse that is killing seven Floridians a day.

"That is why the monitoring bill was passed and why the state attorney general and most of the medical community and the make of oxycodone are vigorously working to see implementation of the monitoring bill.

"Meanwhile, Rep. Robert Schenck proposes to 'cut off the head of the snake' but limiting the dispensing capability of legitimate pain management physicians. Since dispensing physicians account for only 16 percent of the oxycodone dispensed in the state, I fail to see

how this will do anything more than decrease access to care for those who really need it."

EDITOR'S NOTE: Let's not forget that Ahern is one of those who got swept in on the 2010 GOP tide, replacing one of Pinellas County's most effective legislators, Janet Long. For the sake of good government, we need to get her back in office ASAP!

NEW POLL SHOWS SCOTT'S GROWING UNPOPULARITY ACROSS THE BOARD

More and more Florida voters are realizing that Rick Scott is bad for Florida and bad for Floridians and that's good for Democrat chances to send him packing in four years. (And not a moment too soon at the rate he is According to a March 24-27 poll of 500 voters throughout the state, he is one of the country's least-liked governors and would be trounced by Alex Sink if a rematch were held today.

According to a Public Policy Polling news release, Scott was elected by one point over Alex Sink, and even as he prepared to enter office, PPP found that only a third of voters like him and 43% dislike him. But instead of building good will since his inauguration, he has continued to turn more voters off. Now roughly the same number approve his job performance (32%), while 55% are unhappy with his work so far. His own Republicans only approve of him by a 57-27 margin, and independents mirror the overall results. But the main thing he has done is tick off Democrats, who have gone from 60% unfavorable to 81% disapproval in just three months. (Editor's note: isn't it hard to believe that 40% of Dems ever approved? What were they thinking?!)

According to Tom Jensen of PPP, the Florida governor's race was one of the closest in the country last year, with Scott winning by a razor thin margin even in one of the best Republican years ever. If voters got to do it over again today it would be no contest-Alex Sink leads Scott 56-37 in a hypothetical rematch. Independents say they would vote for her by a whopping 32 point margin at 61-29 and even 21% of Republicans now say they'd vote for her. For the sake of comparison, Marco Rubio's disapproval with

Democrats is only 51%, 30 points lower than Scott's; his disapproval with independents is only 31%, 23 points lower than Scott's.

Some of the crosstabs in the 'redo' poll point to the Democratic turnout issues that made Scott's victory possible in the first place though, Jensen notes. For instance, voters under 30 say they would support Sink by a 67-26 margin if the election was today- but those folks made up only 8% of the electorate in the state last year. If they had turned out in greater numbers Scott would have been in the dustbin of Florida political history four months ago. Turnout from African Americans (who say they would vote for Sink now 85-8) and Hispanics (who say they would vote for Sink 69-28) was also down as a share of the electorate last year from 2008. Democratic voters may be disgusted with Scott as governor but to some extent they did it to themselves by not showing up to vote in November.

Scott obviously has almost four whole years to rehabilitate his image, but one thing's clear-it's not going to happen if he doesn't change the way he operates, Jensen says.

And that doesn't seem likely. When questioned about the poll, Scott told reporters, "As I said in my State of the State address, I didn't come here to be the most popular. This state will be the most likely to succeed, have a great day everybody."

You can Google Public Policy Polling to view the full results.

SENATOR NELSON GETS GOOD NEWS IN ANOTHER PPP POLL

According to a poll released March 29 by Public Policy Polling, U.S. Sen. Bill Nelson has a 13 to19 percent lead over a host of potential Republican opponents, including TV talking head and former Florida congressman Joe Scarborough. Thirty-eight percent of those polled approve of Nelson's job performance, 34 percent disapprove.

Not quite such good news according to PPP President Dean Debnam is that "Democrats don't love him but they would still vote for him in a general election and his better than average support across party lines from

Republicans means his eventual opponent will be starting from behind.”

IS SCOTT'S ARROGANCE ALIENATING FLORIDA'S VOTERS?

By **Hal Alterman**, editor, St. Petersburg Democratic Club newsletter, and Largo/Mid-Pinellas Democratic Club member

Florida's Republican candidates swept to victory in 2010 by framing the election cycle as a referendum on President Obama and his policies.

Now, by embracing the Tea Party's narrow, mean-spirited agenda, Gov. Rick Scott is presenting Democrats with the opportunity to regain lost ground in 2012 by attracting the mainstream Florida voters who are becoming increasingly appalled by Scott's arrogant actions.

According to Florida Democratic Party Chair Rod Smith: "Rick Scott is assaulting our middle class with union-busting measures that

genuinely hurt working Floridians and their families. Since he took office, Floridians have seen that he only cares about imposing his rigid and extreme philosophy on our state, rather than working to implement common sense solutions for Florida.

"Whether he is killing high-speed rail, proposing his spending plan that would lay off 20,000 teachers, or putting communities at risk by ending critical law enforcement tools to stop pill-mills, Scott's agenda is doing real harm to our state. Rather than working to improve the quality of living in our state, he prefers to simply bully teachers, firefighters, police officers and other public servants. Rather than working to create jobs, Scott is more interested in attacking government than attacking the many problems our state faces."

Let's follow Rod Smith's lead by providing voters with a compelling alternative to Rick Scott's arrogant attitudes and misguided actions.

For Your Information

Largo/Mid-Pinellas Democratic Club Board of Directors

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All of the officers were elected February, 2011, to serve until their term ends in February 2013.

Additional contact information is available on www.largodemocrats.com – click on Opinions and Letters

What Do We Include in the Newsletter?

It's clear that we Largo/Mid-Pinellas Democratic Club members are an interested, involved, informed - and opinionated - bunch. And providing a forum for all that "good stuff" is an important function of our newsletter. The Board encourages articles and letters to the editor.

This newsletter is created by volunteers who make every attempt to publish factual information, and who encourage the free exchange of information and opinions. It should include input from all of us. However, the opinions and viewpoints expressed by contributors may not necessarily reflect those of the club.

Please send submissions to newsletter editor, Kathleen Jamison, at Editor@largodemocrats.com

If you don't wish to receive this newsletter, let Editor Kathleen Jamison know. She will also be happy to add more folks to our newsletter email list. (Please forward to anyone you know who may be interested in what we do and how to join.) Contact admin@largodemocrats.com.

Why Join the Largo-Mid-Pinellas Democratic Club

The club provides a variety of ways to stay informed and involved in local, county, state and national political discussions. But we're not just about talk. We will be part of the action in finding the best candidates and getting them elected, as well as supporting the most important causes. We will write letters, make phone calls, knock on doors, register voters, and whatever else it takes to bring change to our communities, our county and our state. But, just as important, we also want to make time to enjoy each other's company and celebrate each other's efforts at social events throughout the year. Grassroots politics is effective and fun!

As a member of the Largo/Mid-Pinellas Democratic Club you can:

- Meet other active Democrats
- Meet and get to know your elected officials and potential candidates
- Raise funds and work for candidates
- Participate in community service projects
- Hear speakers and discuss issues of local, state and national importance
- Attend special events and monthly meetings.
- For membership information, email administrator@largodemocrats.com

ANNUAL DUES ARE JUST \$10

FLORIDA'S CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION

- **Sen. Bill Nelson** - 813 225-7040 or (202) 224-5274 Email: <http://billnelson.senate.gov/contact/index.cfm>
- **Sen. Marco Rubio** - 813 977-6450 or (202) 224-3041 email: http://rubio.senate.gov/contact_form.cfm
- **Rep. Bill Young** - 727 893-3191 or (202)225-5961

CHANGE, YES WE CAN!