

THE WILLISTON PROGRESS

“News We Need”

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Welcome!

The Williston Progress takes its name from a local newspaper that was published here between 1919 and 1922. Its founding editor, old J. T. Lewis described the original Progress as “a weekly newspaper published Fridays at Williston Florida in the interest of Williston and Levy County.” The new Progress serves its community by periodically re-examining local stories and perspectives, particularly ones that went largely unreported.

Ex-Legislator on Federal Probation

District 22's disgraced former state representative, **Joe Harding (R)** was released from federal prison following his conviction on six counts of wire fraud and money laundering as part of his attempt to defraud the Small Business Administration of \$150,000 in COVID-19 loans. He was sentenced to four months incarceration, two years probation, and a \$300 fine. Harding served all but 30 days of his prison term and was released last April. In 2021 Harding introduced the “Parental Rights in Education Act,” widely known as the “Don't Say Gay Bill,” and in 2022 he introduced another measure targeting gay children, but that bill didn't move forward. Harding received national notoriety and wide-spread censure for his vigorous efforts to oppose constitutional equality. He is currently out and among the community, on federal probation.

Amusing Content Advisory

The Progress' editorial review board recognizes that political cartoons add humor, but still must bear witness to the fact that local politics is not funny, at all.

Ex-State Senator Sentenced

In November, disgraced former state senator **Frank Artiles (R)**, was convicted and sentenced to sixty days in prison with five years probation for violation of election laws. Artiles had been found guilty in a Miami courtroom for his 2020 scheme to defraud the South Florida electorate by funding a “ghost candidate” to siphon votes away from the pro-democracy candidate. Indictments revealed that he was paid by Data Targeting, Inc., a Gainesville political operation owned by Fay Bainter. We seem to recall that our former state legislator, District 22's **Chuck Clemons' (R)** various campaigns provided Bainter's organization with well over \$150,000 in funding over the years. If the fraudulent scheme that led to Artiles' recent conviction sounds familiar, that's because of its similarity to an earlier, more successful voter siphoning fraud that was perpetrated against voters here, in this very district. With dark money funding provided by the Florida Power and Light Company, Bainter's organization, alongside Alabama-based consulting firm Matrix LLC, helped finance a last-minute independent candidate in the 2018 race for state senate. Their “ghost” candidate drew away a sufficient number of votes to deliver the senate seat to FPL's preferred choice, **Keith Perry (R)**. The pro-democracy candidate in that race, **Dr. Kayser Enneking (D)** called for justice, but if memory serves correctly, the Republican State Attorney declined to investigate. Artiles is currently serving his probation in South Florida, under state supervision.

Florida State Political Directory

Governor: Ronald DeSantis (R)
Lt. Gov.: Jeanette Nuñez (R)
Att. Gen.: James Uthmeier (R)
U. S. Senator: Rick Scott (R)
U. S. Senator: Ashley Moody (R)
U. S. House 3rd: Kat Cammack (R)
FL Senate 9th: Stan McLain (R)
FL House 22nd: Chad Johnson (R)

Levy County Commissioners

District 1 Charlie Kennedy
District 2 Rock Meeks
District 3 Desiree Mills, Chair
District 4 Tim Hodge, Vice-Chair
District 5 Johnny Hiers

Board of Levy County Commissioners Meetings

Tuesday Feb. 04, 2025 9 am
and Feb. 18, 2025 at 6 pm at the
Government Center Auditorium
310 School Street
Bronson, FL 32621

District 22's Legislative Record: A Review of the Judicial Reviews

A federal judge wrote that SB7050 “arises from Florida's latest assault on the right to vote.” **Chuck Clemons (R)** helped pass the bill. Chief U.S. District Judge Mark Walker called Clemons' Individual Freedom Act “positively dystopian,” violating our First and Fourteenth Amendment rights, and the Equal Protection Clause. Federal Appellate Judge, Kevin Newsom rejected his SB7072 outright, citing its violation of “the most basic of the basic” First Amendment freedoms. A federal court declared that his “Form 6” violated the First Amendment, and another federal court ruled that SB254 unconstitutionally deprived children of necessary health care. Other impacted Floridians are still awaiting adjudication of their Seventh-Amendment solutions, still the best defense against mislegislation.

News from the Florida House

Our newly elected legislators are already sworn in and have initiated their organizational session for the 2024-2026 term. Interim committee meetings began on December 8. The regular session of the Florida legislature begins on Tuesday, March 4 and ends on Friday, May 2. **Chad Johnson**, who serves the Republican party, will occupy District 22's seat in the Florida House of Representatives.

According to the website, Ballotpedia, his campaign received \$32,500 in funding from the campaign surplus of Wilton Simpson, egg entrepreneur and sitting Commissioner of Agriculture. Johnson's campaign also received \$23,775 from the FL House Republican Campaign Committee and \$20,000 from the Conservative Leadership Committee Inc. The remainder of his campaign's \$307,312 total, was furnished by various conservative advocacy groups and agriculture interests, totaling 351 individual contributors in all.

The expenditures included \$153,544 to Front Line Strategies Inc., a for-profit conservative organization owned by Brett and Iris Doster. Interestingly, the same \$20,000 amount in donations, was returned back to the Conservative Leadership Committee's coffers.

The remainder of \$228,197 in expenditures was distributed among various conservative interest groups, including \$10,000 to Florida First Forever and \$10,509 to two individuals. Johnson's campaign expenses also included \$3,548 to Cowboyz Bar-B-Q and Catering LLC, presumably for food.

A livestock auctioneer by profession, Johnson has been affiliated with the following organizations: National Rifle Association, Levy County Farm Bureau, and Levy County...

"House" continued, last column...

From the Editor's Desk

We understand that many readers are suffering from long and continuous exposure to a technology-mediated firehose of anti-democracy propaganda. Thankfully, editorial perspectives have changed since old J. T. Lewis' time, but it's our sincere hope that we might occasionally provide a reliable and beneficial local news alternative. The overarching purpose of the new Williston Progress, will be to promote democracy's core values.

A tenacious honesty, one that distinguishes knowledge from opinion is an essential foundational value. Knowledge exists best when it's based on a rational assessment of irrefutable evidence. Without evidence there is only belief, and a recurring lesson of history is that belief without knowledge invariably leads to folly.

Constitutional equality first emerged as an aspirational value. However, after 1868, the blood-bought Fourteenth Amendment transformed our framers' tragically unequal vision into an entirely new social contract for America, one that promises each and every single citizen equality of justice. As an immanent manifestation of a "more perfect union," that historical moment refutes every bad-faith originalist argument.

Instead, we understand that strong democracies are deeply rooted in an embodiment of the word, union. Striving for its improvement provides a constitutional purpose and reflecting on its possibilities builds a philosophical bedrock for our own, uniquely individual, humanistic-rationalistic progressivism.

Pastorialis Publius

Local Content Advisory

The Progress' political reporting staff rarely leaves the county to cover the City of Williston, the Board of Levy County Commissioners, State House District 22, and State Senate District 9

Historic Florida Justice:

A Supreme Court Confession

Exhibit A - July 28, 2015

"The Florida Senate stipulates and agrees that the apportionment plan adopted by the Florida Legislature on March 27, 2012, to establish Florida's Senate districts (the 'Enacted Senate Plan') violates the provision of Article III, Section 21(a) of the Florida Constitution providing that *"in establishing legislative district boundaries, no apportionment plan or district shall be drawn with the intent to favor or disfavor a political party or an incumbent,"* because the Enacted Senate Plan and certain individual districts were drawn to favor a political party and incumbents."

from: Florida Supreme Court
Case No. 2012-CA-002842
Filing #30181595

Question from a New Reader

"If I really wanted to display my complete and utter contempt for the Constitution and its rule of law, would aiding and abetting a 34-time convicted felon's efforts to obstruct constitutional justice be the best way for me to go about doing this?"

"Asking for a friend."

"House" continued...

...Cattlemen's Association, Florida Farm Bureau, Florida Cattlemen Association, National Cattlemen's Beef Association, Florida and National Auctioneers Associations.

His predecessor, Chuck Clemons endorsed Johnson's campaign and Johnson describes himself as a "Constitutional Conservative." After witnessing Clemons' extremely disappointing record on the measure of his overall constitutionality, we'll have to wait and see if Johnson's self-description is an accurate one.

...Next Issue...

"News from the Florida Senate"