

# The Delray Democrat

October 2021

## Are Republicans Deliberately Sabotaging the Economy? Are Blue Dogs Deliberately Sabotaging Biden's Agenda?

Michael K. Cantwell

These are rhetorical questions. Having crashed the economy, Republicans' only path back to power is to undermine Democrats' efforts to fix the mess they left behind. It works because Americans have short attention spans.

They are aided by Blue Dogs, a group of "centrist" and conservative Democrats who kneecap widely popular legislation supported by the people they purport to represent. Why? The corporate interests they actually represent wouldn't have it any other way.

Maybe not this time, however. It is heartening to see that President Biden has learned from President Obama's dealings with both groups.

When President Obama took office, the economy was in freefall. More than 3 million jobs were lost in 2008, and another 802,000 were lost in January 2009. Although this was largely the

result of Republican malfeasance and incompetence, Republicans immediately closed ranks to hobble Obama's attempt to avert a second Great Depression.

Not a single House Republican and only three Republican senators voted in favor of The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). They argued that the bill was too costly, ludicrously claiming that the worst economic collapse since the Great Depression could be cured by simply lowering taxes.

The quarterly reports issued by the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office put the lie to both: tax cuts were among the *least* effective job stimulators of all the various provisions in ARRA, with tax cuts to the rich coming in *dead last*. As to the *size* of the bill, the \$787 billion allocated to ARRA was actually

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## Senate Afghanistan Hearing

Rob Resnick

On September 29, 2021, Secretary of Defense Austin, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs General Milley, and CENTCOM Commander General McKenzie appeared before the Senate Armed Services Committee. It was an excellent opportunity for the Senate to ask and discuss critical information concerning the withdrawal from Afghanistan, evacuation of civilians, General Milley's calls to the Chinese (reportedly involving China's concerns about President Trump), and related issues.

It was certainly an opportunity for the American people to learn. While some senators acted professionally, asked good, challenging questions, and engaged in productive dialogue with the distinguished panelists, other senators simply bloviated, making a disgrace of the proceedings and

engaging in false and hyperbolic recriminations to score points with an extremist base.

By law, regulation, custom, and necessity, military officers may not and should not participate in political activities or engage in partisan commentary. They do not speak for or against political leaders, pending legislation, or similar matters best left to the politicians. These distinguished career officers and public servants did not take the bait to agree with, disagree with, or offer personal political opinions, despite shamefully being pressed and misquoted by certain Republican senators. They were each there to answer questions about the relevant policies, decisions, and actions and did their best to do exactly that. They were overall focused, credible, and

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### Upcoming DCDB Meetings (7:00 PM)

**October 14**

*Candidates' Night: Meet  
the Candidates for HD 88*

**November 11**

*Mindy Koch, DEC Vice-  
Chair*

### BY THE NUMBERS

[Prison versus Population](#)  
[Population By Race \(2018\)](#)

Race	Total Pop. %	Prison Pop. %
Black	12%	33%
Latinx	16%	23%
White	63%	30%

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far too *small*. It was sufficient to avert another Great Depression but insufficient to prevent the loss of more than 3 million jobs in his first year in office.

It's unlikely Obama could have gotten a bigger bill through Congress, but he made the rookie mistake of listening to and then publicly repeating Larry Summer's assurances that passage of a \$787 billion stimulus would keep unemployment below 8 percent. It hit 10 percent in October 2009, leading to a false but common perception that the stimulus had failed.

Had he listened to actual geniuses instead of media-anointed geniuses, he would have pushed for the \$2 trillion stimulus advocated by Economics Noble Laureates Joe Stiglitz and Paul Krugman. Obama wouldn't have gotten it, but he would have been able to seize the narrative when the unemployment rate blew through 8% and spiked at 10%.

The CBO estimated that the \$787 billion stimulus prevented unemployment from increasing another 1%-2%. Had Obama gotten the funding Stiglitz and Krugman recommended, it's likely we would have avoided the Great Recession.

### **Knecapping the Affordable Care Act**

By a 53-35 margin, Americans now have a favorable opinion of the Affordable Care Act, but the frenzied and uninformed opposition to its enactment helped Republicans recapture the House in 2010. They were aided by the Blue Dogs, who prevented the passage of what would have been the most popular part of the ACA, namely, a "public option" allowing the government to offer insurance plans in competition with the insurance industry.

The debacle began when Montana Senator Max Baucus, the ACA's principal drafter, declared that "single-payer" was "off-the-table." (Baucus had received more money from the pharmaceutical and insurance industries in the prior 2 years than anyone in Congress other than John McCain.) Single-payer may have been a bridge too far (despite the fact that a substantial majority of Americans favored it), but Baucus doomed the public option by giving away his single-greatest bargaining chip.

Ironically, several years ago Baucus came out in [favor](#) of some form of single-payer, but he's long gone, replaced by a new crop of Blue Dogs only too willing to do the bidding of those who profiteer from human illness. Recently, Scott Peters, Kurt Schrader, and Kathleen Rice prevented a provision that would allow Medicare to negotiate drug prices from passing the House Energy and Commerce Committee.

Prices for brand name drugs are more than 250% higher in America than anywhere else in the world, and overriding the Bush-era prohibition on Medicare negotiating drug prices with the pharmaceutical industry would lower those costs. It would be good for Americans facing crippling drug prices but bad for the pharmaceutical industry.

Thus it was not surprising to find that Big Pharma was the biggest contributor to Scott Peters's war chest and Kurt Schrader's second biggest contributor. Kathleen Rice doesn't appear to have significant contributions from Big Pharma but defended her vote by expressing concerns about "fiscal responsibility," apparently forgetting understanding that allowing Medicare to negotiate with drug companies would actually *reduce* the government's costs.

Schrader also joined a "gang of 9" to demand that Nancy Pelosi decouple the larger reconciliation bill from the bipartisan infrastructure bill, as *The New York Times* reported in a story falsely suggesting the "Left" was imperiling Biden's agenda. In reality, however, it was the gang of 9 "moderates" who were imperiling Biden's agenda by seeking to neuter the larger bill once the bipartisan bill passed, as Schrader [bragged](#) to the dark-money group "No Labels":

Let's pass that infrastructure package right now, and don't get your hopes up that we're going to spend trillions more of our kids' and grandkids' money that we don't really have at this point.

Unfortunately for the gang of 9, but fortunately for Biden's agenda, both Biden and Nancy Pelosi had learned from the past. They sided with the far larger group of progressives holding fast to the initial plan to consider the two bills together.

### **A Lower and More Vicious Form of Life**

The Blue Dogs may be corporate whores, but as FDR might have said, they're our corporate whores, they still have that "D" after their name. Republicans are a different form of life – unrepentant, malignant, both literally and metaphorically "undead."

Not a single Republican voted for the American Rescue Plan *because* they knew it would help Biden. By contrast, the CARES Act passed the House by unanimous consent and the Senate by 96-0. That is, Democrats voted for the CARES Act last year, *despite* knowing it would help Trump.

As in 2011 and 2013, they are again threatening to cause a government default by refusing to raise the debt ceiling, even though the greatest share of debt was accumulated under Republican administrations.

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But this time Republicans are not only fighting to prevent the American people from receiving the aid that they need, the aid that has been owed them for decades. They are actively sabotaging the American people and the American economy by encouraging lies about vaccines and opposing mask mandates. They know that the more COVID spreads, the worse it is for the economy and for Biden.

## **Sue Thy Neighbor: Why All Americans Should be Very Afraid of Texas' Anti-Abortion Law**

*June Sandra Neal*

Since the advent of Trump's neo-Fascist ideology in 2015, we've smelled menace in the air, a sense that our hard-won human rights and social justices, though still works in progress, could be eliminated. And as the Supreme Court convenes this month, that sense of menace has transmuted into fear that women's reproductive rights are precariously on the block.

Advocates are gearing up. On October 2, Delray Beach joined cities across the nation hosting Women's March rallies to demonstrate resistance to the Republicans' latest war on reproductive rights.

Given that the Republican neo-Fascists are replicating one another's anti-democratic laws faster than their conspiracy theories, Texas SB 8 should scare the hell out of all of us. Indeed, a Sue Thy Neighbor monster is incubating right now in Tallahassee.

After years of Republicans testing different recipes to deprive women of the rights afforded them by the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision, Texans think they've perfected it: an abortion law you can't knock down because it isn't controlled by the Constitution because the state doesn't enforce it.

Pro-choice advocates' hopes fell when, on September 1, the Supreme Court refused an emergency request to block the Texas statute. In a 5-4 majority opinion (Chief Justice John Roberts went with the good guys), they determined: "...it is unclear whether the named defendants in this lawsuit can or will seek to enforce the Texas law against the applicants in a manner that might permit our intervention." Oh, please.

Legal experts told the Texas Tribune that "...the measure is part of an emerging trend in Republican-

I'm sure that in the perverse and vile universe they inhabit, they feel justified. After all, COVID deep-sixed what seemed a certain second term for Trump, so they want COVID to derail the Biden recovery. Of course they ignore the fact that if Trump had been a competent, caring leader instead of the incompetent clown he was and is, he could have rallied the country behind and won that second term. And so what if hundreds of thousands of lives are lost as a result of their actions.

*dominated governments that find it difficult to constitutionally prohibit cultural grievances. Instead, they empower civilians to sue for civil remedies."*

Yes, Texas leaves that filthy enforcement task to its citizen vigilantes. Although they can't sue the patients, they can sue anyone who performs, or assists with, an abortion, even the Uber or Lyft drivers transporting patients to clinics.

*In other words, they can sue people who have done them no harm.*

If the bounty hunters win in court, they get a minimum cash prize of \$10,000, plus "costs and attorneys (sic) fees." If the defendants win, they get nothing.

The law prohibits abortions after six weeks of gestation, with no exceptions for rape or incest other than medical emergencies. However, the American Pregnancy Association notes that, after the first missed period, "...a pregnancy test would come back positive, but women with irregular cycles may not suspect they are pregnant." And when they do find out, it's too late.

These punishing laws are also disproportionately hard on poor women forced to travel to other states.

The threat of these statutes reaches beyond abortion rights, reminiscent of other ugly eras: "Are you now, or have you ever been...?" "Do you reject allegiance to the Japanese emperor?" "Can you name others?"

*They open the portal to the horrifying social changes that have occurred historically when authoritarian governments assumed power and fearful citizens believed that "turning in" their neighbors would*

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*(Sue Thy Neighbor, Continued from page 3)*

*protect them from the sound of jackboots and a knock on the door in the middle of the night.*

Leah Litman, law professor at the University of Michigan Law School, says the danger with the Texas law is that “...it creates a new way to circumvent constitutional rights and opens the door for other states to follow suit.”

Here comes Florida. Since January 1, 2021, Florida has allowed abortions up to 24 weeks; after that, only in cases that threaten the life or health of the mother. Other restrictions include mandated counseling, including information to discourage the patient from having the abortion; limiting payment by the Affordable Care Act to cases of life endangerment, rape or incest; parental notification and consent for minors; and an ultrasound which the patient is “offered” a chance to see.

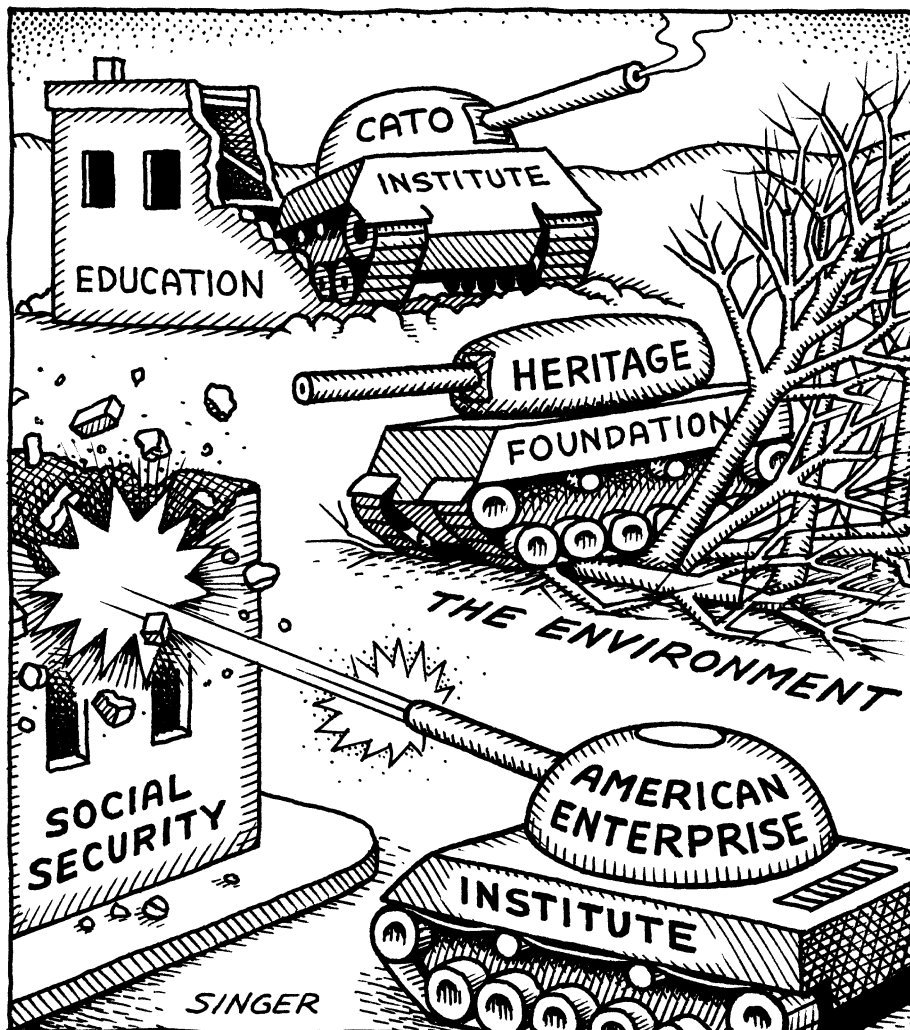
However, on September 21, Republican State Rep. Webster Barnaby introduced a bill that would ban most abortions after six weeks, allow members of the public to sue anyone who helps end a pregnancy beyond that point and fine physicians \$10,000 for each abortion they perform after the 24-week limit.

Although the patients can't be sued, think of what those women will endure under these medieval statutes. Abortion is a crisis, and for most, it is agony. Forcing a woman to relive the experience by suing those who helped her—and exposing her private life to the public—is ruthless and sadistic.

On October 6, U.S. District Judge Robert Pitman issued a forceful temporary injunction blocking Texas from enforcing its anti-abortion law, which the State of Texas will appeal. Pitman was appointed by President Barak Obama.

**NO EXIT** © **Andy Singer**

## THE THINK TANKS



*(Senate Afghanistan Hearing, Continued from page 1)*

forthcoming. U.S. Afghanistan policy has transcended four Presidential administrations and eleven Congresses, and thus is really not a partisan issue, nor should it be. It is an American issue.

### **The Facts on the Ground**

Several hours of testimony, almost all of which focused on the withdrawal from Afghanistan, came down to several critical points. President Trump signed a deal with the Taliban in February 2020 in Doha Qatar, known as the Doha Agreement. Under Trump, the U.S. fulfilled its obligations under the agreement, but the Taliban did not fulfill any other than refraining from attacks on U.S. and Coalition forces. Had the U.S. under Biden chosen to change course, withdraw from the agreement, and seek to remain in Afghanistan, the Taliban would immediately have resumed attacks against our forces.

As Trump had reduced U.S. forces to 2,500 pursuant to the agreement, we lacked anywhere near the troop strength needed to fight the Taliban. For that, we would have needed approximately 20,000 to 25,000 additional troops. Thus, the United States had no other option but to continue the withdrawal unless we were prepared to return to full combat operations replete with significant casualties on both sides.

Faced with this reality, Secretary Austin and the Joint Chiefs provided a unanimous recommendation to President Biden to follow Trump's withdrawal agreement with the Taliban. Republicans continued to mislead the American people, claiming Biden lied when he said his military advisors all supported withdrawal. He did not lie. Although some military leaders would have liked to keep the small force, none recommended that course of action when the result would have been a renewed war with the Taliban.

### **The 2020 Withdrawal**

The initial drawdown to 2,500 troops during 2020 included the removal of U.S. advisors from Afghan Army units. Without these advisors, U.S. forces had no ability to monitor the morale, commitment, and situation of Afghan troops, and this affected the intelligence assessment. While the intelligence reports included a range of possibilities that included the immediate falling of the Afghan government, this was not considered to be the most likely result. Similarly, our intelligence underestimated the level and pervasiveness of corruption throughout the

Afghan government and senior ranks of the Afghan military. There was no expectation that President Ashraf Ghani would immediately flee the country and the government would collapse without a single shot fired. Unfortunately, that's what happened.

Even prior to U.S. forces leaving, President Ghani was busy removing and appointing military leaders, thoroughly disrupting all operations, and reducing the confidence, ability, and performance of the units. This, along with the rampant corruption, interfered with logistics and resulted in many Afghan units not receiving their pay, supplies, ammunition, etc., rendering them unable to fight in the more remote locations. We were not aware of the number or extent of deals Afghan military units made with local leaders. Because of these collective challenges, large numbers of Afghan units chose to desert their posts rather than do their military duty and fight the Taliban. They simply abandoned everything to the Taliban, including sensitive military equipment, and fled. They should have at least secured or destroyed their weapons and equipment, but instead they gave them to the Taliban.

### **The Evacuation of Civilians**

There were certainly issues surrounding the civilian evacuation (NEO) with a small number of Americans still there. Some chose not to leave while others were not able to get to Kabul. Qatar has flown hundreds more out of the country and efforts continue. The military leaders agreed it was better NOT to keep U.S. forces there longer to try and facilitate additional evacuations. This would have placed those troops and the civilians they would be trying to evacuate in increased and unacceptable risk of attack. Consequently, it was better to complete the evacuation in cooperation with other countries as we see ongoing. While everyone worked diligently to get everyone out prior to August 31, it was not possible. However, the safe evacuation of over 124,000 civilians in a short period of time, especially under those conditions, was an incredible achievement.

Even before Trump signed the agreement, the Afghan government only controlled approximately 37% of the country. For the entire 20 years, Afghanistan was a dangerous country in the middle of war, terrorism, and widespread instability. Any civilians who chose to serve there, despite the fact they made courageous, selfless decisions to do so, knew the risks. The U.S. will continue to work to get every American out who wants to leave. With respect to the Afghan people, we must also recognize

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that there have been some aggressive Taliban elements that brutally murdered people who had been working with the U.S. We can argue whether it was preventable or inevitable, but the reality is that it occurred. This is a debt and a tragedy we must bear.

Lebanon and the 241 Marines killed in that terrorist attack or was George W. Bush for nearly 3000 lives lost on 9/11. On both those occasions, Democrats – and the country – rallied behind the president. Not so with today’s Republican Party.

After any operation or war ends, it is essential to

***However, the safe evacuation of over 124,000 civilians in a short period of time, especially under those conditions, was an incredible achievement.***

### **Party Before Country**

Republicans tried to blame this personally on President Biden along with the deaths of 13 American servicemembers in the suicide bombing at the airport. How reprehensible to play politics with such a tragedy. The U.S. planned extensively for such a thing and in reality, our intelligence caught and prevented a significant number of incidents. The panelists testified that Biden approved every request for resources, etc., they submitted in support of the withdrawal and evacuation plan. Leaders are always responsible and accountable, but Biden is no more personally responsible for this than was Reagan for the atrocity of the Khobar Towers bombing in

perform a comprehensive review to learn the successes, the failures, and all of the causes therefore. Lessons learned is a key component of military training. The entirety of 20 years in Afghanistan, the constantly changing military strategies, the withdrawal, and other issues will be the focus on extensive review and analysis. Let’s welcome this for the crucial purpose it serves and stop the ridiculous, foolish partisanship. Thank you to all the heroes who served. You were brave, selfless, and steadfast. You did your duty and deserve to walk tall everywhere you go. Any lingering blame lies with the four administrations and eleven Congresses without respect to political parties.

## **How to Lose Florida Again**

*Michael K. Cantwell*

When I moved from New York to Florida in 2014, I looked forward to having my vote make a difference for the first time in my life.

Obama had won Florida twice, but it was too soon to color it blue. Way too soon, as it turned out.

Rick Scott was reelected later that year, narrowly defeating Charlie Crist. In 2016, Rubio was reelected and Florida delivered its 29 electoral votes to a rough beast. Scott and DeSantis were elected in 2018, and the rough beast took Florida by an even greater margin in 2020.

One might argue that with a record like this, we don’t need help learning how to lose . . . we need help learning how to win. Yet if it’s true that those who do not learn from the mistakes of the past are condemned to repeat them, we will never win until we learn why we lose:

- **We engage in purity tests.**
- **We form into circular firing squads.**

- **We fail to support the Democrat who emerges from the primary**, either by staying home, voting for a third-party candidate and/or actively encouraging others to do the same, and/or telling others that you’re going to hold your nose and vote for the Democratic candidate.
- **We expend all our efforts** telling voters *how* to vote for the Democrat, but expend little or no effort telling them *why* to vote for the Democrat.

*Unfortunately, we’re already repeating them.*

I recently posted an article on the Florida Democratic Party Leaders Facebook Group, titled “Is Charlie Crist our Joe Biden?” pointing to a number of parallels between the two men. For example, a major factor in Biden’s election was public perception of a race pitting a competent, decent human being against an incompetent, heartless miscreant. I suggested a similar construct would play out in a Crist-DeSantis race.

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On the other hand, Biden was far from my first choice in the primaries or the first choice of those of us who self-identify as members of what Paul Wellstone memorably labeled “The Democratic Wing of the Democratic Party.” I expected the same would hold true with respect to Crist, and I didn’t have long to wait.

Negative comments fell into a number of categories: some people inveighed against the Republicanization of the FDP, arguing that we should become an actual leftwing party and stop nominating milquetoast centrists. That’s something that we can, and should debate, and I’d certainly apply that label to Patrick Murphy, but Andrew Gillum was no milquetoast centrist and we lost that race.

A final group of commenters perfectly satisfied three steps on my checklist of how to lose Florida. They insisted that they would NEVER vote for a Republican, ignoring the fact that Crist hadn’t been a Republican for more than a decade. It was unclear to me whether they were also ignoring, or were simply ignorant of, Crist’s record as a governor, when – as a Republican – he restored the voting rights of more former offenders than *any* prior governor, Republican or Democrat.

One commenter, a state committeeman, even wrote that not only would he stay home if Crist were nominated but “will encourage everyone I know to never vote for a former Republican governor” (his zeal somewhat overwhelming his syntax), and then

added, “the only thing worse than DeSantis winning is if Crist wins. We can’t let the Democratic Party be taken over by Republicans.”

That’s the kind of stupidity that led me to vote for Barry Commoner in 1980, only to watch Reagan replace the New Deal with the Raw Deal and appoint three of the five Supreme Court justices who selected George W. Bush in 2000.

That’s the kind of stupidity that allowed the 2000 election to go to the Supreme Court. Had but 538 of the 97,488 Floridians who voted for Ralph Nader voted instead for Al Gore, he would have been elected and the country would have been spared the cost of Bush’s trillion-dollar wars and the ignominy of our use of torture and other violations of international humanitarian law, not to mention the appointments of John Roberts and Samuel Alito to the Supreme Court.

And that’s the kind of stupidity that, in 2016, elected one of the foulest creatures to pollute both the Oval Office and our democracy, giving him the opportunity to appoint more federal appeals court judges in four years than anyone, including three Supreme Court justices.

I don’t presume to know who would be our strongest candidate against DeSantis (or Rubio for that matter), but I do insist that “Vote Blue, No Matter Who” is not merely a slogan, as one commenter derisively claimed. It is the only way our party, our democracy, and our planet, can survive.

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## Environmental Racism and Big Sugar

Patrick Ferguson was our speaker at our September meeting night for a presentation on “Environmental Racism and Sugarcane Burning.” Patrick is an attorney and an organizing rep for the Sierra Club Florida’s Stop the Burn Go Green Campaign. His presentation is available [here](#) and is worth watching.

Sugar companies in Florida harvest sugarcane by burning away the plant’s leafy outer stalk, sending plumes of smoke and ash into nearby neighborhoods and sickening residents, damaging the soil, destroying animal habitats, and contributing to climate change. Not every neighboring community that might be reached by the fumes is affected, however, because burn permits are not issued when the wind is blowing east toward Palm Beach.

Sugarcane burning is not only a toxic practice – it is one that is outdated. Instead of burning the leaves and tops of the plants, sugar companies and farmers in Louisiana and Brazil harvest them mechanically, turning these “non-productive” parts of the plant into additional sources of income, enriching the soil, and improving crop yields.

If it sounds like a no-brainer, it’s not. As Upton Sinclair noted, “It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends upon his not understanding it.” Or his or her reelection.

Big Sugar spent more than \$11 million on Florida campaigns in the 2020 cycle, and they got what they paid for – SB 88/HB 1601, which amended the “Florida Right to Farm Act” and passed with broad bipartisan support. Only one Democrat in the Senate and seven in the House (including Omari Hardy) voted against the bill.

Although FRFA already limited “nuisance suits” against “farm operations,” the amendment pretty much eliminates them:

- It adds “particulate emissions” to the definition of farm operations, making clear that FRFA covers all claims involving the fallout from sugarcane burning .
- It raises the burden of proof on anyone bringing a lawsuit from the “preponderance of evidence” usually applied in civil suits (i.e., better than 50-50) to “clear and convincing evidence.”
- It prohibits lawsuits by anyone living more than ½ mile from the source of the complained activity.
- It prohibits punitive damages and limits compensatory damages to the fair-market value of the property.

MKC

### Democratic Club of Delray Beach 2021 Membership Application and Renewal

Date \_\_\_\_\_ New \_\_\_\_\_ Renewal \_\_\_\_\_

Name/names of household members \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Community/Condo Name \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address \_\_\_\_\_ Phone number \_\_\_\_\_

(E-mail addresses are shared with the Palm Beach County Democratic Party so our members will be kept abreast of the latest County Democratic Activity. If you do not wish to receive this information, please initial here \_\_\_\_ and we will not share your E-mail address.).

Preferred method of contact: E-mail \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Text \_\_\_\_\_

Send newsletter by: E-mail \_\_\_\_\_ Hand delivery \_\_\_\_\_ U.S. Mail \_\_\_\_\_

I/we are in South Florida from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ each year or are a permanent resident \_\_\_\_\_.

Payment: Individual \$25 \_\_\_\_\_ Household \$35 \_\_\_\_\_ Donation \_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks payable to Democratic Club of Delray Beach and mail to P.O. Box 8224, Delray Beach, FL 33484. Thank you and welcome to our Club.

