

SunSentinel LOCAL & STATE

POLITICS

DeSantis faces headwinds in campaign

Needs turnaround in early GOP primary states

By **Steven Lemongello**
Orlando Sentinel

As Gov. Ron DeSantis plummets in the GOP presidential primary polls, his status as option number two in case anything happens to Donald Trump is getting more precarious.

He's battling native son and daughter Tim Scott and Nikki Haley in South Carolina. He's neck and neck in some polls with businessman Vivek Ramaswamy and could become the target of everyone who doesn't want to attack Trump directly.

His campaign is laying off staff to try to cut spending as contributions dry up and is mired in a debate about whether slaves developed beneficial skills for

later in life. It's also under fire because of a video with Nazi imagery reportedly created by one of his staff.

With the first debate on the horizon, DeSantis could be in danger of flaming out entirely by the time the primaries begin unless he can turn things around and score a key win over Trump in one of the early states, political analysts said.

"What he really risks here is getting into this sort of death spiral, where the donors aren't confident in him ... and you get this negative feedback loop that takes over," said J. Miles Coleman, associate editor of Sabato's Crystal Ball at the University of

Turn to Campaign, Page 10



Gov. Ron DeSantis, a Republican presidential candidate, speaks during a campaign stop at Toppling Goliath Brewery in Decorah, Iowa, on Friday. **RACHEL MUMMEY/THE NEW YORK TIMES**

DeSantis dismisses Trump's 2020 election theories as false

By **Nicholas Nehamas and Lisa Lerer**
The New York Times

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis said that claims about the 2020 election being stolen were false, directly contradicting a central argument of former President Donald J. Trump and his supporters.

The comments went further than DeSantis typically goes when asked about Trump's defeat. The governor has often tried to hedge, refusing to acknowledge that the election was fairly conducted. In his response on Friday, DeSantis did not mention Trump by name

Turn to Theory, Page 8



JOHN MCCALL/SOUTH FLORIDA SUN SENTINEL

Battling it out in Boca Raton

Ava Violet performs during the third annual Battle of the Bands competition at Mizner Park Amphitheater in Boca Raton on Friday. Bands compete in one of two age categories, with a grand prize of \$2,500 in each category.

Scammer poses as Broward sheriff

Victims targeted via text, requested to give Apple gift cards

By **Jack Lemnus**
South Florida Sun Sentinel

Public engagement is part of any sheriff's job.

But when somebody posing as Broward County Sheriff Gregory Tony reaches out to request Apple gift cards, it's not public outreach. It's a scam. The scammer targets victims via text, claiming to be the sheriff, according to a news release from the Sheriff's Office.

Police are unsure of the scammer's identity, and BSO's Threat Management Unit is investigating.

The first scams were reported when two Sheriff's Office employees received text messages from the imposter. Reports of the scams have since stopped, and no Sheriff's Office employee has been taken advantage of by the gift card scam, according to BSO investigators.

The Sheriff's Office urges the public not to respond to the texts and to contact BSO Detective Eric Versteeg at Eric.Versteeg@sheriff.org or by calling BSO's non-emergency number, 954-764-HELP (4357).

Flight instructor, passenger dead following North Perry crash

Single-engine plane nosedived shortly after taking off, officials say

By **Shira Moolten**
South Florida Sun Sentinel

Two people have died following the plane crash at North Perry Airport on Friday afternoon, officials said Saturday.

A flight instructor died at the scene of the crash, while a female passenger who was sitting next to him died shortly after in the hospital, according to Aaron McCarter, an air safety investigator for the National Transportation Safety Board. A third victim, a male passenger in the back seat, remains hospitalized in critical condition.

The Cessna 172 single-engine plane had taken off from the airport around noon, reaching an



Officials on scene of a small plane that crashed at North Perry Airport in Pembroke Pines on Friday. The pilot and a passenger were killed in the crash, officials said Saturday. **CARLINE JEAN/SOUTH FLORIDA SUN SENTINEL**

altitude of 100 feet, before it nosedived into the ground.

"It all happened very fast," McCarter said.

The plane began the takeoff roll from runway 10, then went into a "very high angle of attack," McCarter told reporters in the shade of a tree at Maxwell Park,

which sits across the fence from the site of the crash, at a media briefing Saturday afternoon. The plane "crested" the angle of attack at the top before going into a nose-down attitude, turning left, and hitting the ground in between

Turn to Plane, Page 6

RECREATIONAL MARIJUANA

Moody takes aim at firm behind amendment

By **Dara Kam**
News Service of Florida

TALLAHASSEE — Florida Attorney General Ashley Moody has pumped up arguments against a proposed constitutional amendment to legalize recreational marijuana, saying the measure misleads voters in a way to benefit the state's largest medical-marijuana operator, Trulieve.

Tallahassee-based Trulieve has contributed all but a fraction of the nearly \$40 million raised by the Smart & Safe Florida political committee for the proposed Adult Use of Marijuana initiative, which would go on the 2024 ballot.

The committee has submitted more than the nearly 900,000 signatures required to go before voters next year but faces a final hurdle — Florida Supreme Court

approval of the proposed ballot wording.

Lawyers for Moody, the Florida Chamber of Commerce and the Drug Free America Foundation have filed briefs arguing the Supreme Court should reject the proposal.

Smart & Safe Florida's attorneys last month called the state's arguments a "thinly veiled

Turn to Moody, Page 6

Elected official bullied others

Report details Pembroke Park commissioner's behavior at events

By **Lisa J. Huriash**
South Florida Sun Sentinel

A town-commissioned investigation into an elected official's behavior has wrapped up, concluding that Pembroke Park Commissioner Geoffrey Jacobs engaged in a "pattern of bullying, threatening harm, intimidation, public humiliation and retaliation."

But it's unclear what, if anything, will result from the conclusions detailed in a 17-page report. The investigation, sought by the town, was conducted by a private attorney. The inquiry, which cost taxpayers \$19,000, centered on the alleged behavior of Jacobs at public meetings, town events, at Town Hall and his social media postings.

Michael Pizzi, the attorney for Jacobs, called it a "political witch hunt." He said Jacobs was reelected this year, and "it's not up to the mayor and his political opponents to overturn democracy."

Tonja Haddad Coleman, a Fort Lauderdale-based attorney who specializes in labor and employment law, wrote in her report that witnesses accused him of a "hostile, volatile, toxic workplace," and she found evidence "of foul and wholly inappropriate language, racial and ethnic slurs, abuse of power, and antisemitic, chauvinistic, homophobic, misogynistic, demeaning, and degrading commentary."

The report doesn't make any suggestions on what the town should do, other than to say some of the allegations "may warrant further investigation."

Jacobs has repeatedly argued that he is the one at Town Hall trying to root out the problems. And the report also notes "Commissioner Jacobs claims, both in his social media and at commission meetings, that he has First Amendment rights that justify and protect his commentary and behavior."

Jacobs declined to participate in the attorney's probe, and was not interviewed.

Among the report's findings, based on interviews:

■ Former Town Attorney Melissa Anderson reported that anyone "who got in his way of creating a police department on town staff got run over by Jacobs." He was accused of referring to her as a pit bull that should be "put down."

■ Jacobs allegedly cursed at Town Clerk Marlen Martell, called her a "rat," and threatened to have her fired when she disagreed with him or told him that she could not do some of the things he asked.

■ Babette Friedman, the former director of Human Resources, said that the town received eight formal complaints against Jacobs, and relayed that employees come

Turn to Bullying, Page 8