

SunSentinel OPINION

Steve Bousquet
Opinion Editor

Julie Anderson
Editor-in-Chief

SUN SENTINEL EDITORIAL

Vote no on Amendments 5 and 6

Two amendments placed on the November ballot by the Florida Legislature involve tax money. One affects taxpayers; the other affects how politicians finance campaigns.

The Sun Sentinel recommends a no vote on both.

Amendment 5: Homestead exemption

One of the Legislature's worst traits is to cut taxes at someone else's expense — and that's the problem with Amendment 5.

It provides cost-of-living adjustments to part of the homestead exemption on the taxable value of owner-occupied residences. It's the part between \$50,000 and \$75,000 of a home's value as applied to the tax bases of all local governments except schools.

Amendment 5 would not change the basic homestead exemption, which exempts property taxes on the first \$25,000 of a home's value.

If inflation were to go up, the city, county and special district taxes on that other part would go down — unless those governing boards raised tax rates. True to form, the Legislature is not offering state revenue to make up for the losses.

Some governments are at their tax millage limits, but most aren't, and they would likely raise those rates rather than cut spending on public safety and other needs. That gets us to what else is wrong with Amendment 5.

Any tax rate increases would fall hardest on property that does not qualify for the homestead exemptions, including businesses and rental property.

Every business owner and every renter has good reason to vote "no" on 5, which worsens the already discriminatory effects

of the homestead exemption. Any homeowner with a conscience should vote against it, too.

Economists view tax exemptions as "tax expenditures," the same as money voted out of the public treasury. Any such spending should serve a public purpose, and be done fairly.

Helping citizens with shelter costs serves a legitimate public purpose. But it isn't even-handed. Federal and state tax policy favors homeownership over renting. It is not fair to reduce shelter costs for homeowners at the expense of people who rent, especially when those who rent have no choice.

According to the Florida Housing Coalition, more than 2.1 million households pay more than 30% of their income for housing and are considered cost-burdened.

The 2020 census found that just under two-thirds of Florida households are owner-occupied. Amendment 5 favors them at the expense of the other third, who rent.

Amendment 5's homestead adjustments would occur in future years. State economists estimate the loss to local governments at \$112 million a year by fiscal 2028-29.

Such a fiscal analysis would have been an important addition to this amendment on the ballot, but voters won't see it on their ballots. Of course, a politically motivated, phony fiscal analysis on the unknown costs of the abortion rights Amendment 4, which the Legislature is against, is on the ballot.

During floor debate on Amendment 5, Sen. Jason Pizzo, D-Sunny Isles Beach, tried to limit the exemption value increases to 3% a year. It failed on a voice vote. The amendment, HJR 7017, passed almost entirely on party lines, though Republican Sen. Joe Gruters of Sarasota broke ranks

and opposed it. He was right. Voters should follow his example.

Amendment 6: Campaigns

Little remains of the idealistic legacy Florida government created half a century ago. Partial public financing of statewide campaigns is one of the few remnants. A cynical Legislature wants voters to erase that, too.

The Sun Sentinel Editorial Board emphatically recommends a no vote on Amendment 6. Special interests are already too influential.

The targeted program awards matching funds for political contributions of \$250 or less from Florida residents. The money goes to candidates for governor and the Cabinet who agree to limit total spending to \$2 per registered voter in a governor's race, and \$1 per voter for races for attorney general, agriculture commissioner and chief financial officer. They can put no more than \$25,000 into their own campaigns.

Critics complain that it subsidizes candidates who don't need the money. But that's no reason to deny the assistance to low-budget candidates who try to compete with the big bucks.

In the 2018 governor's race, Andrew Gillum's \$2.6 million in matching funds helped him win the Democratic primary and stay competitive with Republican Ron DeSantis, whose subsidy was \$3.2 million and who won by less than half a percentage point.

Democrat Nikki Fried's \$158,507 public subsidy was critical in her razor-thin victory over a Republican who didn't seek matching funds.

In the most famous example, public financing helped a Republican win. Bob Milligan defeated entrenched

Democratic incumbent Gerald Lewis in 1994 for the office of state comptroller and banking regulator. It was a huge upset: Florida was still Democratic then, and bankers and their big money felt obliged to support Lewis.

"We got 100,000 bucks, which matched what we had raised. It helped," Milligan recalled in a text to the Editorial Board.

The public financing law is flawed in some ways. Money spent by candidates' political committees, such as Friends of Ron DeSantis, should be counted against the limits. The Legislature can fix that.

In 2022, DeSantis spent nearly to the max while taking \$7.2 million from the treasury, even as his PAC spent millions more on his behalf that didn't count against the ceiling.

Despite that flaw, matching funds are the public's only restraint against cash-register government. The U.S. Supreme Court barred mandatory spending limits in 1976.

Thirteen other states have some form of public financing. An earlier attempt to repeal Florida's failed at the ballot box in 2010.

"Public campaign financing gives everyday Floridians more influence," said Amy Keith of Common Cause Florida, which opposes Amendment 6.

As the conservative U.S. Sen. Barry Goldwater once said, "Unlimited campaign spending eats at the heart of the democratic process."

Repealing Florida's public financing law would, too. Amendment 6 deserves a resounding no.

The Sun Sentinel Editorial Board consists of Opinion Editor Steve Bousquet, Deputy Opinion Editor Dan Sweeney, editorial writers Pat Beall and Martin Dyckman, and Editor-in-Chief Julie Anderson. To contact us, email at letters@sun-sentinel.com.

ANOTHER VIEWPOINT

Solving crisis of homelessness requires all of us work together

On Oct. 10, World Homeless Day served as a vital reminder of the ongoing struggles faced by individuals and families without stable housing. This day prompts us to acknowledge the difficulties and uncertainties experienced by those living without a roof over their heads, something that is often all too easy to ignore.



By Erin Kozlowski

As the chief development officer of Gulfstream Goodwill Industries (GGI), I know that this issue extends far beyond the numbers of homeless in each city, or the percentage of homeless people among the state population. I know that each of these numbers represents an individual within our community whose life has been profoundly impacted.

While events like World Homeless Day offer a focused reminder, we cannot lose sight of the fact that homelessness is a 365-day challenge. For those without a place to call home, every day brings new struggles and uncertainty. It's not just a number or a statistic — it's people, families and individuals who have often fallen into these circumstances through no fault of their own.

Our work must go beyond observation and recognition. As a community, we must come together to provide real support, meaningful solutions and, ultimately, hope for those in unstable living conditions.

GGI, the largest homelessness provider in Palm Beach, Martin, St. Lucie, Indian River and Okeechobee counties, is changing lives through housing, training, education and employment. Our mission extends beyond a roof over one's head; it encompasses empowerment, dignity and a pathway to self-sufficiency. Every night, GGI has over 250 individuals in its shelters and affordable housing who would otherwise be on the streets.

Our homeless prevention services include temporary shelters and permanent supportive housing that is safe, comfortable and affordable for single adults and families who are homeless

and/or at risk for homelessness. Last year, we served 1,973 homeless individuals, helping to get them off the streets and into a safe environment.

We also provide wraparound services for people experiencing homelessness, including counseling, mental health resources, life skills development, peer support, case management, financial literacy education and psychiatric services. In addition, our workforce readiness services include career counseling information and referral, preemployment training, career camps, work readiness training and job placement.

We are committed to equipping individuals with the skills and resources necessary to secure and maintain stable employment. We provide a hand up to people with any barrier to independence to become self-sufficient, working members of their communities.

But addressing homelessness requires more than what one nonprofit can provide. Other charitable organizations, government agencies, businesses and communities must pool resources, share best practices and create a coordinated response. Together, we can achieve what no single entity can do alone.

Compassion and action go hand in hand. Let us stand in solidarity with those experiencing homelessness and work tirelessly to ensure everyone has a place to call home. Our efforts today will shape the future for generations to come.

I call on all of us to embrace the spirit of World Homeless Day by committing ourselves to enacting meaningful change. Let us make a difference, one person, one family and one community at a time. Together, we can end homelessness, not just for a day but for a lifetime. For more information on GGI, please visit goggi.org or call 561-848-7200.

Erin Kozlowski of Boynton Beach is chief development officer of Gulfstream Goodwill Industries.



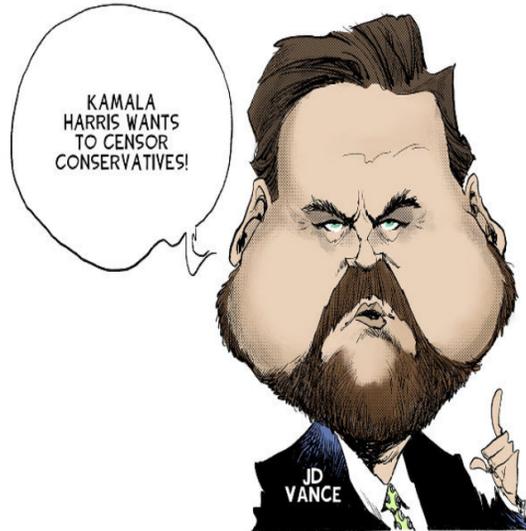
A man sleeps on the sidewalk on NW 1st Street in Fort Lauderdale on Oct. 1, the date a new Florida law took effect making sleeping in public spaces illegal.

JOE CAVARETTA/SOUTH FLORIDA SUN SENTINEL

NOTICE TO READERS

We welcome your opinions. Please email your letters to letters@sunsentinel.com. They should be no more than 150 words and may be edited for length and clarity. All letters become property of the Sun Sentinel. We look forward to hearing from you.

SHENEMAN
TRADE COMMERCIAL AGENCY



SAYS THE GUY WHO'S NOT ALLOWED TO ADMIT TRUMP LOST

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

It's time to burst Trump's balloon

I read newspapers and watch election coverage daily, on TV and online. I watch Fox as much as I can to understand the viewpoints there.

I absolutely cannot fathom why any intelligent person would vote for Donald Trump (emphasis on "intelligent").

His indiscretions against women, attacks on our Constitution, disrespect to minorities, fawning admiration for Vladimir Putin, Kim Jong Un and Viktor Orbán, dishonest business dealings, and other transgressions are too numerous to mention. Also, I wonder why he attacks immigrants who are here legally, as in Springfield, Ohio. Trump himself married two immigrants, right?

Growing up, my dad said: "Some people live and learn — other people just live."

If so many citizens can't absorb facts and make informed choices when they vote, we will end up being a laughingstock, as with Trump previously.

Remember the huge orange Trump balloon that floated in London when he visited there, and the laughter he elicited when he spoke to the U.N. in 2018? They were laughing at us — not with us. The caliber of the person who is president matters.

Penny Morey, Boca Raton

Why we need skepticism

Bravo to your editorial call for skepticism as an antidote to the appalling credulity of, perhaps, 40% of Americans who believe the lies, conspiracy theories and bigotry of the extreme right.

Gullibility is a serious intellectual deficit that education at all levels must address. In my 40-plus years as a teacher, belief in the paranormal has been rampant among college students and, to my horror, my faculty colleagues too. Now, this gullibility has spread to the body politic and society generally. That is far more dangerous.

Maryland Congressman Jamie Raskin adroitly quoting Voltaire's 1765 dictum that those who can make us believe in absurdities can make us commit atrocities really does explain the storming of the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

Your tips about fact-checking, judging the reliability of sources, finding official sources, verifying before sharing, and being skeptical of outlandish claims are plain common sense and just what we need.

Christopher Reiss, Dania Beach

Her head, examined

Trump said Jewish voters will bear the blame if he loses. He also said Jews who vote Democrat hate their religion, and that Jews who don't vote for him need to have their heads examined.

As a Jew and a senior citizen, I'll gladly shoulder the blame when he loses. I'll be happy to have my head examined.

If we get four more years of Donald Trump, we'll all need to see a psychiatrist.

Gail Schorr, Boca Raton

Judge Cannon, again?

Once again, U.S. District Judge Aileen Cannon, a Trump appointee and member of the Federalist Society, has been assigned a Trump-related case (the second assassination attempt on him). She should have recused herself from the classified documents case but did not, only to face criticism.

Dragging the case out by requiring unreasonable motions and appointing a person to review the documents brought criticism from former judges.

Cannon is clearly not impartial, leaning toward decisions that favor Trump — or does she lack the experience and expertise to understand the complexity of the cases? The second case is very different from the first, but can she be truly impartial? Were these assignments coincidental? Therein lay the questions.

Richard Silver, Boynton Beach