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The Reports

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The state stepped in to help manage the distressed finances of two rural school districts. **P6**

Matlow Defends Judge in Underage Sex Case

By Steve Stewart

Tallahassee city commissioner and mayoral candidate Jeremy Matlow recently took to social media and the pages of the Tallahassee Democrat to defend a judge who has come under fire for granting bail to a convicted sex offender who was charged with murdering his stepdaughter while awaiting sentencing, saying the criticism is part of a "far-right" conspiracy.

Matlow responded to Governor DeSantis' impeachment call of Leon County Judge Tiffany Baker-Carper as he signed Missy's Law this

MATLOW, Page 5

TPD Investigation Leads to Arrest, Seizure of Over \$1.8 Million in Narcotics

By Steve Stewart

During a Tallahassee Police Department (TPD) press conference on Wednesday, April 8, Police Chief Revell announced the arrest of 42-year Chandale Mills following a months-long narcotics investigation that resulted in the seizure of trafficking-level quantities of illegal drugs, multiple firearms, and nearly \$30,000 in cash.

According to officials, beginning in February, TPD detectives launched an investigation into suspected narcotics activity connected to a residence on Folsom Road.

Over the course of several weeks, detectives conducted surveillance, gathered intelligence, and identified patterns



consistent with large-scale drug distribution.

As the investigation progressed, detectives

determined Mills was making frequent trips out of state to resupply illegal narcotics. Further

investigation revealed Mills was operating out of multiple locations, including a residence in

the 3100 block of Folsom Road and another in the 1700 block of Cassatt Drive.

TPD, Page 4

Marva Johnson Discusses Her Experience as FAMU President

By Jay Waagmeester
The Florida Phoenix

Florida A&M University President Marva Johnson reflected on her experience thus far as the university's leader, particularly in light of widespread public pushback to her selection.

Johnson spoke Friday to the Capital Tiger Bay Club in Tallahassee.

"I know no university president has a 100% likability rate, but I'm hoping to try to make sure that I listen in a way that is constructive, that I make decisions that are well informed, not just from peoples' opinions but from data," Johnson responded to a question about how opposition has changed since her selection nearly a year ago.

"And that at the end of the first year, the second year, third year, fifth year, that what people are truly measuring and commenting on is the outcome and the impact, and we expect that to be phenomenal," Johnson continued.

Johnson highlighted FAMU successes, such as being ranked the No. 1 public historically Black college and university by U.S. News & World Report and No. 1 HBCU by Niche, and for the economic support the university provides to the state.

Alumni and FAMU stakeholders questioned Johnson's political ties when she was announced as a finalist, having been appointed to boards by former Gov. Rick Scott and Gov.



Ron DeSantis, prompting protesters' concerns that she may prove a political president.

Those political ties, paired with a perceived lack of higher education experience, resulted in petitions and community events opposing her presidency and prolonged FAMU Board of Trustee meetings.

"I'm a lawyer and a corporate executive. Not exactly a part of the academy from the traditional higher education experience," Johnson acknowledged Friday.

Johnson was vice president for governmental affairs for Charter Communications before coming to FAMU and previously served as chair of the State Board of Education, which oversees K-12 education in the state and the Florida College System.

She was education chair for Florida's Constitution Revision Commission in 2016. That, paired with her State Board of Education experience,

FAMU, Page 6

Florida PBA Big Bend Chapter Endorses City Commissioner Dianne Williams-Cox



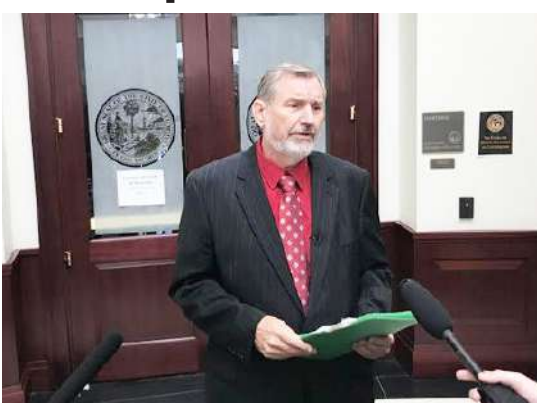
By Steve Stewart

The Florida Police Benevolent Association Big Bend Chapter has formally endorsed the re-election campaign of Tallahassee City Commissioner Dianne Williams-Cox.

The endorsement, released on Monday stated, "Over the last several years, Tallahassee police officers have faced great adversity. Now more than ever, our members need to support candidates for City Commission, who always have our backs. Throughout her tenure on the City Commission, Commissioner Diane Williams-Cox has always championed the issues that matter most to our officers and their families. She has supported law enforcement

PBA, Page 5

Dr. Erwin Jackson Pens Book About City Hall: "Fighting the Commission of Corruption"



Dr. Erwin Jackson, the city watchdog and major player in the recent federal investigation of city hall, has written a book about his experience titled "Fighting the Commission of Corruption." The book is available on Amazon.com. Provided on page 3 is an excerpt from the book related to his fight against a proposed biomass plant. **P43**

INSIDE



FLAG FOOTBALL: The 8th ranked (FL) Timberwolves showed off their explosive offense beating the Baby Rattlers 26-7. **P10**

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Community News

Local News Seen as Essential Anchor in Fragmented Media Landscape

By Steve Stewart

Thursday, April 9 marked Local News Day, a national observance recognizing the vital role local journalism plays in keeping communities informed, safe and engaged. The day highlights the work of reporters and news organizations that cover city councils, school boards, public safety and neighborhood issues that directly affect residents' daily lives.

Local News Day also raises awareness about the challenges facing community news outlets, including declining advertising revenue, newsroom closures and the growth of "news deserts," where residents have limited access to reliable local information. Media advocates use the observance to encourage public support for local journalism and to emphasize its role in government accountability and emergency communication.

In communities across the country, like Tallahassee, local journalists routinely cover public meetings, school board decisions and government spending—issues that directly affect residents' daily lives. Media scholars describe this watchdog role as one of the most critical functions of local

news organizations. "Local reporting is often the only consistent source of scrutiny over municipal government," communications researchers note. Without that coverage, fewer public meetings are documented, spending decisions receive less public attention, and potential mismanagement can go unnoticed. Studies have linked declining local news coverage to reduced civic participation and increased government costs, underscoring the connection between journalism and public accountability.

Beyond oversight, local news outlets serve as a primary source of practical information that residents rely on to navigate everyday life. Coverage of school closures, public safety alerts, infrastructure disruptions and local elections provides timely updates that are rarely addressed by national media unless they escalate into major crises.

Community leaders also emphasize the role local news plays in shaping civic identity. By highlighting neighborhood events, local sports, cultural celebrations and community challenges, local outlets help residents understand shared experiences and maintain a common set of facts for public discussion. Analysts warn that

when local news coverage diminishes, communities may become more polarized as audiences increasingly turn to national or partisan sources for information.

The importance of local journalism becomes especially clear during emergencies. In disaster-prone states such as Florida, local news organizations often serve as a lifeline during hurricanes and severe weather, delivering real-time updates, safety guidance and coordination with emergency officials. Residents frequently rely on familiar local outlets for trusted information when conditions change rapidly.

Many significant local developments also receive little to no national attention, from zoning decisions and economic development projects to neighborhood crime trends and small business openings. These stories, while less visible on a national stage, can have lasting impacts on local economies and quality of life.

Ultimately, researchers and industry observers say the continued presence of strong local news organizations supports democratic participation by keeping voters informed about municipal elections, referendums and school board races—contests that often shape



policy closest to home.

As digital media options continue to expand, analysts point to a growing paradox: the more fragmented the information landscape becomes, the more essential reliable local news appears to be for maintaining transparency, public safety and civic engagement.

First Commerce, FCCU Foundation Bring Real-World Money Skills to Leon High Students

By Staff

More than 80 senior-level economics students at Leon High School gained hands-on money management experience April 2 as First Commerce Credit Union and the FCCU Foundation kicked off Financial Literacy Month.

As the nonprofit arm of First Commerce, the FCCU Foundation focuses on fostering financial literacy for all age groups across North Florida and South Georgia. At Leon High, the Foundation led an interactive, game-style Financial Fitness Fair designed to help students build strong financial fundamentals as young adults.

During the Financial Fitness Fair, students received fictional identities that came with simulated real-world expenses, including transportation, housing, groceries, entertainment and childcare.

Students rotated through a series of stations representing different expense categories, working one-on-one with First Commerce financial professionals to navigate budgeting decisions tied to each.

First Commerce CEO Cecilia Homison staffed one of the stations, talking with students and advising them on hypothetical budget choices. She said the experience encouraged students to think critically about financial decisions in a safe, supportive environment.

"It's really exciting because you can start to see them thinking, 'Hey, I get to make these choices,' and wanting to be in control," Homison said after the event. "At the same time, the reality starts to sink in as they see how quickly costs add up and how their job and family situation influence the choices they can make."

As part of the visit, First Commerce also presented Leon High School with a \$1,000 check to support campus beautification efforts by planting new trees. The trees serve as a lasting symbol of the growth and opportunity fostered through financial education initiatives like the Financial Fitness Fair.

Leon High School Assistant Principal Linda John said the Financial Fitness Fair delivers practical lessons students can carry with them long after graduation.

"We truly appreciate you being here today and not only investing in Leon High School, but also investing in financial literacy in our community," John said following the event.

Members of First Commerce's volunteer Board of Directors also participated alongside credit union team members, reinforcing the

board's commitment to financial education and community impact.

Alan Neubauer, chairman of the First Commerce Board of Directors, said the event helps prepare students for the financial realities they will face after graduation.

"The goal is to have fun while empowering generations of families to achieve their financial aspirations," Neubauer said. "These students will soon be navigating the real world, and this gives them valuable perspective on what everyday costs look like and how quickly they add up."

Board member Shonda Knight, a Leon High School graduate, said the Financial Fitness Fair showcases the credit union's mission in action.

"As we celebrate the FCCU Foundation's 10th anniversary alongside First Commerce's 85th anniversary, we're in-

credibly proud that our team members have contributed more than 25,000 volunteer hours empowering generations to achieve their financial aspirations," Knight said.

The April 2 event reflects First Commerce's growing commitment to financial education. In 2025, more than 4,000 people of all ages participated in FCCU Foundation financial fitness fairs and customized learning experiences offered throughout the region.

First Commerce and the FCCU Foundation are providing the communities they serve with financial literacy content, lessons, resources and tools throughout Financial Literacy Month in April, all of which are accessible at FirstCommerceCU.org/FLM2026.

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Community News

Dr. Erwin Jackson Pens "Fighting the Commission of Corruption"

By Staff

Dr. Erwin Jackson, the city watchdog and major player in the recent federal investigation of city hall, has written a book about his experience titled "Fighting the Commission of Corruption. The book is available on Amazon.com. Provided below is an excerpt from the book related to his fight against a proposed biomass plant.

It wasn't long after this I got a call from Betty Steffens, FSU's general counsel, who represented the FSU president. The attorney asked if I would come in and talk with the president.

I was kind of excited. I said, "I've never talked to the President of FSU, and he wants to talk with me. How about that?" Hell, I knew what he wanted to talk with me about.

I took my office manager, Ely Rosario, with me. Ely and I were greeted in the FSU president's outer office by Steffens. She asked us to leave our cell phones on the desk and then escorted us into T.K.'s opulent office.

Decorated with dark wood furniture, tufted leather chairs and tan colored walls, the office of the President was elegant and dignified, almost stereotypically stuffy. T.K. was sitting behind his large desk as we entered. He stood, walked around his desk and greeted us.

A former FSU star football player, T.K., despite being in his early 60's, was

a fairly tall, athletically built man with a receding hairline and graying hair. He wore a perfectly starched, white dress shirt, dark dress pants, and a tie. He took off his glasses as he directed Ely and me to a square table where we all sat.

I started out by thanking T.K. for his recent donation of a couple million dollars to FSU. Then I said, "I understand you want to take good care of your wife. She's a little younger than you, that makes sense. You want to set up a nice retirement. I'm in favor of that too. The problem is your wife owns a 10 percent financial interest in this biomass plant. That's what she's going to be given since she convinced you to allow the biomass plant to use FSU property at the end of Lipona Road. It's a good deal for her and a good deal for you, but it's a terrible deal for FSU and a terrible deal for a young mother I know who owns a house next door to it."

He was sitting with his elbows on the table, cupping his chin in his right hand as he listened to me. He rubbed his eyes and eyebrows, sat back in his chair and said, "No, no, that's not right. I don't know what you're talking about. I don't care. I don't care where they build this plant. I don't have a dog in this fight."

I quipped back, "T.K., you are the big dog in this fight, and I intend on seeing you lose!"

He shook his head and shot right back, "Dr. Jackson, I drove by your

office and through the neighborhood where your rental houses are. 'For Rent' signs are everywhere. Maybe you should spend more time with your business and not so much with mine."

I quickly explained to him that this was rental season, that between January and August my occupancy rate was at 100 percent, that this was just the time of the year when renewals were up, and new residents signed leases. I told him my business would be devastated by his business, FSU's project to build this BioMass plant. I asked how it would be, sitting at Doak Campbell stadium, FSU's beloved, multi-million-dollar football venue, with ash from the biomass plant falling around all the spectators and players.

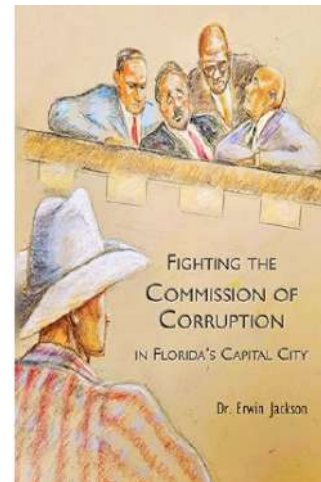
"I don't know why you call this an FSU project," he said.

I responded, "The plant will be built on FSU's Southwest campus. You are the president of FSU. This project is identified in your university's comprehensive plan. You have actively lobbied for this project. That's why I call it an FSU project."

The argument continued to escalate.

"I concur that calling this an FSU project may be misleading. I believe a more accurate title would be 'Wetherell, Wetherell & BG&E project,'" I said.

He sat on my right side. The attorney was across from me and Ely was to my left. As we're talking, T.K. was getting more heated, and I was



speaking fairly directly, and our noses start getting closer and closer together.

And I said, "furthermore, your wife..." At about that time the attorney pushes her chair back, stands up, claps her hands and says "Gentlemen, this meeting is OVER."

And then we both turned and looked at her, as if she broke some kind of spell.

I said, "Alright, I guess you understand. I've said all I need to say." We got up and left his office.

As we were leaving, Steffens warned, "This conversation was confidential. I don't want to hear statements from you that T.K. said this or that on the radio, television or in the newspaper."

I just looked at her. I didn't like being threatened or told not to express my deep-felt beliefs. This BioMass deal needed more light shined on it, not less.



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Local News

Violent, Property Crime Incidents Up Double-Digits Through March

By Steve Stewart

TPD crime incident numbers for March 2026 are in. The numbers show that year-to-date (YTD) property crime and violent crime incidents are up 20.7% when compared to YTD numbers in March 2025. The broader 12-month trends show that violent and property crime incidents, after months of declining, are starting to trend up.

The YTD Numbers

The incident data - tabulated by TR - show that YTD property crime incidents were up 13.9% and YTD violent crime incidents are up 32.8% through March when compared to one year ago.

Property crimes encompass burglaries, thefts, and inci-

YTD TPD Incident Comparisons				
	YTD (Mar 31)		Chg	%Chg
	2025	2026		
Total Incidents	540	652	112	20.7%
--- Property	345	393	48	13.9%
--- Violent	195	259	64	32.8%

dents of vandalism. Violent incidents include aggravated assaults, armed robberies, and physical altercations.

A look at specific crimes reveals the increase in property crime was driven by increases in residential (19.8%) and commercial burglaries (100.0%). The Auto Burglary & Theft category - which accounts for approximately 55% of all property crimes - was

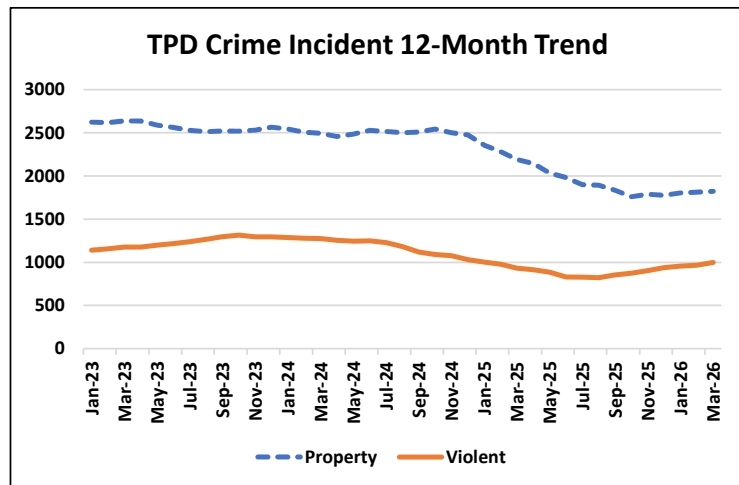
down 3.4%.

The violent crime data shows that robbery incidents were up 64.1% while assault & battery incidents were up 25.0%.

12-Month Trends

The chart below shows the 12-month trends of property and violent crime incidents from January 2023 through March 2026.

Property crime incidents



began to decline in December 2024 and reached a 3-year low in October 2025. For a brief period, the change in property crime has remained flat. However, over the last three months these crimes have

started to increase. Violent crime incidents peaked in October 2023 and reached a 3-year low in June 2025. Since then, violent crime incidents have been trending up.

TPD Investigation Leads to Arrest, Seizure of Over \$1.8 Million in Narcotics

TPD, From Front Page

Folsom Road connects to Lakeshore, just west of Meridian Road, and runs south.

The Cassatt Drive location is located near Pedrick Drive, approximately 1,000 feet from Buck Lake Elementary School.

After compiling the evidence, detectives obtained search warrants for both locations. Believing Mills had recently returned to Tallahassee from out of state with a new supply of narcotics, Detectives executed the warrants the same day. Mills was taken into custody without incident.

The following items were recovered during the execution of the search warrants:

Total Seizure:

- Approximately 14 kilograms of cocaine
- Approximately 177 pounds of marijuana

- Approximately 11 pounds of suspected MDMA
- Approximately 66 grams of fentanyl
- Approximately 150 grams of synthetic cathinones
- Approximately 8 ounces of methamphetamine
- Six firearms
- More than \$30,000 in cash
- Packaging materials consistent with drug distribution

“The amount of narcotics removed from our streets in this case is significant and represents a direct impact on the safety of our community,” said Chief Lawrence Revell.

“Every time we disrupt an operation like this, we’re doing more than making an arrest, we are preventing violence, reducing addiction, and protecting families. This is how we make our



community safer, and it’s work we will continue every single day.”

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TPD Announces New Crime Fighting Technology

By Steve Stewart

The Tallahassee Police Department (TPD), in partnership with Florida State University Police Department (FSUPD), the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) and the Leon County Sheriff’s Office (LCSO), recently announced the implementation of Connect Tallahassee, an advanced technology program designed to enhance real-time information sharing and strengthen public safety operations across the community.

This collaborative effort, supported through the Capital Region Real Time Crime Center, represents a significant step forward in how law enforcement partners work together to prevent and respond to crime.

Connect Tallahassee serves as the community-facing component of this initiative. Residents can voluntarily register their security cameras, allowing law enforcement to send electronic requests for video footage in the event of an incident. Through a secure link, residents can review their recorded footage and share any relevant video with investigators.

Business partners also have the option to integrate their exterior camera systems, enabling the voluntary sharing of live video feeds. This capability enhances situational awareness and strengthens law enforcement’s ability to respond to, investigate, and deter criminal activity.

Connect Tallahassee is a program built on transparency, privacy, and community trust.

“This is not about surveillance, it’s about collaboration,” said Chief

Lawrence Revell. “By leveraging technology and strengthening our partnerships, we are enhancing our ability to respond quickly, solve crimes more efficiently, and ultimately keep our community safer.”

This proactive approach supports a continued transition toward intelligence-led policing and crime prevention.

The partnership between TPD, FDLE, FSUPD, and LCSO highlights a shared commitment to innovation, cooperation, and community engagement.

“This initiative reflects the future of public safety, where technology, collaboration, and community involvement come together to create a safer environment for everyone,” Revell added.

Connect Tallahassee gives our agencies a powerful tool to enhance collaboration, streamline information flow, and improve how we serve the people of Leon County,” said Sheriff Walt McNeil “This investment supports our mission to protect our community with professionalism and innovation.”

“It takes everyone to create a culture of safety,” said FSUPD Chief Jason Trumbower. “FSUPD is proud to stand alongside our partners and be a part of this dynamic initiative to strengthen and safeguard our community.”

“We are proud to work alongside and support our law enforcement partners as they work to protect the communities they serve,” said FDLE Commissioner Mark Glass. “This initiative demonstrates how collaboration and community engagement strengthen public safety across our region.”

Leon County Invests Cross Country Championships Proceeds in Student-Athletes

By Staff

On April 7, Leon County presented a \$10,000 check to Leon County Schools at Montford Middle School, investing Fun Run proceeds from the 2026 World Athletics Cross Country Championships in student-athletes across the county.

“Today is about turning a world-class event into real, lasting impact for our students,” said County Commission Chairman Christian Caban. “By reinvesting a portion of the World Athletics Fun Run proceeds into our schools, we are strengthening athletic programs and creating more opportunities for young people across Leon County to thrive.”

The 2026 World Athletics Cross Country Championships drew more than 15,000 people, including nearly 11,000 visitors from outside the county and around the world, and generated more than \$6 million in total economic impact for the local economy — exceeding early projections by more than 50 percent when accounting for the full ripple effect of visitor spending.

The funds will go towards supporting the school district’s cross-country and track and field teams, enabling more opportunities for the students to excel in these sports. This investment fulfills Leon County’s pledge to dedicate a portion of proceeds from the international championship event to benefit local athletics, ensuring a lasting community impact beyond race day.

“Leon County’s Apalachee Regional Park was built on a long-term vision of transforming a former landfill into a world-class venue that put our County on the global stage for cross country,” said Leon County Administrator Vincent S. Long. “Directing these proceeds to



student-athletes is how we make sure the benefits of that investment reach every corner of our community, not just on race day but for years to come.”

This effort is part of a broader strategic initiative in partnership with World Athletics to introduce, grow, and sustain the sport of cross country to the next generation of athletes. Leon County Schools will determine how the funding is distributed among its cross-country and track and field programs districtwide.

“We are grateful for this investment in our student-athletes and athletic programs,” said LCS Superintendent Rocky Hanna. “Support like this helps us provide valuable opportunities for students to build discipline, teamwork, and confidence through sports.”

The check presentation took place in the Montford Middle School gymnasium, where Leon County and Leon County Schools officials were joined by the Montford Middle School boys’ and girls’ cross country teams, both reigning district champions.

“For our students, this support shows them that their community believes in them,” said Montford Middle School Boys and Girls Cross Country Coach Brad Busboom. “This investment will have a direct impact on our ability to grow the sport and support young runners at every level.”

Local News

Local Democratic Party Questions Lorraine Ausley About Positive Statement Related to Hospital Sale

By Steve Stewart

The Leon County Democratic Party, led by Tallahassee City Commissioner Matlow's aide, Ryan Ray, has responded to mayoral candidate Lorraine Ausley's positive comments about the city's sale of hospital assets to FSU. The party's response - which questioned Ausley's position on the 3-2 decision - raises questions about the role of the local Democratic Party in the upcoming Tallahassee mayoral election.

Ausley is a registered Democrat.

A New Opportunity

After the 3-2 vote to transfer city-owned hospital assets to FSU, Ausley posted a statement on Facebook urging the community take advantage of

the "opportunity."

"Tallahassee now has the opportunity to create a true academic medical center that brings more specialists, residency training, clinical trials and cutting-edge care to the city we love. This transformation won't happen overnight - it will take long-term collaboration, hard work and strong partnerships. This is going to grow local capacity, improve recruitment and retention of providers, and strengthen health outcomes for everyone in our region, said Ausley.

Ausley continued, "Now that the city has voted to transfer TMH to FSU and this bold vision is moving forward, it is time to roll up our sleeves and start the hard work. That means our next Mayor must be ready on day one to work with all parties to

ensure the vision becomes a reality. Our next Mayor must stand firm in enforcing the agreed protections including the most important protection for charity care. Today begins the long-term investment in health care access, quality, and economic stability for all of Tallahassee. As your next Mayor, my sleeves are rolled up and I'm ready to go to work."

The post generated approximately 65 comments and 232 other engagements, with 223 of the engagements supporting Ausley's statement.

Included in the comments was a question from the local Democratic Party which asked, "Do you support the transfer of assets as approved this morning, Senator?"

The post by the Democratic Party was liked by Dr. Bruce



Strouble, chair of Tallahassee ALERT, a group that voiced opposition to the sale. Ausley never responded to the inquiry.

The post from the Democratic Party, during the campaign for Tallahassee mayor featuring at least three registered Democrats, raises questions about the role the Democratic Party will play in the election.

Will the party only promote positions endorsed by City Commissioner Jeremy Matlow?

Can Democrats running for mayor take a position supporting the sale of the hospital assets to FSU without fear of being attacked by their own political party?

TR has reached out to the Democratic Party for a comment.

Florida PBA Big Bend Chapter Endorses City Commissioner Dianne Williams-Cox

PBA, From Front Page

by ensuring that Tallahassee police officers have the necessary resources and staffing levels to serve the citizens of Tallahassee."

Williams-Cox has consistently approved negotiated police union contracts, that

were at times, passed with a 3-2 vote.

The police union noted that Williams-Cox "understands that investing in good contracts that provide wage increases and benefits for police officers is also a sound

investment in public safety. Because of her proven track record and dedication to improving our working conditions and protecting our rights, the Big Bend Chapter of the Florida PBA is proud to endorse City Commission-

er Diane Williams-Cox for re-election to the City Commission Seat, 5. We will ask our members, their families and all Tallahassee citizens, who support public safety, to join us in sending Commissioner Diane Williams-Cox

back to the City Commission to serve another term."

Williams-Cox currently faces three challengers: Tiffany Hill, Joe Kalicki, and Bernard Michael Stevens II.

Matlow Defends Judge's Bail Decision in Underage Sex Case, Cites "Far-Right" Conspiracy

MATLOW, From Front Page

week. The legislation demands judges keep defendants convicted of dangerous crimes in custody instead of freeing them ahead of sentencing.

"We live in a time where some people just don't get it, and that includes some of these judges who just don't want to hold these people accountable to the fullest extent of the law," DeSantis said.

Missy was allegedly murdered by her stepfather, Daniel Spencer, while he was out on bail awaiting sentencing after being convicted in an underage sex sting for attempting to meet a 15-year-old girl. Judge Baker-Carper opted not to jail Spencer before he was sentenced, despite a request from prosecutors to do so.

State Attorney Jack Campbell blasted the decision to allow Spencer to remain free after he was found

guilty weeks before the girl's death. Campbell told the Tallahassee Democrat that Missy would still be alive had Spencer been locked up while he awaited sentencing in the child sex operation. He noted that prosecutors asked to remand him, but that Baker-Carper rejected their request.

During the hearing prosecutors stated, "the state would be asking that he be remanded into custody given the nature of this offense as well as the fact that he does score on his score sheet."

Defenders of the decision say the judge followed the appropriate guidelines in allowing bail.

Matlow Enters the Fray

After Desantis called for impeachment, Matlow posted on social media that "Governor DeSantis attacks on

Judge Baker-Carper are an attempt to stack the courts with far-right, partisan ideologues."

In an opinion piece published by the Tallahassee Democrat, Matlow continued with the same theme as he wrote, "it's all a part of a long-standing right-wing effort to stack the courts with extremist conservative judges."

In the article, Matlow stated that "So many powerful institutions failed Missy Mogle before and after her tragic murder at the tender age of 5", and added that "Judge Tiffany Baker-Carper, the youngest woman and African American to be elected judge in the Second Judicial Circuit, is the least culpable in the flawed process that led to the death of Missy Mogle."

The article and a related video



posted on Matlow's Facebook account, which is promoting his run for Tallahassee mayor, garnered over 250 comments and approximately 10,000 views. The opinion article was also posted on the Tallahassee Democrat social media accounts.

Local News Briefs

FAMU President Johnson Appoints Altony Lee III as Interim Chief of Staff

Florida A&M University (FAMU) President Marva B. Johnson, J.D., recently announced Altony Lee III, Ed.D., as interim chief of staff. Lee has experience as the associate vice chancellor of Public Affairs for the State University System of Florida (SUS) and the Florida Board of Governors. He began his role on April 6, 2026.

"Dr. Tony Lee's breadth of experience across Florida's higher education landscape brings instant momentum and strategic insight to his new role as Florida A&M University's interim chief of staff. His leadership is a welcome addition to the executive team as we advance our mission and continue to prioritize student success, research innovation and academic excellence," said President Johnson.

Carmen Cummings-Martin, who most recently served as acting chief of staff, will return to the Division of University Advancement as the assistant vice president for Community Affairs.

Lee's strategic leadership has driven key initiatives that have advanced the mis-

sion and impact of the SUS. Notable achievements include securing increased funding for the System, launching the strategic plan "SUS 30," organizing the inaugural SUS Fly-In in Washington, D.C., and conducting engagement visits across all 12 universities. His advocacy has been instrumental in shaping higher education policy through collaboration with legislative stakeholders.

"It is a privilege to serve at the number one public HBCU during this transformational time in FAMU history. Together with President Johnson, the Board of Trustees, and our administrative colleagues, I look forward to identifying best practices, advancing our shared strategic goals, and contributing to the continued excellence of this great institution," said Lee.

Capital City Country Club Members Vote for Redevelopment Initiative

A major private investment is moving forward at the historic Capital City Country Club following a decisive vote by club members to transfer control of the property to a group of private investors, marking a significant shift in the future of the golf course.

Members voted 167-9 to approve the transfer, clearing the way for a redevelopment initiative that includes a pledge of roughly \$30 million in renovations and modernization of the golf course, clubhouse, and related amenities. The investor group includes prominent real estate developer Patrick Zalupski, who has indicated plans to hire an internationally recognized golf course architect to restore the historic layout.

Under the proposal, the property will remain a golf course due to deed restrictions established during the City of Tallahassee's recent sale of the land. Those restrictions also require continued access for Florida A&M University golf tournaments and protection of a memorial site honoring formerly enslaved individuals whose graves were discovered on the property.

Construction is not expected to begin immediately. Club officials have indicated a planning period of approximately two years, with major redevelopment activity likely starting around 2028.

The investment represents one of the most significant private capital commitments to a recreational facility in

Tallahassee in recent years and is expected to shape the long-term viability and identity of the historic course.

TPD Investigating Sports Bar Homicide

The Tallahassee Police Department (TPD) is currently conducting a homicide investigation in the 1100 block of Apalachee Parkway. The TPD watch commander said the shooting happened inside a sports bar called Zingales Billiards & Sports Bar, located at 1147 Apalachee Parkway.

At approximately 1:31 a.m. on Sunday morning, April 5, TPD responded to the area following reports of a shooting. When officers arrived, an adult male was found suffering from multiple gunshot wounds. Life-saving measures were immediately attempted, and the victim was transported to a local hospital, but sadly, he succumbed to his injuries.

Preliminary findings indicate the shooting occurred during a large physical altercation. Currently, there is no known ongoing threat to the public.

This remains an open and active investigation and updates will be provided as more information becomes available.

TPD Arrests Suspect in Fatal Shooting on Faringdon Drive

On March 29 at approximately 4:40 p.m., the Tallahassee Police Department (TPD) responded to the 2800 block of Faringdon Drive in reference to a reported shooting. When officers arrived, an adult male was found suffering from a gunshot wound. Life-saving measures were immediately initiated, and the victim was transported to a local hospital, where he succumbed to his injuries.

Following a thorough investigation, detectives with TPD's Violent Crimes Unit determined that a large altercation occurred stemming from an ongoing dispute involving multiple individuals. During the incident, the victim attempted to intervene and stop one of the fights, at which point he observed the suspect, Jessie Davis V, striking another individual with a firearm. As the victim attempted to stop Davis, he was shot. Davis fled the scene after the shooting.

On April 1, Davis was taken into custody and charged with second-degree murder and aggravated battery.

State News

DeSantis Tells Florida House to Impeach Tallahassee Judge Who Released Sex Offender on Bond

By Liv Caputo
The Florida Phoenix

Gov. Ron DeSantis is calling on the Florida House to impeach a Tallahassee judge who briefly released a sex offender onto the streets, resulting in the killing of the man's 5-year-old stepdaughter.

"To my friends in the Florida House of Representatives, I don't think what you've done is enough," DeSantis said during a Tampa press conference on Tuesday. "You have the power, and you have sufficient numbers in your chamber, to impeach this judge, Tiffany Baker-Carper.

"Until you start holding these judges

accountable, they are gonna continue to find ways to benefit the criminal element," he added.

The comments were the strongest yet from the governor who's long-battled who he calls "activist judges." Although it's the first time DeSantis — who's insisted for years that unruly judges must be held accountable — has pushed for impeachment, it comes only days after President Donald Trump publicly called for a federal judge to be impeached.

It takes a two-thirds vote from the Florida House to impeach judicial officers, followed by a two-thirds vote in the Senate to remove them. Republicans make up nearly 70% of lawmakers

in each chamber.

DeSantis' impeachment call came Tuesday as he signed Missy's Law. A priority bill for Attorney General James Uthmeier, the legislation demands judges keep defendants convicted of dangerous crimes in custody instead of freeing them ahead of sentencing.

That's what happened in the case of Daniel Spencer, a 35-year-old convicted in an underage sex sting for attempting to meet a 15-year-old girl. Leon County Judge Tiffany Baker-Carper didn't lock him up pending sentencing because he'd already been out of jail for a year without violations and had no violent criminal history,

the Tallahassee Democrat reported.

But a month later, he — along with the girl's mother, Chloe Spencer — beat and murdered his stepdaughter, Missy Mogle. Both Spencers were charged with second-degree murder in May 2025.

Baker-Carper was elected to the Second Judicial Circuit on Nov. 3, 2020.

"It's a miscarriage of justice, a dereliction of judicial duty," DeSantis said. "If we had this bill in place then, Missy would be alive today."

Rural School Districts' Financial Woes a 'Canary In Coal Mine'

By Ana Goñi-Lessan
The News Service of Florida

The state stepped in last week to help manage the distressed finances of two rural school districts, and that could be just an inkling of what's to come, state leaders say, as enrollment continues to decline.

"Union and Glades (counties) are the canary in the coal mine," said Sen. Jennifer Bradley, R-Fleming Island, who represents Union County.

Last week, the Florida Department of Education appointed a financial board to both Union and Glades counties' school districts to help with "operations, management and finances and to make recommendations for financial recovery," because their projected fund balances were below 2 percent.

State law requires school districts to maintain a 3 percent fund balance.

According to Union County School Board meeting records from February, the district has a \$1.4 million deficit caused by the reduction of students, based on the third calculation of the Florida Education Finance Program.

The FEFP is the formula the state uses to distribute money to public school districts. One of its main components is student enrollment data, which is calculated at different times throughout the year.

The third calculation showed Union schools had 2,146 students, or 103 fewer than the previous calculation. The drop meant the district was due \$947,000 less than anticipated.

For Glades schools, there were 1,921 students, a decline of 46 students from the previous calculation, which put a \$337,000 dent in their anticipated funds.

Union schools officials point to the state's universal voucher program, which offers scholarships to any K-12 student in Florida, as the main reason for the declining enrollment, even though Union County has few private schools.

"While some students move to other districts and states, many of them are going to homeschool settings and private schools," said Mike Ripplinger, Union County Schools superintendent.

"We have seen an increase in private school and homeschool options with the growth of the scholarships available to parents offered by the State of Florida," he added. "While these options for education have always been available, I believe the financial incentive due to the scholarships available has drawn more parents towards these options."

Ripplinger said the last time the district experienced major financial stress was in 2000.

The superintendent for the Glades County School District, Alice Barfield, said the district was grateful for the state's help.

"We fully embrace this collaboration and are committed to working closely with the State to strengthen our financial position and ensure long-term stability for our district," Barfield said.

Bradley said she could not recall another instance of a school district falling into financial emergency, other than Jefferson County in 2016. Because of mismanagement, Jefferson County schools were taken over by the state and managed by a charter company until 2022.

"What we're dealing with in Union County is not due to mismanagement," Bradley said. "The school district has taken steps for the last three years to try to make cuts, make reductions in order to cure their financials."

Ripplinger said the district has been in danger of being below the 3 percent fund balance threshold throughout the school year.

"We have been taking steps to reduce our expenditures as much as possible to mitigate our situation while still providing the required educational and supplemental services to our students," he said.

This spring, the district eliminated benefits for school board members, canceled bus service for more than

60 daycare students and reduced the school supply budget.

The district also explored taking out a loan to cover expenses for the rest of the school year.

Florida legislators tried to pass a bill that would have included a "school district stabilization" fund for this issue during this year's session, but the House never considered it.

The bill (SB 318) set up accountability measures for the Family Empowerment Scholarship, taking recommendations from a state auditor general's report that found a "myriad of accountability challenges" with Florida's K-12 school voucher system.

The report showed overspending and delays in scholarship payments that resulted in a funding shortfall and a system without proper controls to verify where students who received the voucher payments were being educated.

The stabilization fund included in the bill would have distributed money to school districts if the state money appropriated for the current year was not sufficient.

"If the money is going to follow the student, it has to be transparent, and the system that we create has to work, and right now it's not working," Bradley said.

February Revenue Tops Forecast

The News Service of Florida

State general revenue collections for February exceeded expectations by \$154.5 million, according to the Legislature's Office of Economic & Demographic Research.

A monthly revenue report released Wednesday shows the state collected \$4.01 billion in net general revenue in February, 4 percent above the anticipated amount from a revised forecast in January.

The state forecast is intended to help lawmakers make budget decisions. General revenue is closely watched because it plays a major role in funding education, health care and prison programs.

When revising the numbers in January, state economists increased the revenue projection for fiscal year 2025-2026, which ends June 30, by \$502.5 million and the 2026-2027 projection by \$70 million. At the time, the economists noted the "forecasting environment is generally stable," but there was an "elevated

uncertainty regarding the economic outlook "from this point forward."

Sales tax collections, which make up the largest part of state revenue, totaled \$3.05 billion for the month of February. The total was \$200,000 less than forecast or "virtually on estimate," according to the office release.

Meanwhile, the \$242.7 million in corporate income taxes exceeded the forecast by \$108.2 million. Also, earnings on state investments totaled \$120.3 million for the month, \$500,000 above the forecast.

Documentary stamp taxes on real estate transactions totaled \$96.1 million for the month, \$14 million over the forecast.

Revenue from Indian gaming was at \$89.6 million, matching the outlook, while the \$16 million generated through the beverage tax was \$1 million over the forecast. The \$8.3 million brought in through the tobacco tax was \$600,000 short of the forecast and the parimutuel tax generated \$800,000, or \$100,000 less than anticipated.

No Special Session Next Week, Leaders Announce

By Staff

There won't be a special session to work on the budget next week, legislative leaders announced Wednesday.

House Speaker Daniel Perez, R-Miami, and Senate President Ben Albritton, R-Wauchula, sent separate memos to their members alerting them they won't need to travel to Tallahassee next week.

When the regular session ended March 13 without a budget deal, "mid-April" was eyed as a likely time to return for lawmakers.

But discussions between the chambers on allocations — top line budget numbers — that are needed to embark on formal negotiations on the final spending plan, have so far failed to result in an agreement.

"While I believe we are making great progress, it will not be necessary for you to return to Tallahassee prior to the special session called by Governor DeSantis. We will share a

schedule for that special session as soon as possible," Albritton wrote in his memo.

Perez called "external speculation" of a special session next week "not accurate."

"When we have an update on the timing of the budget, we will notify you," Perez stated.

Gov. Ron DeSantis has already called a special session for the week of April 20 to redraw congressional districts.

During the regular session budget talks stalemated largely on the overall size of the spending plan. The House preferred a cut from the current budget and passed a \$113.6 billion proposal, while the Senate passed a \$115 billion plan.

A budget must be in place by July 1, the start of the fiscal year, to avoid a partial state government shutdown.

Marva Johnson Provides Insight Into Her Experience as FAMU President So Far

FAMU, From Front Page

gave her "a clear perspective and appreciation" for the constitutional responsibility the state has to educate, and she came to FAMU with "clarity and with purpose and with deep respect for what this institution represents."

"I spent years navigating a career in corporate board rooms, state legislatures, regulatory battles across nine states simultaneously, and I thought that I really understood complex institutions. I thought I understood complex politics. I thought I understood difficult people, and what I really learned is all that was just gonna be preparing for coming to FAMU. This is probably, in truth, the hardest job I've ever had, but it's also the most rewarding."

During the Board of Governors meet-

ing in which she was confirmed for the position last year, she committed to having an open door and "full engagement on campus and in our communities."

"One of the interesting things about the open-door policy is some people tell me I listen to too many people. For me, I can't listen to too many people. The only limitation I have is time," Johnson told reporters Friday.

"By having that open door, I think that it's worked in both directions. I think that some people initially who didn't understand who I was, didn't understand what my vision was, who may have been reticent because of those things, I think they're coming around," Johnson told reporters.

President/Publisher: Kathy Stewart

Editor: Steve Stewart

Writers: Steve Stewart, Casey Drayer, Robert Stewart

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The Leon County LINK

LeonCountyFL.gov



For Leon County news and information, please visit: LeonCountyFL.gov/News

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Tuesday, April 21
5:30 p.m. • The Moon

Created Equal: The Soul of Food

Join Leon County Government and The Village Square for a conversation that will explore how food tells the story of survival, adaptation, and celebration across generations at the 11th Annual Created Equal event. Through a discussion-based panel, discover how the culinary traditions of Black and Brown communities have evolved and how personal stories of food reveal deeper truths about history, belonging, and resilience.

RSVP today at LeonCountyFL.gov/CreatedEqual
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Transform your business idea into reality at the Leon County Main Library with the eight-part Roadmap to Business workshop series for aspiring entrepreneurs. Work on business ideas, receive feedback from experts and build a supportive network of fellow future business owners.

Dates and details at LeonCountyLibrary.org/Roadmap.

LEON COUNTY NEWS & EVENTS

Join a Citizen Advisory Committee

Leon County is seeking dedicated residents to join our Citizen Advisory Committees. Your role will be vital as we strive to develop and grow our community responsibly.

Learn more and apply today at LeonCountyFL.gov/Committees.

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS SCHEDULE

APRIL 2025

TUESDAY 14	3:00 p.m.	Board of County Commissioners Regular Meeting County Courthouse, 5th Floor Commission Chambers – 301 S. Monroe Street
TUESDAY 14	6:00 p.m.	Board of County Commissioners Public Hearing County Courthouse, 5th Floor Commission Chambers – 301 S. Monroe Street
TUESDAY 28	1:30 p.m.	Board of County Commissioners Board Budget Workshop County Courthouse, 5th Floor Commission Chambers – 301 S. Monroe Street

Live television broadcasts of Board of County Commissioners meetings are available on Comcast channel 16, the Leon County Florida channel on Roku, the County's Facebook page, YouTube channel, and X, and LeonCountyFL.gov.

For meeting and location updates, visit LeonCountyFL.gov

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LeonCountyFL.gov/News

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Learn more at LeonCountyFL.gov/GetEngaged

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Learn more at LeonCountyFL.gov/Mosquito

CELEBRATE AUTISM ACCEPTANCE MONTH

Leon County Government celebrates autism and neurodiversity during National Autism Acceptance Month with art exhibits, a resource fair, sensory story times, topical book lists, and movie watchlists for all ages and abilities from the LeRoy Collins Leon County Public Library System.

Learn more at LeonCountyFL.gov/Celebration

Apply for a SUMMER JOB WITH LEON COUNTY!

Leon County Government is now accepting applications for the 2026 Summer Youth Training Program. In partnership with CareerSource Capital Region, this five-week program provides young adults ages 14-24 with valuable job experience working in various Leon County departments over the summer.

Apply by 5 p.m. EST on Monday, April 20, at LeonCountyFL.gov/SummerYouth



Business News

Leon County Residential Construction Permits Rebound in March

According to filings with Leon County and the City of Tallahassee, the number of single-family residential construction permits was up 26.1% in March 2026 when compared to March 2025.

There were 58 permits issued in March 2026, compared to 46 permits issued one year ago. There were 37 permits issued last month, February 2026.

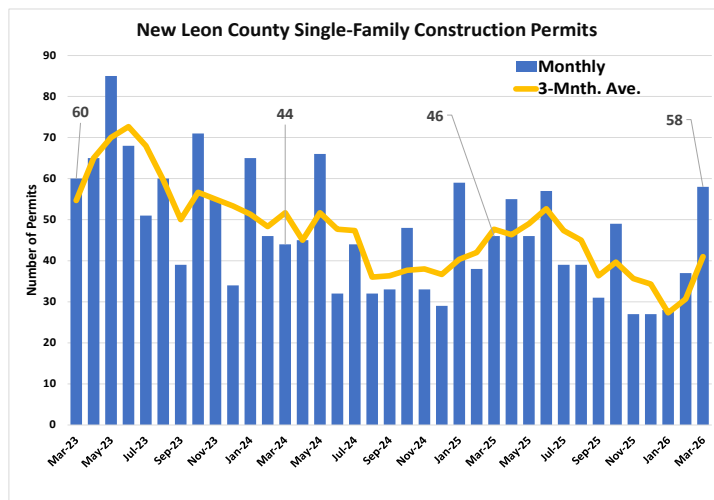
The 3-Mnth Avg. data (Jan. – Mar.), which smooths out the month-to-month volatility, shows a 2.6% decrease in the number of permits issued

over the same 3-month period one year ago.

The 3-month average permit values increased 2.4% from \$12.7 million in March 2026 to \$13.0 million in March 2026.

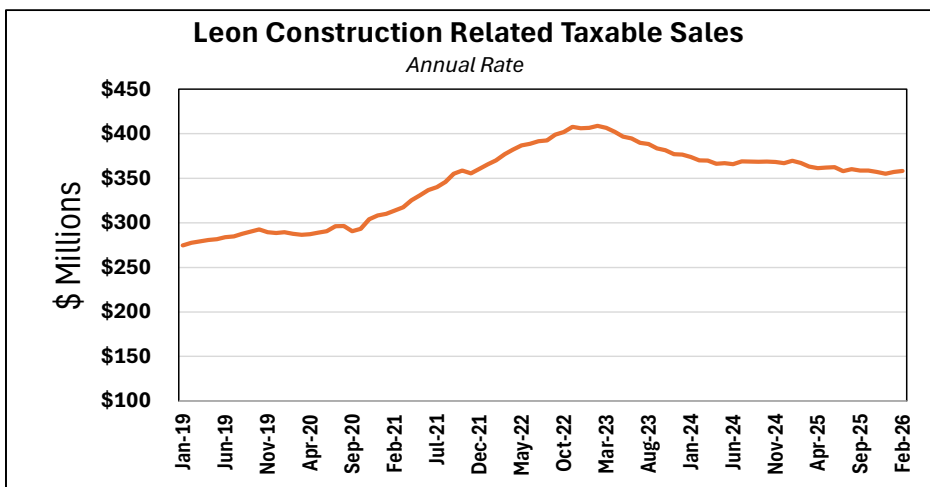
The chart to the right shows the number of permits issued each month for the last 37-month period. A 3-Month Ave. line is also included. The highlighted numbers relate to permits issued in the month of March back to 2023.

The chart shows that the 3-month average declining trend that began in June 2025 has been reversed. However, the year-to-date (YTD) numbers through March show 2026 permits (123) lagging permits issued during the start of 2025 (143).



	Mar-25	Mar-26	Chg	%Chg
Permits	46	58	12	26.1%
Value (millions)	\$ 12.5	\$ 15.0	\$ 2.5	20.0%
3-Mnth Avg.	42.1	41.0	-1.1	-2.6%
Value (millions)	\$ 12.7	\$ 13.0	\$ 0.3	2.4%

Source: Leon County, Office of Econ. Vitality



The chart above shows that the annual rate of taxable sales related to construction items in Leon County has been relatively flat since early 2024. The annual tax-

able sales rate related to construction peaked in late 2022 at \$400M and then declined to just over \$350M in early 2024.

Tallahassee Real Estate Leaders Describe 'Bouncy' Economy at Annual Market Update

By Staff

Local government and business leaders gathered on Monday, March 30, at The Moon for NAI TALCOR's 6th Annual Commercial Real Estate Market Update, offering a mixed assessment of Tallahassee's economic outlook and urging greater focus on housing development and job growth.

The attendees heard presentations detailing trends across the retail, industrial and office sectors. The overall message: Tallahassee's commercial economy is stable but showing limited momentum.

Ed Murray, president of NAI TALCOR, described the local economy as neither booming nor declining, but largely flat. He suggested the city should continue leaning into housing development — particularly near universities — to meet demand from students and young professionals seeking walkable neighborhoods.

"There are 40,000 students at FSU, and there are probably 15,000 beds around campus," Murray said, noting that lifestyle preferences are driving demand for new residential projects.

Office Market Shows Limited Growth

Commercial brokers reported roughly 100,000 square feet of vacant office space among approximately 850,000 square feet of downtown inventory spread across nine buildings. While some tenant movement is occurring, most activity involves companies relocating in search of more favorable terms.

John McNeil, a principal with NAI TALCOR, said a key indicator of sluggish growth is the absence of new construction. "Not a single new office building has been completed since our last market update in 2025," McNeil said. "Maybe we're not growing jobs at a rate that's fast enough."

Murray agreed, calling the lack of new office development a sign of a flat

employment market.

Retail Remains a Bright Spot in Certain Areas

Retail development continues to show the strongest demand, particularly in Midtown and northeast Tallahassee. Restaurant space remains especially attractive to national and regional tenants due to relatively quick turnover and consistent consumer demand.

Interest is also growing near the campuses of Florida State University and Florida A&M University, where food and beverage concepts are expanding along West Tennessee and Gaines streets.

Two shopping centers — Carriage Gate in northeast Tallahassee and Miracle Plaza in Midtown — are fully leased, reflecting sustained retail demand in established commercial corridors. Murray noted that new major shopping centers have been built resulting in many national brands constructing stand-alone locations.

Murray Addresses Challenges, Politics

Despite positive indicators in certain sectors, Murray cautioned that the broader economy remains constrained by slow job growth and uncertainty. "We've got all the hardware you need," he said. "We have great universities, great people, great infrastructure. Our problem is the inability to connect the pieces and make us great." He described the local economy as "bouncy," meaning businesses are delaying major decisions while monitoring state and global economic pressures, particularly during an election year.

Ahead of the 2026 election cycle, Murray said elected leaders should avoid what he called "negative chaos," aka negative self-talk. He added all sides of the political spectrum engage in that, especially during an election year, which can damage long term business interests.

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Local Sports

Leon County High School Baseball Rankings

By Robert Stewart

Below are the Leon County high school baseball rankings based off of stats provided by MaxPreps through Mar. 31. A total of 10 Leon County team were included in the rankings with the top three highlighted by individual and team stats. Complete rankings are available at TallahasseeReports.com

#1 Chiles

Chiles has started the season 16-3, combining consistent run production with steady pitching after an uneven stretch early in the schedule. They opened with a 4-3 win over Buchholz, which remains one of their closest games. After three losses in four games against strong opponents, Chiles responded with a long winning streak, during which most victories came by multiple runs. Two of the more competitive results during that stretch were a 2-1 win at Silverdale Academy and a 1-0 extra-inning win against South Walton, both low-scoring games that point to good pitching and the ability to manufacture runs in limited opportunities. Outside of those matchups, Chiles has largely controlled games, reflected in several double-digit scoring performances, suggesting a clear separation between them and most teams on their schedule so far.

Chiles' pitching staff has been anchored by its top three arms—Noah Chavez, Colton Corder, and Alex Haine—who have combined for the majority of the team's most effective innings. Chavez has been the most dominant, allowing just 2 earned runs over 35.3 innings while striking out 54, indicating both swing-and-miss ability and strong run preven-

tion. Corder has logged 26 innings with 40 strikeouts and only 4 earned runs, showing similar effectiveness while limiting damage despite allowing some baserunners. Haine has added another reliable option with 2 earned runs over 17 innings and 31 strikeouts, giving Chiles a third pitcher capable of controlling games.

Chiles' lineup has been led by a consistent top group of hitters, with Saunder Dinkelman, Preston Ritchie, and Alex Haine driving much of the production. Dinkelman has been the most impactful, hitting .373 with 5 home runs, 22 hits, and 19 RBIs, combining power with run production at the top of the order. Ritchie has provided steady contact, batting .368 with 21 hits and 23 runs scored, showing his role in setting the table and creating scoring opportunities. Haine adds balance to the middle of the lineup, hitting .350 with 21 hits and contributing extra-base production with 5 combined doubles and triples. Behind them, players like Trace Morris (18 RBIs) and Myles Mott-Smith (13 RBIs, 6 doubles) have added situational production, but the offense has largely been driven by the efficiency and consistency of its top hitters, reflected in the team's .286 average and 134 total runs through 19 games.

#2 Lincoln

Lincoln has posted a 9-10 overall record, and their season has been defined by inconsistency, especially in close games and against higher-level competition. Early on, they dropped several narrow contests, including 3-2 losses to Arnold, 4-3 losses to Bishop Snyder, and 4-3 to Clay, showing they were competitive but

unable to consistently finish games. Against stronger opponents, they had some clear setbacks, such as an 11-6 loss to Chiles and an 8-0 loss to South Walton, though they did pick up key wins, including a 12-7 victory over Leon and a solid stretch of wins against Bishop Kenny (5-2), St. Augustine (7-2), and Menendez (6-0).

On offense, Lincoln is hitting .252 as a team, led by Jayson Parker (.368, 15 RBI) and Chase Fuller (.326), but overall run production has been spread out without a dominant power presence.

On the mound, Lincoln has a staff ERA of 3.90, with a few pitchers carrying the majority of the workload. Ethan LaFuria (2.10 ERA, 4-2) has been the most consistent arm, providing reliable innings and limiting damage. Jacob Rabion has also been a key contributor with 29 innings and 28 strikeouts, though with some inconsistency reflected in runs allowed. Luke Thomas (2.10 ERA) has been effective in limited opportunities, while the rest of the staff has shown mixed results, contributing to the team's overall balance but also some of the inconsistency reflected in their record.

#3 St. John Paul II

St. John Paul II has had a strong season, posting a 12-4 overall record with consistent success on both sides of the ball. Their schedule includes several dominant wins, such as 10-0 over Wewahatchka, 8-2 over Valdosta, 12-2 over North Florida Christian, and 11-0 over North Bay Haven, while their losses include tighter games like 2-1 to Aucilla Christian, 5-1 to Florida High, and 4-0 to Valwood, indicating they've been



competitive even in defeat. Overall, the team has shown the ability to win comfortably while also staying competitive in lower-scoring matchups against stronger opponents.

Offensively, St. John Paul II is hitting .288 as a team, led by a group of high-average hitters including Jason Cantella (.438), Wyatt Visnovske (.353), and Wyatt Cantella (.333), who have driven much of the production. The lineup is balanced, with multiple players contributing RBIs and run production, totaling 96 runs as a team, though power has been limited with just 2 home runs.

On the mound, St. John Paul II has been dominant, posting a team ERA of 1.07 and a 12-4 pitching record, with multiple arms contributing to their success. Javier Santana (1.30 ERA, 4-1) has been one of the key starters, while Wyatt Cantella (0.55 ERA) and M. Rice (0.54 ERA, 2-0) have been highly effective in limiting runs. Max Helbling (1.62 ERA) has also provided strong innings with a 3-1 record, giving the team depth and reliability on the mound. Overall, the pitching staff has been the defining strength of the team, consistently keeping opponents in check and supporting their strong record.

Chiles Beach Volleyball Beats Leon Without Dropping a Set

By Robert Stewart

The Chiles High School beach volleyball team delivered a dominant performance on April 7, sweeping Leon 5-0 in beach volleyball action and not dropping a single set across all five courts.

The sweep began on Court 5, where Riley Boykin and Anna Holman set the tone with a strong 21-12, 21-15 win over Salem Ehrhardt and Jazmin Burdick. Their consistent play gave Chiles an early 1-0 lead and immediate momentum.

On Court 4, Jensen Glenn and Maddie Joyner followed with another straight-sets victory, defeating Destyni Zuema and Aubrey Moore 21-13, 21-19. After a comfortable first set, they held off a tighter second set to extend Chiles' lead.

The No. 3 pair of Loganne Abernathy and Riley Warmath continued the sweep with a 21-14, 21-17 win over

Jordyn Russell and Kendall Cruse. Their balanced performance kept Leon from gaining any ground as Chiles moved to 3-0 on the day.

At the No. 2 position, Lindsay Smith and Sterling Carlile clinched the team victory with a 21-13, 21-19 win against Reagan Giles and Riley Perezluha. Despite a late push from Leon in the second set, Smith and Carlile stayed composed to secure the decisive fourth point.

Closing out the match on Court 1, Meg Hearn and Natalie Gibson capped off the sweep in dominant fashion, defeating Riley Knipple and Bentley Barnard 21-12, 21-13. Their commanding performance sealed a perfect 10-0 set record for Chiles.

With this win the Timberwolves advanced to 10-1 on the season as Leon fell to 9-4. Chiles will play Lincoln next on Apr. 8 while Leon will play Maclay on Apr. 9.

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Local Sports

Leon County High School Softball Rankings

By Robert Stewart

Below are the Leon County high school softball rankings based off of stats provided by MaxPreps through Mar. 31. A total of 8 Leon County team were included in the rankings with the top three highlighted by individual and team stats. Complete rankings are available at TallahasseeReports.com

#1 Chiles

Chiles has opened the season 12-2, with most of their success coming from consistent run production and the ability to separate in games early. They have multiple decisive wins, including 12-0 over St. John Paul II, 17-1 over Altha, and 14-1 over Suwannee, along with a 16-3 win over Florida High, showing a clear ability to control matchups against a range of opponents. At the same time, they've been tested in closer games, including a 3-2 win over Holmes County, a 5-4 win over Lincoln, and a 6-5 extra-inning win over St. John Paul II, indicating they can execute in tighter situations. Their two losses—a 1-0 game to Lincoln and a 12-11 game to Bishop Kenny—also reflect how narrow the margin has been in their most competitive matchups. Overall, Chiles has combined high scoring output with enough consistency in close games to maintain one of the strongest records in the area.

Chiles' offense has been one of the most productive units in the area, hitting .353 as a team with 134 runs and 116 RBIs through 14 games. The lineup is built around consistent, high-average hitters, led by A. Barber (.429, 4 HR, 17 RBI) and Scout Joyner (.415, 16 RBI), with strong support from Lily Trumbower (.400, 16 RBI) and Mia Hemenway (.390, 21 RBI, 3 HR). Depth has

also been a factor, with multiple players hitting above .300 and contributing extra-base hits, including 29 doubles, 11 triples, and 10 home runs as a team. Overall, the offense relies on sustained contact and gap power, allowing them to consistently produce runs across the lineup rather than depending on a single hitter.

Chiles' pitching staff has been effective overall, posting a 2.36 team ERA with a 12-2 record, largely driven by Anna Kate Barber, who has handled the majority of the workload. Barber is 10-1 with a 1.88 ERA across 12 appearances (10 starts), indicating consistent run prevention and the ability to work deep into games. H. Harlow (4.38 ERA, 2-1) has provided a secondary option with limited starts, while the rest of the innings have been spread out. Overall, the staff has relied heavily on its top arm, with Barber's consistency playing a central role in maintaining the team's record.

#2 North Florida Christian

North Florida Christian (NFC) is 11-3, with most of their games decided by large margins, but their profile is defined by a few close losses and one competitive win. Their three losses all came in relatively tight games—4-3 to Madison County, 5-4 to Madison County, and 5-2 to Lincoln—indicating difficulty closing against comparable opponents. Their closest win came in a 9-6 game against Florida High, while the rest of their schedule has been largely controlled, with multiple run-rule type results. Overall, NFC has consistently separated from weaker opponents but has been less effective in one-run or late-game situations against stronger teams.

NFC's offense has been highly pro-

ductive, posting a .373 team batting average with 145 runs and 126 RBIs over 14 games. The production is concentrated at the top, led by Harli Ray (.525) and Reese Sparkman (.500, 26 RBIs), both of whom are consistently driving in runs and getting on base at a high rate. Brynlee Pafford (.477, 22 runs) and Skylar Young (.409) add depth, giving NFC multiple reliable hitters with strong on-base and contact profiles. Overall, the lineup shows strong consistency across multiple contributors, with several players producing both extra-base hits and run production at a high level.

NFC's pitching has been anchored by a single primary arm, producing a 1.24 team ERA with an 11-3 record and a high number of complete games (11). Skylar Young (1.08 ERA) has been the clear workhorse, handling most of the starts and delivering consistent run prevention across heavy innings, while also accounting for nearly all of the team's wins. The staff has not relied on depth, with very limited contribution outside of Young, but the low ERA and high win percentage indicate strong performance in games where he starts and finishes. Overall, NFC's pitching success is driven almost entirely by one dominant starter rather than a rotation or bullpen depth.

#3 St John Paul II

St. John Paul II (JPII) has played to a 10-4 record, with several of their results coming in decisive wins but also a few close losses that define their profile. Their most notable tight games include a 2-1 loss to Lincoln and a 6-5 extra-inning loss to Chiles, showing they've been competitive against stronger opponents but have come up short in one-run situations. They also had a

narrow 4-3 win over Wewahitchka, indicating they can close out close games as well. Outside of those matchups, most of their wins have been by comfortable margins, suggesting a clear gap when facing weaker competition but some inconsistency in high-leverage, close contests.

JPII's offense has produced a .272 team batting average with 130 runs and 98 RBIs, but the production is heavily driven by a few key hitters. Amanda Thompson (.500, 27 RBIs, 8 HR) is the clear centerpiece of the lineup, providing both average and power at a high level, while Sanaa Roberts (.462, 24 RBIs, 5 HR) and Shavon Stewart (.320, 18 RBIs) add additional run production and extra-base hitting. Outside of those three, the lineup drops off in consistency, with several players posting lower averages and limited impact at the plate. Overall, JPII's offense relies on a small core of high-performing hitters, with less balance and depth compared to more complete lineups.

JPII's pitching staff has posted a 3.05 team ERA with an 11-3 record, but the workload and effectiveness are heavily concentrated in Amanda Thompson (2.34 ERA, 11-3), who accounts for all of the team's wins and has handled the majority of appearances. The rest of the staff has seen minimal impact, with Natalia Walker and Sanaa Roberts combining for limited innings and little statistical production, and Roberts carrying a much higher 11.55 ERA in a small sample. The lack of recorded strikeouts or complete games further suggests that JPII relies on control and defense rather than overpowering pitching. Overall, the team's success on the mound is almost entirely dependent on Thompson's consistency and ability to limit runs.

Chiles Flag Football Beats FAMU DRS

By Robert Stewart

On Apr. 7, the Chiles flag football team hosted FAMU DRS at Stan Goldstein Field for the Timberwolves' 12th game of the regular season. The 8th ranked (FL) Timberwolves showed off their explosive offense beating the Baby Rattlers 26-7.

The Timberwolves wasted no time getting on the board, opening the game with a touchdown pass to Ellis Smeltzer to take a quick 7-0 lead. Their defense followed suit, as Lainey Crisafulli jumped a route and returned an interception for a pick-six, extending the advantage to 14-0.

Chiles continued to dictate the pace, coming up with another defensive stop to regain possession and keep momentum firmly on their side. The offense capitalized again, this time with a creative double pass that found Kaitlyn Fagan in the end zone for the team's third touchdown of the night.

Crisafulli wasn't done making plays, adding a second interception to her standout performance and further stalling any rhythm FAMU DRS tried to establish. Just before half-time, FAMU DRS showed signs of life when they came away with an interception of their own, sending Chiles

into the break with a 20-0 lead.

In the second half, Chiles continued to apply pressure. A touchdown pass to Soli Wetzel pushed the lead to 26-0, putting the game well out of reach. FAMU DRS managed to respond late in the third quarter, as they recorded an interception to set up their offense.

Early in the fourth, FAMU DRS quarterback connected with her wide receiver for FAMU DRS's first touchdown of the night, and a successful conversion to cut the deficit to 26-7. However, it proved to be too little, too late.

Chiles was led by Standout quarter-

back play from Gracie Gerteisen and Benny Powell. Gracie Gerteisen went eight for 17 passing for 74 yards and one touchdown with two interceptions while Benny Powell finished eight for 10 through the air for 78 yards and two touchdowns.

Chiles' balanced effort on both sides of the ball sealed the victory, highlighted by multiple takeaways and explosive offensive plays, as they rolled to a convincing 26-7 final.

Chiles will play Choctawhatchee next on Apr. 10 and FAMU DRS will play Rickards on Apr. 8.



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