

MIAMI HERALD | EDITORIAL

## We don't need an election-crime investigation office — and DeSantis knows it

No one is “for” election fraud, but Florida lawmakers returning to Tallahassee next month should still reject Gov. Ron DeSantis’ unnecessary, expensive — and potentially mischief-making — proposition that the state needs a 52-person, \$5.7 million Office of Election Crime and Security.

The immediate outcry from prosecutors — and the lukewarm reaction of even some Republicans — should be a clue: This is an attempt to exploit the fears of the public while allowing DeSantis to cast himself as the superhero of election integrity. And it’s no coincidence that this effort also dovetails with the false narrative that Donald Trump — DeSantis’ mentor — only lost the 2020 election because of fraud.

The state already has the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, counties already have states attorney and there are federal prosecutors to boot. This new office would have the power to take control over any investigation conducted by local police or prosecutors. That’s unwise and unnecessary. And don’t forget, Florida is already in court defending another DeSantis-driven law supposedly aimed at election security by making it more difficult to vote by mail.

The main issue, though, is that election fraud in Florida is relatively rare and — here’s the cynical part — the governor knows it. He even bragged

about the wonderful success of the 2020 election under his stellar leadership.

Let’s hear it from DeSantis himself, back on Nov. 4, 2020:

“People are actually looking at Florida and asking the question, ‘Why can’t the states be more like Florida? Florida was able to handle 11 million ballots,’” he said then, fresh off the election that delivered Florida to President Trump, though Trump lost the White House. “The way Florida did it, I think, inspires confidence. I think that’s how elections should be run.”

He went on: “Perhaps 2020 was the year that we finally vanquished the ghosts of Bush vs. Gore.”

That doesn’t sound like a man who is so wracked with worries about election integrity in Florida that he needs to create an entirely new office with more staffers than most police departments to combat the problem.

### ‘SECURE, ACCURATE’

His own secretary of state jumped in as well. “Florida’s election in 2020 was accurate, transparent and conducted in compliance with Florida law,” Republican Laurel Lee said, as quoted in the Orlando Sentinel. “Florida has already conducted both pre- and post-elections audits, and we are confident in the security and integrity of our 2020 election results. . . . The post-election audit confirmed that Florida’s 2020 election was secure and accurate.”

And yet, take a wild guess at who would get to oversee this vast new office that is suddenly required to root out election fraud. Lee, of course.

DeSantis has said the office is needed because local prosecutors and police aren’t always pursuing election problems with the vigor that he apparently thinks is required — even though he said he also believes the most recent election went well. As recently as Oct. 12, he tried to split the difference, telling the media at a St. Petersburg press conference that the 2020 election had been “good” but then adding: “I think the issue is, Do you want to make sure you continue doing that, going forward?”

### COSTLY, UNNEEDED

That sounds an awful lot like he wants to create a \$5.7 million, 52-person office purely on spec. But of course, it’s not his money paying for it.

His spokeswoman, Christina Pushaw, continued to sound the “curbing future crime” theme, telling the Herald Editorial Board that, “Having a dedicated team responsible for investigating alleged election-related crimes will function as a powerful deterrent to would-be perpetrators of election fraud. Alongside other election-integrity reforms, this measure will go a long way toward strengthening public trust in elections.”

In 2018, as Pushaw noted, Palm Beach County ran into trouble completing state-mandated recounts for the November election. DeSantis replaced the elections supervisor there shortly after he got into office.

Certainly, some election-law violation cases are being prosecuted right now — but that is happening with existing law-enforcement resources. Three residents of The Villages in Central Florida were arrested this month on charges they cast more than one ballot in the



In a seemingly hypocritical stance, Gov. DeSantis praised 2020 elections, but now says state needs to probe vote fraud.

2020 election. (Two were Republicans and the other had had no party affiliation.) There’s also the ongoing case of former GOP state senator Frank Artiles, who has been accused of recruiting and paying a no-party candidate, Alexis Pedro Rodriguez, to sway the outcome of a Miami-Dade state Senate race.

No doubt, there are some cases that should be pursued, but aren’t. The Miami Herald noted that local prosecutors have a “mixed track record” on going after election-related allegations.

### DEMANDING FLORIDA AUDIT

And yet, there is little evidence that vote fraud is rampant, despite the GOP’s focus on this issue nationally. A recent Associated Press review of voter fraud in the six battleground states disputed by Trump found fewer than 475 cases. They didn’t look at Florida because its results weren’t disputed. In other words, even Trump’s camp believed the election here went fine.

That hasn’t stopped a small number of Florida Republicans from loudly demanding that the state conduct an audit of the 2020 election results, an obvious nod to Trump. DeSantis has resisted — hard to do anything

else after he proclaimed that Florida’s handling of elections “inspires confidence” — but he’s also under fire from Trump’s pal, Roger Stone.

Stone has threatened to challenge the governor in the gubernatorial primary next year as a way to siphon off votes unless DeSantis says he won’t run for president, especially against Trump.

What’s a governor-slash-potential-presidential-candidate to do? Create a diversion, in the form of a new state office with unprecedented authority to investigate claims of vote fraud — even if it’s overkill. This would have been the perfect time for the governor to stand up to a bully, to make clear that he will base his career on doing what’s right, not what’s politically advantageous. Unfortunately, that has never been DeSantis’ M.O. So, he knuckled under, to Floridians’ detriment.

If the governor truly wants to bolster confidence in Florida’s election system, we have a radical idea: Just tell the truth — that we all can be proud that there’s little election crime in Florida, and that his election-crimes office is totally unnecessary, after all.

But don’t hold your breath for that one.

## OPEN MIC

### Life might be easier if we left Florida

Many are wondering if the pandemic will provoke a cultural shift that will lead us to reassess our priorities.

In a wonderful Dec. 23 letter, “Teachers endure,” a reader tells us that Florida’s average teacher salary in 2018 was \$48,395.

She complained about the prominent coverage given to the departure of Miami-Dade Schools Superintendent Alberto Carvalho, while the tireless work and dedication of our teachers goes quietly on, without much fanfare.

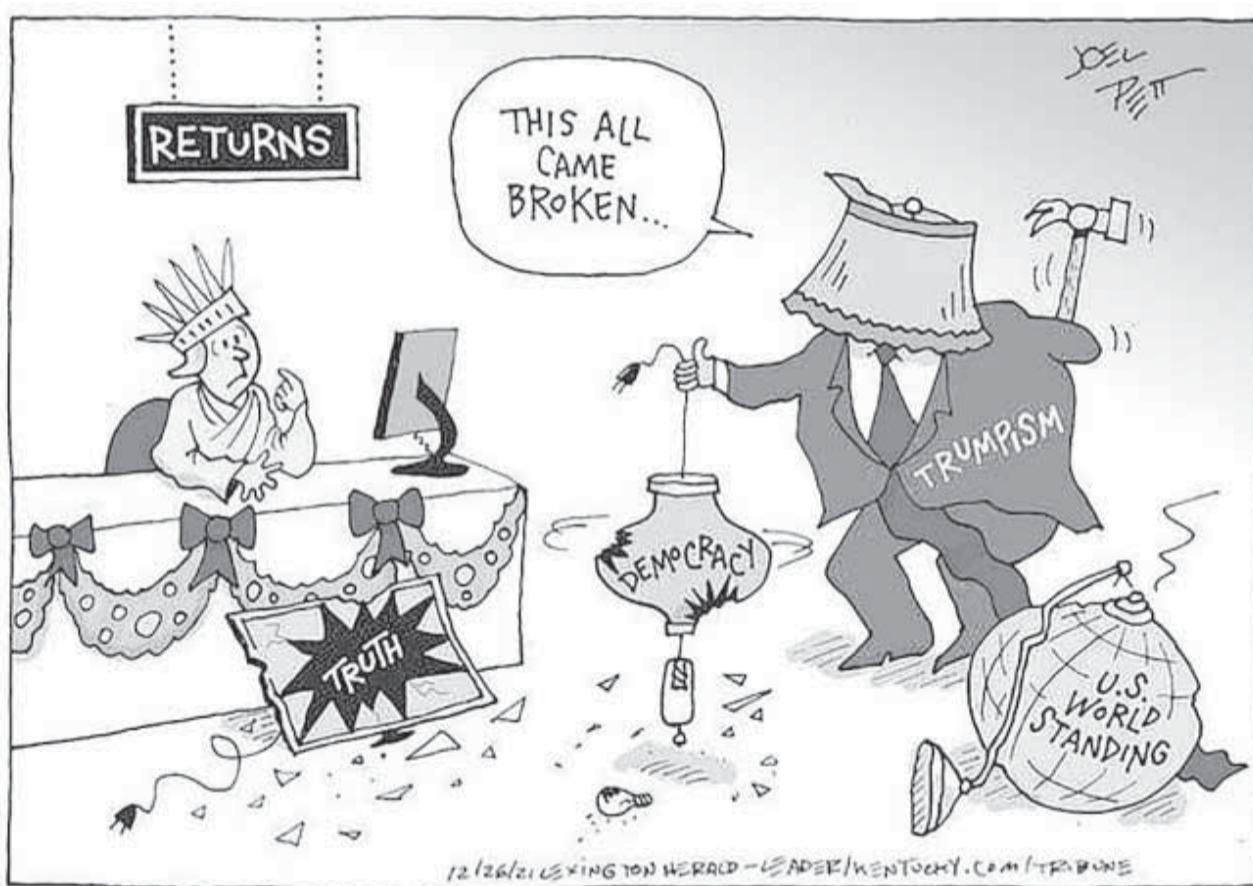
The Herald’s Dec. 23 editorial, “After Surfside, it’s foolish to wait 40 years to inspect buildings,” speaks to how we may need a huge increase in engineers and government staffers to certify the safety of all of our tall buildings.

If so, one would hope their salaries, and that of those involved in certifying the accuracy of Brightline rail lines, trains and stations, will also be capped at \$48,395.

Perhaps these letter offer an unwelcome glimpse of the future.

Life may be easier if we move to another state, where most public officials and residents share our own political views and preferences.

— Antonio Prado, Miami



### FPL ON SOLAR POWER

Re the Miami Herald’s Dec. 20 story on new legislation to alter the state’s rooftop solar rules: FPL does not oppose rooftop solar or net metering, which compensates homeowners for excess electricity produced. In fact, we help administer the state’s current net-metering policies and support customers who have the financial means to install solar on their roof.

But the decision to put solar on your roof should never mean that other customers must subsidize your choice, which is what happens today. More than 8.5 million Floridians pay higher electric bills today due to 90,000 residents who have chosen to install rooftop solar, and we just think that’s unfair.

The story leads readers to believe that FPL acted improperly by recommending draft legislation. However, we’ve been working with lawmakers to suggest changes to the current policy, as well as actively and transparently communicating our position in Tallahassee and in front of the Florida Public Service Commission for several years.

FPL is America’s biggest solar energy producer, and nobody is doing more to produce and store energy from the sun than we are. We simply believe that Florida and our customers benefit the most when the largest amount of reliable solar is installed for the lowest cost. This is indisputably achieved through large-scale, ground-mounted solar — like the

42 solar power plants FPL has today — which is more than three times more cost-effective than rooftop solar.

— David P. Reuter, chief communications officer, Florida Power & Light Co. Juno Beach

### SAVE A BUNDLE

There is a much better and safer way to navigate, or avoid, the long lines at COVID-19 test stations.

Go to your preferred pharmacy, get vaccinated and, voila, problem solved.

You will not only save yourself, your friends and neighbors, but also a lot of time by not waiting on a long line — not to mention gas money and the environment.

Get it done already.  
— Andre Banert, Miami

### SET THEM FREE

Re the Dec. 20 story “New federal probe at Miami Seaquarium delays lease change; 3 more animal deaths reported.” I appreciate the superb reporting of the deteriorating care received by Lolita and other orcas, and the related deaths of a harbor seal, dolphin and manatee.

Holding back food, feeding rotting fish and what seems like dumping these beings into inappropriate tanks speaks to a callous disregard for their well-being.

Captured, or bred in captivity, they’re trapped in a situation that totally negates their natural life style. I agree with PETA that it’s time to end the Miami Seaquarium and release its inhabitants to

“SEEMS LIKE OMICRON IS JUST, LIKE, REALLY CONTAGIOUS. SO, TO BE SAFE, I NOT ONLY WON’T BE SEEING PEOPLE, I ALSO WON’T BE TEXTING ANYONE BACK.”

@danadomnelly  
Twitter

sanctuaries where they can live out their lives with better care.

— Jacqueline Raven, New York, NY

### TOO MUCH

I, too, am shocked that the Miami Herald would dedicate five pages and a large photo of Miami-Dade County Schools Superintendent Alberto Carvalho, who is departing to pursue a new job with a \$400,000 salary, while the average teacher is paid far less.

However, I should not be surprised. Just a few weeks ago, the Herald dedicated a similar number of pages with a huge color photo of Cuban dictator Fidel Castro on its front page.

— Gladys Chern, Redland

## Miami Herald

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