

Editorial Opinion

Naples Daily News

"Give light and the people will find their own way"

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Charter schools

Conference could be beginning of reform

A conference in Central Florida this week could help advance the cause toward charter school reforms in the state.

The Florida Charter School Conference, from Tuesday through Thursday in Orlando, is an annual gathering for state and educational leaders interested in school choice and the trend toward charter school options.

Failures in the charter school system were documented in a four-part Daily News series in September. Data cited in the series showed that, since 1996, 269 charter schools of 900 have closed, or about 30 percent, leaving those children to be reintegrated into another school.

Five key changes were brought by a task force to the 2014 Florida Legislature, but none became law.

It is hoped that momentum will build this week toward addressing changes. Notable among them is a task force suggestion to require a \$250,000 surety bond or credit line before a charter school opens. The task force is on to something there, but a standard amount isn't the best way to go when weighing a mom-and-pop startup proposal against the financial heft of an established charter school corporation.

Additionally, it would be encouraging to see a consensus emerge this week to give more local control to school districts and school boards in weighing the credentials of applicants, rather than following a rigid state contract tantamount to a checklist.

This week's conference agenda offers an opportunity for stakeholders to deliberate changes. Presentations and discussions include such topics as:

- Lessons learned by school districts, charter schools and the Florida Department of Education in authorizing quality charter schools.

- Ways to help state lawmakers pass prudent charter school legislation.

- State Department of Education legislative and rule changes, focused on a standard charter contract.

While the state education department says it doesn't go into the 2015 legislative session with a set agenda for charter school reform, it does contemplate some programs in its proposed 2015-16 state education budget.

Charter schools are eligible for a new \$174.5 million program directed at increasing student achievement and performance. The budget request also includes \$900,000 for a Knowledge is Power program to provide college prep in a network of Jacksonville charter schools. It likewise requests \$80 million for maintenance, repair, renovation and remodeling of charter schools that have operated for at least three years; that's less than this year's dollar amount, but more than two years ago.

The budget requests point to the state's continued plan to showcase charter schools as an option for parents. That's encouraging, but it's time to address necessary changes to improve on Florida's 30 percent charter school failure rate.

Space exploration

Long journey of discovery

We've become blasé about NASA's incredible feats in space, landing so many craft on Mars that we might rack up another milestone, the first Martian traffic jam.

But the European Space Agency has joined us in pulling off a seemingly impossible feat.

In 2004, a rocket carrying the spacecraft Rosetta blasted off and, after doing a few laps around the galaxy to pick up speed and a journey of 4 billion miles, rendezvoused with a tiny asteroid whose orbit now has it "only" 300 million miles from Earth.

The comet, inelegantly named 67/PChuryumov-Gerasimenko, is a 2.5-mile-long chunk of rock and ice that has been described as looking like a rubber duck modeled by a not very talented child.

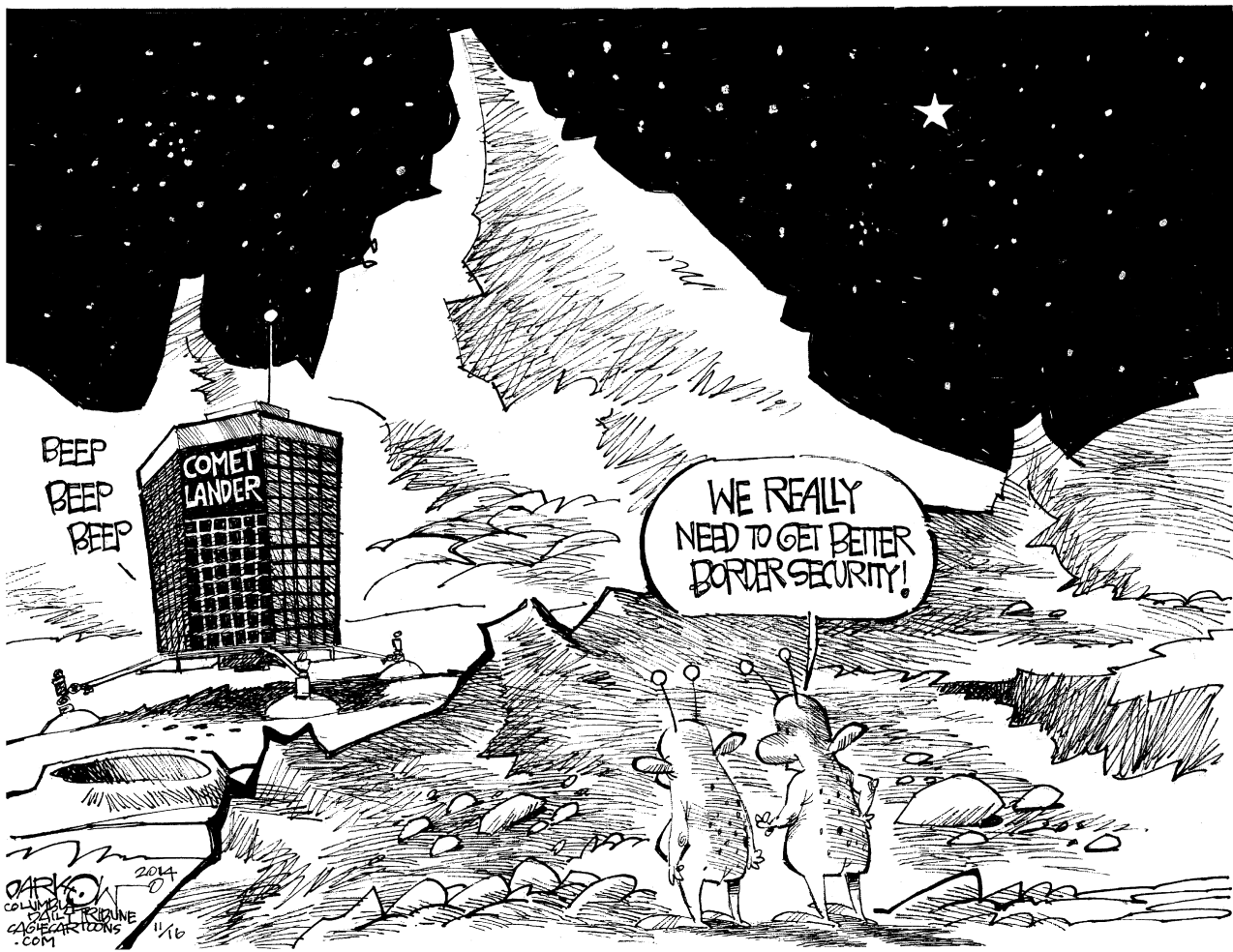
But comets date back to the earliest days of the universe — this one is thought to be 4.5 billion years old — and its innards might yield molecular clues to the creation of the stars, planets and, ultimately, us.

Rosetta gave its lander Philae a gentle push toward the comet, where it landed, bounced twice and ended up in an awkward position.

Philae sent back photos and fired up a sophisticated radio wave instrument that can see into the comet. But the scientists back in Darmstadt, Germany, were wary of activating Philae's drills for fear they might propel the featherweight lander off the surface or tip it over.

The lander was partially in a shadow, meaning the space scientists had the delicate problem of turning its solar panels to maximum sunlight to power the batteries. (Philae's batteries died Saturday, and the lander went silent.)

Still, it achieved a miraculous step in the steadily growing annals of space exploration.



LETTERS

Linda Oberhaus, Naples

*Executive director,
Shelter for Abused Women & Children*

Don't blame victim

Re: Letter to the editor by Dennis Wichterman Sr. in Friday's edition, headlined "Officer's judgment."

As stated in his letter, Mr. Wichterman is "confused," as evidenced by his comments on the actions of Naples police Sgt. Amy Young on July 9. This letter serves as a textbook example of blaming the victim, which has been the historical response to incidents of domestic violence.

Whether alcohol was involved or not, any victim in fear for her life has an absolute right to protect herself by all means possible. To infer that Ms. Young was responsible for her own shooting is simply offering excuses for an unthinkable act for which officer Luis "Dave" Monroig, alone, was responsible.

If anyone is in need of "learning a lesson," it is people who continue to blame the victim and see domestic violence as a woman's issue. The shelter is grateful for the 50-plus members of its Gentlemen Against Domestic Violence initiative. Acting as role models for young men and boys, these gentle men regard domestic violence as a man's issue, opposing traditional stereotypes and breaking the cycle of abuse in our community.

We all have a role to play in preventing, protecting and prevailing over domestic violence. To learn how you can make a difference, go online to www.naplesshelter.org.

E.L. "Bud" Ruff, Naples

Blame game

Why do Republicans and Fox News keep blaming President Barack Obama for the Islamic State terrorist group?

President George W. Bush started the Iraqi war of "no weapons of mass destruction." He also signed the agreement for complete withdrawal of all American troops from Iraq in 2008. Obama strictly abided by the agreement.

Fast and Furious: Why do Republicans and Fox always fail to tell the American public about the program the Bush administration started in 2005? They ran two programs for more than four years: "Wide Receiver" and "Gunrunner."

Benghazi: Why do Republicans and Fox never mention that under the Bush administration there were overseas terrorist attacks on our embassies and consulates. Some were very much like Benghazi, with Americans killed. Should we mention 9/11, where nearly 3,000 innocent people were murdered by terrorists on Bush's watch?

Crossing the Mexican border: Republicans and Fox criticize

Letters policy

Letters can be 250 words or less. We reserve the right to reject letters or edit for clarity, brevity, good taste, accuracy and to prevent libel. No poetry, personal attacks or letter-writing campaigns. We cannot accept handwritten or typewritten letters; they must be submitted electronically. Submissions limited to one letter every two weeks. Include daytime phone, and sign your letter.

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Obama for letting "thousands" of young children cross the border, but never mention the millions of immigrants who illegally crossed during the Reagan administration and the two Bush administrations, over 20 years in total.

Of course, many crossed during the Clinton administration also.

What makes the Republican politicians and Fox so terrible is that they know the real truth, but won't tell the truth to the American public.

**Dianne Rhodes, Naples and
Saskatchewan, Canada**

Global warming

The recent letter from Bernice Richmond exemplified much that is wrong with dialogue on global warming.

She suggested that Al Gore personifies climate science, which he emphatically does not.

But Richmond failed to mention those who do count, namely the vast majority of the thousands trained in climate science and practicing climate scientists, as well as all national academies of science, universities and professional organizations around the world, who agree that warming is real.

Nor did she mention that it is practically impossible to identify a real scientist who denies that human activities now play a significant, if not predominant, role in causing warming.

Burning fossil fuels — "business as usual" — means we are heading before the end of the century to levels last experienced 125,000 years ago when sea levels were 15 feet higher than today.

Secondly, in arguing that efforts to halt global warming will "sacrifice our way of life," she joins past opponents of automobiles, electricity, airplanes, etc., who argued on the same lines in their day.

Fortunately, many forward-looking entrepreneurs realize that conversion to alternative renewable energy will produce more jobs than will be lost and that overall costs of conversion are unlikely to exceed

those which would result from inevitable overhaul of obsolete infrastructures, while being far cheaper than dealing with the costs of averting effects of rampant warming.

Pity that Richmond wasn't around when Thomas Edison said the sun is the solution to the world's energy needs, and wished he would be around to work on benefiting from it.

Deirdre Clemons, Naples

Hey, ACLU

Hey, ACLU! You may want to know that Oakridge Middle School sixth-grade classes spend a whole week studying Christianity.

But before you Christians get all happy about that, you should know that they sandwich Jesus and early Christians in between weeks where they are also studying all the Roman pagan gods (with all their names and powers), as well as the Greek mythology gods with all their individual names and powers and family histories.

The title of one assignment is "The Universe Created the Gods; Not the Other Way Around."

Did I forget to mention that they also studied all the Egyptian gods and goddesses in great detail? But what the kids had the most fun with was the assignment where they get to create their own god/goddess in a very detailed and complicated way. This all takes place in the history class.

Christians may be interested to learn that 10th-graders at Gulf Coast High School studying World History will end up completing 20 or more workbook pages on Islam, with an in-depth look at the five pillars of that faith.

It makes one wonder, who is picking the curriculum materials? Parents, let's go to the School Board meetings and demand answers.

Paul Orzech, Bonita Springs

Rich get richer

To those who labor, to those in need, hold on tight.

The Republicans reign in the houses.

This means the rich get richer and the average Americans will become servants to a select few.

May God protect this nation from the greed of the rich.

Margaret Felice, Naples

Expunged? Really?

Re: former congressman Trey Radel.

I would like to know if my grandson was guilty of cocaine possession and completed his probation, would he also be able to have his record expunged?