

Editorial Opinion

Naples Daily News

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

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Fire district/EMS consolidation

Too soon to consider countywide merger

Tuesday's decision by Collier County commissioners to hold off on creating a committee to study blending the fire districts with Emergency Medical Services will, in the long term, better serve the consolidation movement that's finally underway.

Commissioner Tom Henning led the push to set up a committee to study turning control of ambulance service over to a future, fully consolidated fire district. Commissioner Tim Nance backed the idea. The two commissioners were focused on keeping the consolidation momentum going, but we're concerned that their good intentions could have backfired.

It's too much, too soon. Consolidation must proceed in an orderly fashion to reach its ultimate long-term goal of bringing all departments and services together

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to improve response times and save taxpayers money through efficiencies. One misstep along the way could cause it to begin to unravel.

So a majority of county commissioners wisely decided to wait until at least May to further consider setting up any such committee. That, too, may turn out to be too soon.

After decades of discussions, fire district consolidation moved forward in November with the decision to form the North Collier Fire Control and Rescue District out of the previously separate North Naples and Big Corkscrew Island fire districts. Technically, however, that merger isn't even in effect yet and the Florida Legislature must pass a local bill in the March through May legislative session to affirm it. Voters also agreed in November to create the Greater Naples Fire Rescue District by combining the Golden Gate and East Naples fire districts, which the Legislature already has backed.

While fire commissioners and chiefs in the four previously separate districts carefully thought out the merger plans that voters overwhelmingly supported Nov. 4, the work to carry out those plans is just beginning.

In each merger, elected boards of the separate fire districts are blending into a larger board that will phase down to fewer members in the coming years. Those elected board members haven't even begun the meaningful discussions they face to direct the two mergers. So having another committee now to talk about the long-range goal of blending all fire districts and EMS would have been a distraction to the important work these fire commissioners have in front of them.

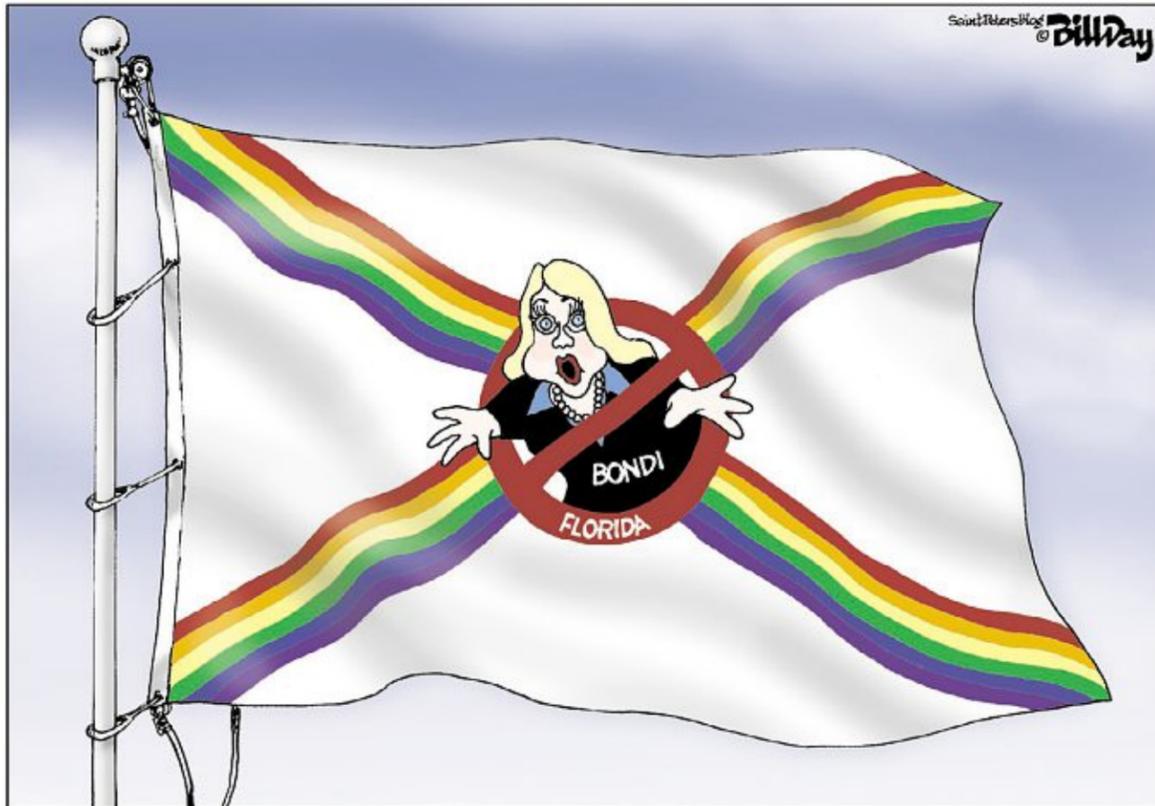
A second legislative matter also hasn't been resolved yet: The Fiddler's Creek community is asking the Legislature to move more of its properties into the Greater Naples Fire Rescue District. This comes after the August failure of a vote to bring the county government-operated Isles of Capri fire district into what now has become the Greater Naples fire district.

Tuesday's discussion of Henning's proposal made it clear there is work to be done before any such committee can begin its work with any hope of success. Immokalee fire district leaders have deep concerns about a unified, countywide initiative. Imagine a combined fire and emergency medical services organization that leaves out Immokalee, which also covers burgeoning Ave Maria. It is unthinkable.

Everglades City Mayor Sammy Hamilton said his city wants no part. That also raises the question of what the cities of Marco Island and Naples think of the idea. For those cities and fire districts not wanting to take part, how would ambulance service be provided for those jurisdictions if there no longer were a countywide EMS?

Henning's committee would have worked through these contentious issues. That's the point. It would have been too contentious right now. We've just gone through two successful votes after an unfortunate August outcome in Isles of Capri.

There will be a time to take the next step toward the future goal of overall consolidation. When will it be the right time? We believe the elected boards and leadership of both the North Collier Fire Control and Rescue District and the Greater Naples Fire Rescue District have the collective firepower to let us know when it's time.



BONDIBUSTERS

LETTERS

Linda Oberhaus, Naples
Executive director, The Shelter
for Abused Women & Children

Ray Rice setback

Re: Nov. 28 story on Ray Rice being reinstated by the NFL after winning an appeal.

Two steps forward, one step back. The arbitrator in Rice's appeal of his indefinite NFL suspension overturned the disciplinary action, finding Rice was unfairly punished twice for knocking his then-girlfriend Janay Rice unconscious in the elevator of an Atlantic City casino.

The arbitrator found that Rice was upfront when he shared the details of that evening, and if the league had initially imposed an indefinite suspension, she would have been "hard-pressed" to overturn it. Unfortunately, it took public outcry at the release of graphic video footage to push officials to do what should have done in the first place.

Did justice slip through the cracks? Perhaps, but the case launched a resounding call to the entire sports industry that domestic violence among players can no longer be condoned. No more tolerance for token suspensions that sidestep the larger issue of violence against women.

For his part, Rice refers to his actions as "one bad night." Domestic violence advocates know it doesn't work this way — this was probably not the first time and, sadly, it will likely not be the last.

Teams should think long and hard about the kind of players they want on and off the field. It is my hope they choose players who serve as positive role models. Only then will we send the message that violence is not acceptable and work toward breaking the cycle of violence for generations to come.

Jeffrey Ryan, Naples

Creating a wedge

During the past couple of months, I have been hearing a lot about the Michael Brown shooting in Ferguson, Missouri.

This has all of the same similarities as the Trayvon Martin shooting some years back. A man of color is shot down by a Caucasian who is only doing a job to protect fellow citizens.

We were blessed with the arrival of the Revs. Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton. Now along with them comes the president and attorney general.

It was many years ago here in Naples we had a shooting of a man of color under the ficus tree at the River Park Apartments and Jackson's organization stirred the pot. This kind of behavior isn't productive; it's only driving a wedge between all hardworking, law-abiding citizens of our country.

The reason I am bringing this up

Letter of the Day

Marie Dekkers, Naples

Bugged

Recently I read an article in the Naples Daily News about the mealy bugs called meallies here in Florida.

They are a nuisance as they somehow get in my lanai, on the ceiling and the floor.

I had a 2-inch palmetto bug a couple days ago slightly inebriated from the pesticide our bug man sprayed, but the meallies seem to stay sober.

I just toss them back out. I read where they are beneficial to the environment.

We get a lot of help from the great white and the blue heron because they stalk and prey on snakes and other crustaceans. And those little lizards, although they are food for the herons, keep the small critters at bay.

This is a wonderland in all Mother Nature shares with us, even though we are bothered by them sometimes.

is because of other recent news reports. In Fort Myers, a 5-year-old's life was cut short in a drive-by shooting. The two men arrested were men of color. There was another recent news report of a man of color who doused his girlfriend with gas and set her on fire.

In all of these cases, where is the president, attorney general, Jesse Jackson or Al Sharpton?

I'm sure some will say I'm a bigot or racist because I am making these statements, but this is far from the truth. I served in a combat zone and my back was covered by all races of Americans. I know many people of all races whom I met through my life both in the service and the 45 years I've lived in Naples.

I think we all should become a little more cognizant of our country and what it has started turn into.

Dick Selvala, Naples

In harm's way

According to U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, certain demographic groups are in harm's way disproportionately more frequently than other groups via greater contact with police officers for questioning or arrest.

The greater at-risk situation for black teens includes being more likely to be arrested for violent crime and more likely to be arrested for robbery, the statistics show.

The resulting higher arrest and fatality data may be inflated somewhat by the higher reporting rates for police jurisdictions having higher black populations as a factor in national statistics.

Being a police officer working alone is particularly dangerous. There are serious socioeconomic causes behind some crime statistics, including erosion of traditional family units, poverty and unemployment. But it serves no useful purpose to inflate the blame on racism for the inevitable higher fatality rates for any demographic group more likely to be in harm's way.

It is unfortunate that the Ferguson, Missouri, incident has become the rallying cry for justice in police conduct involving minorities because the tragic image of "an unarmed youth being shot by an arresting officer" is muted somewhat by that teenager being a 6-foot-4-inch, 292-pound person who is now known to have committed two felonious acts in a single evening, each involving his aggressive behavior.

Obviously, none of that eases the pain for family and friends of the deceased, and the loss of a young life is always a sad and regrettable outcome.

There is much talk now about change to avoid Ferguson-like incidents. While some changes take years, an immediate change can occur on the part of any individual citizen when confronted by an officer of the law, whether innocent or guilty.

Ana DiMercurio, Naples

Service of hope

A local multicultural celebration on Thanksgiving Day provided our family with some much-needed hope.

The trilingual Mass at St. Peter the Apostle Catholic Church in East Naples has been an annual tradition for several years now, uniting members of our Hispanic, Haitian and Anglo communities.

This year, with so much attention on Ferguson, Missouri, and talk about racial discord across our country, it was particularly encouraging to see people from multiple generations, diverse cultures and various ethnic backgrounds gathered under one roof in harmony. As a parent, I was glad that my children were able to see a positive display of God's people standing together in gratitude.

The celebration began with a stunning procession featuring a local dance troupe dressed in traditional Aztec clothing. The songs, readings and prayers were in three different languages: English, Spanish and Creole. With parishioners from various backgrounds reciting The Lord's Prayer in their native tongue, it was a beautiful example of our similarities rather than our differences.

I am very thankful for the diverse community in which we live and opportunities like these where we can show our children that we are not defined by the color of our skin but by the content of our character. May we continue to offer positive examples like these for our children.