

metro

ED LUCAS
Blind former sports journalist shares story, advice with students **Story, B-4**



SCAM SUSPECT
Police: Victim lost \$32,000 in 'winning ticket' tale **Story, B-3**

Scott proposes \$1B in tax cuts

Democratic leader says plan guts programs; key Republican: 'Bold'

By Jim Turner
News Service of Florida

TALLAHASSEE | Gov. Rick Scott, who has already asked lawmakers for \$250 million that could be used to attract corporations to Florida, rolled out a proposed \$1 billion tax-cut package Thursday.

A Democratic leader decried the tax-cut proposal as a way of gutting state government programs, while a key Republican lawmaker called the requested cuts "bold."

The bulk of the proposed cuts, which would be amassed over a two-year period, involve permanently eliminating the income

tax on manufacturing and retail businesses, a cut the governor's office estimates at \$770 million.

The package also would make permanent the elimination of a tax on manufacturing equipment, reduce a commercial lease tax and extend a temporary elimination of sales taxes on college textbooks.

Scott said in a news release that the tax-cut package is "putting job creators on the road to success for years to come."

"The more we can cut taxes — like the one on commercial lease — the more we can grow our small businesses in Florida and further diversify our economy to invest in our future," Scott said.

CUTS continues on B-6

Pilot dies from his injuries in plane crash

Yulee man, 63, was flying with pair of area attorneys when aircraft went down in Broward

By Dan Scanlan
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The 63-year-old Yulee pilot who crashed last month en route to Fort Lauderdale Executive Airport with Jacksonville attorneys Robert Spohrer and Steve Browning on board died from his injuries Tuesday night at Broward General Hospital.

James Alexander Townsend was flying a Piper Chieftain plane with the Spohrer & Dodd law firm attorneys on board about 12:30 p.m. Oct. 26 when his plane went down on the eastern edge of the Everglades in western Broward County, according to the Sheriff's Office.

The twin-engine plane ended up in a marshy ditch at the bottom of an embankment, according to Broward sheriff and fire-rescue officials. Rescue crews arriving after a 911 call from one of the passengers found the pilot and wrecked plane down a 30-foot slope. Firefighters had to cut the plane open to free Townsend's legs before he could be flown to a hospital, according to WTVJ TV-6.

PILOT continues on B-6

Attorneys argue venue for suspect in girl's death

Questions raised if Duval can hear Perrywinkle case fairly

By Andrew Pantazi
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Attorneys defending and prosecuting the man charged with the 2013 killing of 8-year-old Cherish Perrywinkle argued in court Thursday whether a Jacksonville jury can fairly hear evidence and issue a verdict.

Attorneys for Donald James Smith, the 59-year-old on trial for charges of murder, kidnapping and sexual battery, argue that news reports in Jacksonville have been inflammatory. The attorneys say too many people — former prosecutors, attorneys and others quoted in news stories, as well as people posting on different Facebook pages — have called Smith a "monster." She also said news coverage



Smith

SMITH continues on B-6

Residents voice concern about IKEA's location



Photos by Bob Mack@jacksonville.com

Store, traffic engineers try to alleviate worries over whether area can handle it

By David Bauerlein
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Abby Howard Murphy is a fan of IKEA who's made long-distance drives to Tampa to roam the aisles of the Swedish super-store.

But Murphy is dead set against the Jacksonville site that IKEA has zeroed in on for a 294,000-square-foot store off Interstate 295 at Gate Parkway on the Southside.

"I'm sure all of us like IKEA," she said. "They do wonderful things and I love the store, but it doesn't belong in a residential neighborhood."

Murphy, who lives in the Hampton Glen subdivision, was among the area residents who turned out Thursday night for a town hall meeting sponsored by City Councilman Danny Becton to field questions about what IKEA means for traffic congestion.

IKEA continues on B-6

Above: Mike Maier, U.S. real estate manager for IKEA, discusses the proposed store at a town hall meeting at UNF on Thursday night.

Below: Ron May points out the location of the proposed store to Virginia Rathje on maps provided for the meeting that was sponsored by Councilman Danny Becton. About 80 people attended the meeting at the University of North Florida's Adam Herbert Center.



Teenage fisherman drowns in St. Johns River tangled in net

He was fishing with his uncle early Thursday morning, and a rescue team recovered his body in 11 feet of water

By Dana Treen
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An teenage fisherman died Thursday morning after falling from a boat and becoming entangled in a weighted cast-

ing net in the St. Johns River.

Adam Rosier Jr., 17, and his 45-year-old uncle, John Rosier, were fishing about 7:15 a.m., said Karen Parker, a Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

spokeswoman. She said the uncle turned the boat to reach a school of mullet when the teenager, standing on the back of the boat with the casting net, fell into the water.

A search began off the 4300 block of Great Oaks Lane south of the Fuller Warren

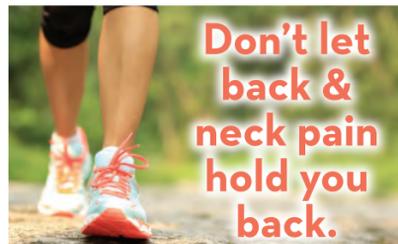
FISHERMAN continues on B-6



The Jacksonville Sheriff's Office dive team arrives at the 4300 block of Great Oaks Lane to search for the 17-year-old missing fisherman. The teen was with his uncle when he fell from the boat.

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IKEA

Continued from B-1

About 80 people attended the meeting at the University of North Florida's Adam Herbert Center. They heard presentations from IKEA about the store and an overview by the state Department of Transportation about upcoming construction that will widen Interstate 295 by building toll lanes.

Becton, whose City Council district contains the property where IKEA wants to build, said it's vital for transportation improvements to keep pace with the development coming down the pipe.

"IKEA will not be the last business that will come into play in that corridor," he said. "We have a lot of undeveloped property in that area that is commercial, and that area has some big employers that are growing. Everybody has a vested interest in improving the area and keeping the traffic flowing."

When IKEA announced in October that it had selected Jacksonville for a new store, the company got raves from JAX Chamber and city officials, including Mayor Lenny Curry and City Council President Greg Anderson.

But before the company can break ground, it must get zoning approval for the store. The property is zoned for commercial use, but not for a store as big as IKEA. The company is interested in a "planned unit development" that would specify various requirements for the site, including the layout of its landscaping and size of its signs that differ from what's allowed under the zoning that's in place.

Critics like Murphy say no amount of zoning requirements can offset the size of the store, which she said it simply too huge for it to be a good fit. She said the stream of shoppers going to an IKEA

store will make it harder for residents to walk and bicycle in the area.

But representatives of IKEA said the store would have less impact on rush hour traffic than if a developer built a 200,000-square-foot strip shopping center that zoning allows now. They said IKEA customers spend an average of two to three hours in the store so there is less of the faster in-and-out flow of vehicles that a strip shopping center experiences.

Also, they said half of IKEA's business is on weekends as opposed to weekdays when roads are crammed with commuters.

The planned IKEA location is off I-295 south of Butler Boulevard. The state Department of Transportation plans to widen I-295 from Butler Boulevard to Florida 9B by building toll lanes. Construction of two lanes in each direction will start in early 2016. When the toll lanes are open, they will make an immediate improvement on southbound I-295 traffic, an FDOT engineer said.

But the benefit of the toll lanes for northbound I-295 traffic won't come right away because the state will still need to build toll lanes north of Butler Boulevard and widen Butler Boulevard heading toward the beach.

As for Gate Parkway, a traffic engineer working for IKEA said the company will improve turn lanes for access to the store, but the road otherwise has enough capacity to handle projected traffic. Some people in the audience chuckled at that assertion and several questioned whether the city is taking a big-picture view that factors in future traffic from other developments coming to the area.

IKEA wants to start construction next summer and open its store by fall 2017.

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Area resident Bill Bolebruch asks questions about effects on traffic from a proposed IKEA store on Gate Parkway during a town hall meeting on Thursday night.

FISHERMAN

Continued from B-1

Bridge off San Jose Boulevard after rescuers were notified about 7:15 a.m.

The Jacksonville Sheriff's Office dive team recovered the teen from 11 feet of water, entangled in the net, she said.

The cast net included about 20 pounds of weight when he fell, said spokesman Tom Francis of the Jacksonville Fire and Rescue Department.

A search area extending about 100 yards out from a dock near where the

boat was operating was established. In addition to the Fire and Rescue Department, rescuers from the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and Navy were on scene.

Francis said the two fishermen had been fishing in that area for years and so were familiar with that part of the river.

He said they left the Arlington area Thursday morning to begin working.

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CUTS

Continued from B-1

For most Floridians, the cuts will be seen through a pair of sales tax "holidays," which total just over \$70 million. A 10-day back-to-school "holiday" would lift sales taxes on certain school supplies, clothes and some electronics. A separate nine-day period would be set aside to remove sales tax on hurricane supplies.

House Minority Leader Mark Pafford, D-West Palm Beach, said fulfilling Scott's request would require spending cuts to areas such as the environment and education.

"So we have services that are responsive to the people of Florida, he's gutting them," Pafford said. "He's continuing to move and follow through on his pledge of smaller government. And that pledge is destroying Florida and eating up reserves, paying no attention

to what his own agencies are claiming will happen.

"His legacy is going to catch up to him," Pafford added. "Gov. Scott has led us in to the dark ages and under his control we're not going to see a renaissance."

The call for the cuts comes as state economists in September projected lawmakers will have a \$635.4 million surplus when crafting the budget for the next fiscal year. In addition to seeking the tax cuts, Scott is pushing for \$250 million in economic-development incentive money.

House Finance & Tax Chairman Matt Gaetz, R-Fort Walton Beach, called Scott's tax-cut proposal "bold." Gaetz's committee will work on a final tax-cut package during the legislative session that starts in January.

"Who says you should only cut taxes in an amount that equates to the surplus?" Gaetz said. "Some of us believe you should actu-

6 Florida veterans told they're dead, won't get VA benefits

It is not the first time benefits have been suspended due to false reports

By Tamara Lush

Associated Press

DUNEDIN | Mike Rieker, a 69-year-old Vietnam Navy veteran, relies on his Veterans Affairs benefits to get him through the month.

That's why the Pinellas County resident was alarmed when his VA check didn't show up in his bank account Monday. He called the Department of Veterans Affairs office to find out why, and their response was stunning: The benefits had been suspended because he was dead.

"Well, I'm not," Rieker retorted. "I woke up this morning and I'm feeling rather chipper, in fact."

As it turns out, Rieker is one of six Tampa Bay area residents who were getting veterans benefits, but then were declared dead — despite being very much alive.

U.S. Rep. David Jolly, who represents a section of Florida's Gulf Coast near Tampa, said he's handled a total of five such cases in the past 18 months, and a neighboring congressman in the Tampa Bay area received a similar call as well.

"It's a very serious matter," Jolly said. "How many cases are there nationwide?"

Jolly is calling on VA Secretary Robert A. McDonald to investigate the scope of

the problem.

Randy Noller, a spokesman for the VA, said Thursday that the agency is looking into the situation and will respond to Jolly.

"We sincerely regret the inconvenience caused by such errors and work to restore benefits as quickly as possible after any such error is brought to our attention," the VA wrote in a statement, adding that the erroneous notifications "represent a very small number of beneficiaries in comparison to the millions of transactions completed each year."

The agency added that it's strengthening its verification process in "notice of death" cases.

U.S. Rep. Jeff Miller said the problem has been going on for years and it "indicates that VA's system for identifying deceased veterans and dependents is in need of an overhaul."

In a statement released Thursday, the congressman who represents parts of Florida's Panhandle added, "It's time for VA to initiate a review to identify and correct these obvious deficiencies in its system in order to put a stop to this problem once and for all. If, as VA has claimed in the past, these mistakes are simple cases of human error, it's incumbent upon the department to swiftly hold the responsible employees



Mike Reiker, a 69-year-old Vietnam Navy veteran, relies on his VA benefits to get him through the month. He became alarmed when he didn't get his check because he was "dead."

Provided by Mike Rieker

accountable."

News reports of cases similar to Rieker's have cropped up. One Brevard County man said the VA had declared him dead four times. Another veteran from Illinois also received a letter denying him benefits because he was deceased — and the same day, in a different envelope, he received a new VA card to receive care at a VA hospital.

Last November, Mary Ann Clough of Clearwater opened a letter that the VA sent to her house, addressed to her family, offering condolences on her death. It said the government would stop sending her monthly checks for the military service of her deceased second husband.

Clough visited the bank and, indeed, money was missing from her account.

"The bank told me, 'No, you're deceased,'" the 86-year-old woman said.

Jolly's office helped both Clough and Rieker.

PILOT

Continued from B-1

Spohrer and Browning sustained minor injuries in the crash.

Townsend was an experienced pilot with ratings for both single- and multi-engine aircraft, according to the Federal Aviation Administration's Airmen Certification Database. The database, at faa.gov, names Townsend and other certified pilots who have met or exceeded the high educational, licensing and medical standards established by the FAA.

Plans for a memorial service have not been made, Spohrer & Dodd told Times-Union news partner First Coast News.

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Broward County Fire Rescue

Rescue personnel investigate the scene of the Oct. 26 crash of a twin-engine Piper Chieftain on the eastern edge of the Everglades in western Broward County. The pilot, James Alexander Townsend of Yulee, has died from his injuries.

SMITH

Continued from B-1

has highlighted Smith's status as a sex offender.

That sort of incendiary talk presumes a guilty verdict and that Smith deserves execution, defense attorney Julie Schlax told the court. The publicity, she said, will only increase Jacksonville residents, she said, have been indoctrinated.

Instead, the Duval County court will need jurors from another county that has not had as much news coverage of the death. Spe-

cifically, she wants a jury from Miami-Dade. That county has 2.5 million people, she said, and that means the court will have a bigger pool of jurors from which to choose.

If not Miami, she asked for Broward County.

Prosecutor Mark Caliel agreed that no one wants to delay the trial, but he said the Duval County court should first try to choose a jury before deciding it can't find jurors who will remain impartial.

Duval County has a large enough population, Caliel argued, that it should be possible to find jurors who



Cherish Perrywinkle was abducted, assaulted and slain in 2013.

haven't already made up their mind on the case.

He also said Miami-Dade does not reflect Duval's demographics and that it's so far away that the long drive would be an unnecessary burden.

Circuit Judge Mallory Cooper did not make a decision Thursday.

Prosecutors and police say Smith, a sex offender released from prison three

weeks before the killing, offered to help Cherish and her mother, Rayne Perrywinkle, at a Dollar General store in June 2013.

He went to Wal-Mart with them and offered to buy clothes, Perrywinkle told police.

Perrywinkle said Smith then offered to buy hamburgers at the McDonald's inside the store.

Cherish went with him to get the food and did not return.

Her body was found near a creek off Broward Road the next morning.

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ally shrink the size of government."

Gaetz said he's also encouraged that the governor included reducing the commercial lease tax, which the committee chairman said is a personal priority.

"We're already seeing the governor reflect priorities of the House in his tax plan, and we'll do all that is appropriate to vet the proposals he's put forward and determine what impact they'll have on Florida's expanding economy," Gaetz said.

Senate President Andy Gardiner, who in September said \$250 million would be a starting point in discussions on tax cuts, "would certainly support increasing that amount provided we can maintain the structural balance within our budget," spokeswoman Katie Betta said in an email Thursday.

A number of the proposals are already moving in the Senate.

Proposals for a 10-day sales tax holiday on back-to-school items (SB 198) and to reduce the tax on commercial leases from 6 percent to 5 percent (SB 116) have each gone through two Senate committees without finding any opposition.

ESTIMATED REDUCTIONS

The state Revenue Estimating Conference estimates the "back-to-school tax holiday" could save shoppers \$68.7 million, cutting state revenue by \$56.1 million and local government revenue by \$12.6 million.

Reducing the commercial lease tax by a single percentage point is projected to reduce state and local government revenue by \$199.6 million next fiscal year, with the amount growing to \$287 million. The reduction would go into place Jan. 1, 2017, which is in the middle of next fiscal year.

Scott announced the

proposed tax-cut package at the annual Manufacturers Association of Florida Summit in West Palm Beach. He had earlier called for making the manufacturing-equipment tax cut permanent.

Lawmakers in 2013 approved a three-year moratorium on the manufacturing-equipment tax, but the tax is scheduled to be revived in 2017. Scott last year projected that companies will have to pay \$142.5 million annually if the tax returns.

Cutting the commercial-lease tax is a priority for a number of business groups.

The conservative-advocacy group Americans for Prosperity-Florida, which considers reducing the commercial lease tax a top priority, wasted little time calling on lawmakers to work with Scott on his proposed cuts. Also, the group reiterated its opposition to requests to fund profes-

sional sports stadiums in Miami, Jacksonville, Tampa and Daytona Beach or to create incentives for the film and television industry.

"While legislators and the governor are making great strides to reduce burdens such as the commercial lease sales tax on Florida families and businesses, they should be working to eliminate taxes that stifle growth and competition all together," AFP-Florida State Director Chris Hudson said in a release.

Throughout his nearly five years in office, Scott has made a top priority of cutting taxes.

As he ran for re-election in 2014, Scott campaigned on a promise of \$1 billion in tax cuts over a two-year period. Lawmakers put together a wide-ranging tax-cut package during a June special session that is projected by state economists to cut revenue by \$372.4 million this fiscal year.