



## COURT BLOCKS CHANGES TO OVERTIME LAW

Money, D-1

## JAGS' TELVIN SMITH DEALS WITH PAIN OF BROTHER'S DEATH

Sports, C-1



## BERKMAN RUIN COULD GIVE WAY TO HOTEL

Money, D-1

# Cuban immigrant thankful for chances America offers



Jose Morales conducts a resume review and mock interview with client Jeanette Kuhn at the Independent Living Resource Center, where he is a program assistant. (Photos by Bob Mack/Florida Times-Union)

## Family sacrificed to come to U.S.; now he's working to help others



mark woods

It's not hard to find people in North Florida who say they are thankful for Jose Morales, grateful their lives intersected with his.

Some are thankful he became a classmate, teammate or co-worker. Others are thankful that when they enter a building near Beach Boulevard, hoping to figure out a way to become more independent despite a physical or mental disability, he will be there, ready to provide help and, in the process, help.

"People meet with Jose and they say, 'I can do this,'" said Beth Meyer, development director at the Independent Liv-

ing Resource Center. "He's ... one of the finest young people I've ever met."

One recent morning he greeted a visitor to the center with a handshake and a smile, then led the way to a conference room, choosing the stairs over the ramp.

He is built like an athlete, a reminder that he was an All-American in high school. He has a deep voice, the hint of an accent offering a hint of his story.

After he tells that story, he is asked what he will give thanks for when his family — his mother, stepfather and younger sister — sits down for a Thanksgiving meal. He starts with that family and this country.

"I will never be able to give back as much as this country

MORALES continues on A-4



Jose Morales often uses public transportation to attend appointments and to commute to work in the morning.

# Trump chooses Haley for U.N. envoy

Charter school advocate tapped for education post

By Julie Bykowitz & Steve Peoples  
Associated Press

PALM BEACH | President-elect Donald Trump has chosen South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley to serve as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations and prominent charter school advocate Betsy DeVos as his secretary of education, the first women selected for top-level administration posts in his new administration.



Haley

Both Cabinet-level positions require Senate confirmation.

While some cheered Haley's selection, despite her limited experience on the international stage, the DeVos choice faced criticism even before it was formally announced Wednesday. Conservatives warned that DeVos, a longtime Republican donor, previously supported the Common Core education standards that Trump railed against during the campaign.



DeVos

TRUMP continues on A-4

## Police union rejects Curry proposal to end pensions for new hires

By Christopher Hong  
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Jacksonville police union officials dug in their heels Wednesday during contract negotiations with city leaders, rejecting Mayor Lenny Curry's proposal to eliminate pensions for future city employees.

The meeting revealed just how far apart the two parties sit in the high-stakes negotiations, in which Curry hopes to convince city employees to accept changes to their retirement benefits necessary for the city to use a special sales tax to help pay off its \$2.85 billion pension debt.

Fraternal Order of Police President Steve Zona told city negotiators that Jacksonville police already receive lower salaries

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DAILY DEAL!

Casablanca Express: \$79 for two night in Las Vegas and more **Details, A-2**

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## MORALES

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has given me,” he said.

His Thanksgiving list — family and faith, community and country — is hardly unusual. It's at the very heart of the celebration on the fourth Thursday in November in America. And although it's tempting to say the story of this 25-year-old who lives in Orange Park and works in Jacksonville is unusual — he's a legally blind, Cuban immigrant — in many ways it is a quintessential American story, beginning the same way American stories have begun for centuries.

His parents wanted a better life for him.

He was born with limited vision. In Cuba, he said, that meant a life with limited opportunities, an education ending before high school, followed by limited career options.

“My parents didn't want someone setting a ceiling for me,” he said. “I would have learned a craft, maybe had a vegetable stand or something like that. If that was what I was capable of, so be it. My family would have backed me up and been proud. But I would not have had any opportunity to see what I was capable of.”

Because of his disability, he couldn't go to public schools in his town. His parents — his mother and his stepfather have been together since Jose was 1 — were told they could send him to a school for the blind in the capital. But they couldn't afford to move to Havana, and they didn't want to send him off to school by himself.

His mother, Mayelia, ended up home-schooling him for first and second grades. For third and fourth grades, she convinced a teacher to allow him to be in a classroom, even though he wasn't enrolled in the school. After that, his mother decided she needed to do something more drastic.

She worked in the medical field and was sent on a trip to Africa. She took Jose with her. They never made it to Africa.

When they landed in Spain, she applied for political asylum. Three weeks later, they were allowed to come to the United States, and initially settled in West Palm Beach along with his stepfather, Heriberto, who had already come through a visa program.



When she saw Jose Morales leading a group of blind men on a walk through downtown Jacksonville, Beth Meyer of the Independent Living Resource Center, said, “That young man is going to work for me.” Morales is a program assistant. (Bob Mack/Florida Times-Union)

Jose was 10. He didn't speak any English.

A year later, after his parents heard about the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind, they moved to St. Augustine. His English was improving rapidly but still had a long way to go.

“I'd ask to go to the bathroom and somehow end up in the office, or ask to go to the office and somehow end up in the bathroom,” he said with a laugh.

One of the first people he met was James Crozier, a mobility specialist.

Crozier remembers a quiet kid who seemed terrified. He also remembers watching Morales gradually come out of his shell and eventually become a leader — particularly on the goalball court.

Goalball, initially created for visually impaired World War II veterans, is a team sport, with three players on each side trying to throw balls (with bells embedded into it) into the opponent's net. When Crozier, the longtime girls goalball coach, took over the boys team in 2008 for a year, he moved Morales into starting center position, one of the most important spots on the court.

“He makes people around him better,” Crozier said. “I told him what

I was doing and why I was doing it: If they were going to be successful, he was going to be the one who gets them there.”

The team won the national title and Morales was named an All-American.

Off the court, he also was making great strides which, Crozier said, could be traced to his mother.

“His mom was amazing,” he said. “She was one of those parents who, when summer hit, she was asking for all the books for the next year. She was going to make sure he was working like a dog all summer, trying to stay ahead. That's why he's turned out as well as he has.”

He became an American citizen. And after getting his high school diploma, he went to the University of North Florida and majored in political science. He did an internship in Sen. Marco Rubio's office, before Rubio became a presidential candidate, and was thinking that maybe his own career path might be tied to politics.

It still might be. But in a roundabout way, goalball led him to the Independent Living Resource Center and what he does now.

He and some friends have continued to play goalball as adults. They

take it quite seriously. And they're quite good. (Last year they finished second in nationals). When they were looking for a place to practice, Morales contacted the city about using a gym downtown.

Meyer, the development director at the ILRC, worked for the city at the time. She was driving to meet Morales at the gym when she saw this group of blind guys walking through downtown. One of them looked like the leader, navigating downtown, studying bus schedules, using his white cane and “walking with a purpose.”

“I said, ‘That young man is going to work for me,’” she said.

Morales started out volunteering for her, then working part time. He now works full time at the center, which helps people with a wide array of disabilities. His title is “program assistant.” He helps people apply for jobs and acquire medical equipment. He does community outreach. He's learning about how the program runs.

More than anything, those who watch him work with people — disarming them with his smile and sense of humor, empowering them with the confidence and calmness in his voice — say this is what he

does best.

He makes people around him better.

He still lives with his parents in Orange Park — mainly to save money, he said — and commutes to the office on Jacksonville's Southside, using mass transit and walking with a purpose.

Being in this office, helping others with disabilities has made him think maybe this type of public service has more impact than any political job.

“But at the same time, I do want to do something greater for the people I'm helping,” he said. “If that's putting it on the front page and ...”

He paused, searching for right word.

“Not advocating,” he said. “Advocating gets overused ... I want people just to know it's normal. There's nothing amazing about someone with a disability. It's just about acceptance and making things inclusive.”

Meyer told another story about Morales, this one involving something he did outside of work. She knew a young father whose newborn son was blind. The father was overwhelmed and frightened. She asked Morales if he'd talk to him.

“The man he was speaking to was crying,”

she said. “At the end, this young father was saying to Jose, ‘Dude, can we go out and have a beer? Can you be my friend? Because you just made me feel like everything is going to be OK.’”

They have stayed in touch. While that first meeting made an impact on the father, it also affected Morales. He got a glimpse of what his parents must have felt 25 years ago. And while he might not have realized it when he was 10, he now knows what a leap his mother took to leave Cuba.

Even though things were difficult there, she had her parents and grandparents. She knew everybody in their town. She easily could have stayed and made the best of things. Instead, she came here.

“At first she worked like any immigrant, in any job she could find,” he said. “She did some baby-sitting. She cleaned houses. She did a little bit of everything for five or six years. And then my stepdad started doing well as a truck driver.”

Asked about that decision to leave Cuba, his mother said she just wanted her son to become successful. By successful, she doesn't mean rich.

“Rich inside,” she said. “He has the opportunity to grow up free, with the liberty we didn't have.”

Which leads to what she will give thanks for this year.

She used to worry about her son. She worried when he was born, when he was in elementary school, when they came to America. She really worried when he started college.

“So many worries,” she said. “I now am thankful because he is a young man who will be ready for life.”

Who knows where it will take him. Maybe to Washington, D.C. He's applied for an internship with the State Department.

He has been to Washington before. A goalball tournament was held there. After he and his teammates lost in the final, they walked all over town.

He describes some of the highlights in tactile terms. What it felt like to touch planes in the Smithsonian and monuments and statues on the National Mall. And how he felt when touching these pieces of America. Kind of the same way he will feel Thursday.

Thankful.

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## TRUMP

Continued from A-1

Trump, who was at his Palm Beach estate Wednesday for the Thanksgiving holiday, called DeVos “a brilliant and passionate education advocate.”

Haley, the daughter of Indian immigrants, is the only minority member chosen by Trump so far. Retired neurosurgeon and Trump loyalist, Ben Carson, an African-American, has been offered the job of secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, according to a person familiar with the offer who spoke on the condition of anonymity because the person was not authorized to discuss the deliberations publicly.

Carson has not yet accepted the offer, but he tweeted on Wednesday that “an announcement is forthcoming about my role in helping to make America great again.”

Trump said that Haley, his UN choice, “has a prov-

en track record of bringing people together regardless of background or party affiliation to move critical policies forward for the betterment of her state and our country.”

“She is also a proven dealmaker, and we look to be making plenty of deals,” he said in a statement. “She will be a great leader representing us on the world stage.”

DeVos, from Michigan, is a longtime advocate for charter schools and school vouchers.

She currently leads the advocacy group, American Federation for Children, and sits on the board of the Jeb Bush-led Foundation for Excellence in Education.

“Under her leadership we will reform the U.S. education system and break the bureaucracy that is holding our children back so that we can deliver world-class education and school choice to all families,” Trump said.

DeVos said in her own statement, “The status quo

in education is not acceptable.”

The DeVos family has been active in Republican politics for decades, especially as donors to GOP candidates and the Republican Party. DeVos' husband, Dick, is an heir to the Amway fortune and a former president of the company.

The couple gave \$22.5 million to the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington in 2010, at the time the largest private donation in the center's history.

Hours before the DeVos pick was announced, conservative policy leader Frank Cannon, president of American Principles Project, called her “an establishment, pro-Common Core secretary of education.”

“This would not qualify as ‘draining the swamp,’” Cannon said, referencing Trump's campaign trail slogan. “And it seems to fly in the face of what Trump has stated on education policy up to this point.”

Asked about DeVos' support for the Common Core standards, Trump spokesman Jason Miller noted that “the president-elect has been consistent and very clear in his opposition to Common Core.”

“Anybody joining the administration is signing on to the president-elect's platform and vision for moving America forward,” Miller said.

There was less immediate opposition to Haley's selection.

South Carolina Sen. Lindsey Graham praised his home-state governor as a good choice and said in a statement that he looks forward to working with her on “overdue reforms of the United Nations.” Graham is chairman of the Senate's Foreign Operations Subcommittee on Appropriations, which is responsible for funding the U.N. and all American foreign assistance.

Haley said she accepted the assignment partly out of “a sense of duty.”

“When the president

believes you have a major contribution to make to the welfare of our nation, and to our nation's standing in the world, that is a calling that is important to heed,” she said in a statement.

Not all presidents have treated the ambassadorship to the U.N. as a Cabinet-level position, and Republicans have tended not to grant that status.

Trump spokesman Jason Miller said Trump is “spending significant time” weighing his choice for secretary of state. Among those he has interviewed is 2012 GOP presidential nominee Mitt Romney, who repeatedly denounced Trump during the 2016 campaign.

After secretary of state, the UN ambassador is the highest-profile diplomatic position, often serving as the voice for U.S. positions on the international stage. As part of the Cabinet, Haley would have more opportunity to shape U.S. policies, rather than simply defend the administration's positions.

Yet it could be an awkward role at times. Trump campaigned on the theme of “America first” and said he is skeptical about “international unions that tie us up and bring America down.” Trump has also described the United Nations as weak and incompetent.

Haley would be the third consecutive female U.S. ambassador to the U.N., after Susan Rice and Samantha Power, the current ambassador.

Bad blood between Trump and Haley was evident through much of the campaign.

“The people of South Carolina are embarrassed by Nikki Haley!” Trump wrote on Twitter in March. Haley denounced several of Trump's campaign comments and urged voters to “reject the siren call of the angriest voices.”

DeVos, too, was slow to warm to Trump.

She told The Associated Press in July, “A lot of the things he has said are very off-putting and concerning.”

## PENSION

Continued from A-1

salaries and pensions, pay higher benefit costs and work in a city with higher violent crime rates than state and national averages. In return, he said the department struggles to recruit and retain quality employees.

Zona said he was “frustrated” by Curry's proposal to end pensions for new hires, which Zona said would make the department even less competitive compared with other departments.

Zona proposed a counteroffer that included placing new employees in the



Zona

Florida Retirement System, a state-run retirement plan that offers participants a defined-benefit pension or a 401(k)-style investment account.

City negotiators shot down the idea and said they had no interest in it.

Both parties walked away from the table without reaching agreement on any issue. It was a similar outcome to Tuesday's meeting between city leaders and the firefighters union, which also proposed new hires being put into the Florida Retirement System.

In order to begin levying the half-cent pension sales tax that voters approved in August, the city must close down current pension plans to new employees.

Curry, who heavily campaigned for the sales tax, has said pensions are financially unsustainable and has made placing all future city employees in 401(k)-style plans a key component of his reform vision — although doing so isn't a requirement to use the sales tax.

No other major city has converted its entire workforce, including public safety workers, to 401(k)-style plans.

While the Florida Retirement System, or FRS,

is considered to be a well-managed fund, city negotiators said it takes away the city's control of retirement benefits and gives it to the Legislature.

However, Zona said it would ensure police would continue earning a defined-benefit pension, which he said was not only standard for big-city police departments, but also a fundamental part of what police deserve in exchange for working a high-risk job.

In return, he said the city could close the current pension plan, begin using the sales tax to pay off the debt and place new employees in a plan that posed far less financial risk to the city.

“FRS is a way out for both of us,” Zona said.

Zona's offer also included a 3 percent retroactive pay raise dating back to 2014, and 10 percent raises for the next three years. It was higher than the Curry's original proposal to offer a one-time 2 percent bonus this year, a 5 percent increase in 2017, a 4 percent increase in 2018 and 3.5 percent increase in 2019. The offer also called for current police officers to get back certain benefits that were cut as a result of the 2015 pension reform agreement.

City negotiators countered with a lesser offer of a 7 percent increase in 2017, 3.5 percent increase in 2018

and 3.5 percent increase in 2019, but the offer wasn't accepted.

After the meeting, Curry said he still intends to put employees in 401(k)-style plans despite the unions' opposition. He said he expects negotiations to resume after Thanksgiving and that both sides will need to continue working through their differences.

“It's a deservingly generous offer I put on the table. If you are a police or fireman, you'll be making 14 percent more than you do today [in three years] if my deal goes through,” Curry said. “If it doesn't, I kept my promises, and we'll see what happens at the negotiating table.”