

FDLE closes property appraiser race complaint

Joshua Solomon
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MARTIN COUNTY — A complaint Kelli Glass Leighton filed against Jenny Fields, her opponent in the property appraiser's election, has been dismissed with no findings of wrongdoings by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement.

FDLE is completing its report to conclude its review of the complaint filed earlier this month, spokesperson Gretl Plessinger said Thursday. The report is expected to be available next week.

"I knew from the beginning this was not going to be an issue," Fields said Thursday. "My opponent didn't understand that."

Glass Leighton alleged Fields, the assistant property appraiser, let a certified public accountant, who donated \$50 to her campaign, file a tangible personal property tax bill late.

Glass Leighton said she obtained the email exchange between Fields and the CPA through a public records request.

Fields said she has been waiving the deadline for people citing difficulties associated with the coronavirus pandemic, as allowed by Florida statute.

"Just because it's not against the law, it doesn't mean it's not ethical," Glass Leighton said Thursday. "At the very least, she should have removed herself from the situation."

If FDLE had found enough evidence to substantiate the complaint, it could have opened a formal investi-



Glass Leighton

Fields

gation with a potential criminal charge. But FDLE did not move past the initial review phase, Plessinger said.

Fields, second-in-command at the Property Appraiser's Office and looking to succeed longtime Property Appraiser Laurel Kelly, said Glass Leighton is inexperienced in the work they do.

"In my opinion, it was a political ploy to demean my character," Fields said.

Fields is running her campaign on her experience and endorsement from Kelly, who has been the property appraiser for three decades.

Glass Leighton, who recently stepped down from her post on the Stuart City Council for a decade, is running her campaign on a fresh voice in an office she says has made errors that sparked tension between the city and county staffs. She said Fields exempting the CPA, while it may be by the books, "wasn't the most prudent decision."

Joshua Solomon is a watchdog and government reporter covering Martin County. You can reach him at 772-692-8935 or joshua.solomon@tcpalm.com.



U.S. Rep. Brian Mast, R-Palm City, gives his support for the Stuart City Commission's possible lawsuit against the Army Corps of Engineers during a news conference Jan. 21 beside the St. Lucie River in downtown Stuart. TYLER TREADWAY

Mast

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Beach media market through Aug. 15, just before the Aug. 18 primary election.

The political action committee is spending about \$100,000 on the campaign; \$10,000 to produce the ad and \$90,000 for air time, said Jack Pratt, the EDF Action Votes president.

Mast, a Palm City Republican, has a primary challenger, Nick Vessio. The winner will face the winner of the Democratic primary — either Pam Keith or Oz Vazquez — as well as independent K.W. Miller in the Nov. 3 general election to represent the district that includes Martin, St. Lucie and northern Palm Beach counties.

Clean water issues

The ad for Mast says the congressman has been:

- Working "across the aisle" with Democrats to "protect Florida's coast from the impacts of climate change"

- Committed to banning offshore drilling
- Fighting "to protect our children from mercury and toxic air pollution."

The ad doesn't mention Mast's efforts to stop Lake Okeechobee discharges or harmful algae blooms in the St. Lucie River. The issue has earned him endorsements from some South Florida environmental groups, including Bullsguard and the Everglades Trust.

"All these issues tie into the way he talks about the clean water issue," said Pratt, the EDF president. "When he talks in terms of clean water, he's talking about algae blooms."

Despite support from local environmental groups, Mast received a 29% grade from the League of Conservation Voters for his overall congressional voting record.

"He's not with us 100% of the time for sure," Pratt said, "but it's pretty clear he's coming our way. He's voted right on a lot of key issues. We applaud him for that and think he'll keep getting better all the time."

Trump's environmental record

Earlier this month, EDF Action Votes launched a TV ad campaign in the Tampa Bay media market against President Donald Trump, highlighting the fact he called climate change "a hoax."

Trump "has a terrible record on the environment," Pratt said. "It would be hard to get much worse. It's important to defeat him."

On supporting one Republican and trying to oust another, Pratt said, "We have to call balls and strikes the way we see them. ... Mr. Mast has said he differs from the president on the issue of climate change."

Mast has been "steadfast in his support to fix Florida's water issues and also in his support for Trump, who has made a historic commitment to funding Everglades restoration," Brad Stewart, Mast's campaign manager, said in a prepared statement.

Pratt noted Mast crossed party lines to support legislation to ban drilling off Florida's coasts and to protect the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's mercury and air toxic standards.

"He's getting past the party line on these issues," Pratt said, "and we think it's really important to build that up."

Mast's opponents

The super PAC has nothing against Mast's opponents, Pratt said.

"When we have someone in Congress who is willing to work with us, we try our best to work with them rather than look around the corner," Pratt said.

Told about the ads touting Mast's environmental stance, Keith said, "Brian Mast is an environmentalist in the same way that Donald Trump is a businessman: Lots of showmanship, but not much to show."

"To be an environmentalist, she added, "you have to care about all of the environment, not just the part in your backyard. Brian only cares about the environment when angry waterfront property owners show up in his office."

On Mast's efforts to stop Lake Okeechobee discharges, Vazquez said, "He took credit for the work done by local activists and dry weather. But he ignores the underlying issues. He failed to push back on the Trump administration's efforts to roll back environmental standards."

Vessio, Mast's Republican primary opponent, did not respond to requests for comments before deadline.

Tyler Treadway is an environmental reporter who specializes in issues facing the Indian River Lagoon. Support his work on TCPalm.com. Contact him at 772-221-4219 and tyler.treadway@tcpalm.com.

Kilroys are coming back to Indian River County

Tyler Treadway Treasure Coast Newspapers
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Kilroys are coming back to monitor water quality in Indian River County.

The Ocean Research & Conservation Association's remote-controlled monitors providing real-time data on water conditions in the Indian River Lagoon and its tributaries have been absent from the county named for the lagoon for three years.

Back-to-back grants from the Florida Legislature — \$500,000 in 2019 and \$575,000 this year — are changing that, said ORCA Managing Director Warren Falls.

The money is enough to maintain nine state-funded Kilroys spread through Brevard, Martin and St. Lucie counties and add new ones, all in Indian River County:

- At the mouth of the C-54 Canal at Sebastian
 - At the mouth of the Main Relief Canal at Royal Palm Point in Vero Beach
 - In the St. Sebastian River at Dale Wimbrow Park
- "Indian River County was a gap in our network," Falls said, "and with the money from the Legislature, we're able to fill that gap."

The Kilroys measure water-quality indicators such as blue-green algae and the nitrates and phosphates that feed the blooms. They also measure temperature, depth, clarity, salinity, dissolved oxygen, chlorophyll and acidity.

The data is posted in real time on the ORCA website at api.kilroydata.org/public.

Most of the data from the new Kilroys is already available on the ORCA website. Staffers are installing for monitoring nitrates and phosphorus this week, and that data should be online by the beginning of next week, Falls said.

The data helps researchers find pollution hot spots in the lagoon and predict when and where algae blooms might occur.

And not just blue-green algae: Kilroys showed how a brown tide bloom "crashed" at several sites in the northern lagoon simultaneously in March 2016, leading to a horrendous fish kill in the Banana River.

ORCA had three Kilroys in Indian River County for

about two years before state funding was cut three years ago, Falls said.

"We had been getting some good data from those systems, seeing some significant nutrient-loading, especially from the Main Relief Canal," Falls said. "It's important that we keep getting that data so we can determine where the hot spots along the lagoon are."

In the right spots

ORCA picked the right spots for the Kilroys, said Capt. Paul Fafeita, a Vero Beach fishing guide and president of the Clean Water Coalition of Indian River County.

"Those three sites are at the county's three main inflows into the lagoon," Fafeita said, "so they'll give a really good sense of where all the nutrients flowing off the land and into the lagoon are coming from."

Fully outfitted Kilroys cost about \$85,000, and maintaining them costs from \$30,000 to \$35,000 a year.

"The maintenance is expensive because it's time- and labor-intensive," Falls said.

With the additions in Indian River County, ORCA will have 18 Kilroys spread throughout the lagoon and its tributaries.

Eleven are funded by the state, four by Brevard County, two by Martin County and one by St. Lucie County. ORCA has had as many as 34 Kilroys operating through a combination of local and state funding and private funding for special projects.

Kilroys aren't the only remote-controlled monitors in the lagoon: Florida Atlantic University's Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute at Fort Pierce operates 10 Land/Ocean Biogeochemical Observatories, or LOBOs, which measure similar water conditions.

Two are in Indian River County, two in St. Lucie County and six in Martin County. To access data from LOBOs, go to fauloboviz.com.

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NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARINGS

Notice is hereby given that the Local Planning Agency of Martin County will conduct a public hearing on August 5, 2020, to consider the adoption of an ordinance related to the Martin County Land Development Regulations. The hearing will be conducted beginning at 7:00 P.M., or as soon thereafter as the following item may be heard.

Notice is hereby given that the Martin County Board of County Commissioners will conduct a public hearing on August 11, 2020, to consider the adoption of an ordinance related to the Martin County Land Development Regulations. The hearing will be conducted beginning at 9:00 A.M., or as soon thereafter as the item may be heard.

The title of the proposed ordinance is:

AN ORDINANCE OF MARTIN COUNTY, FLORIDA, AMENDING SECTION 3.201(C), ACCESSORY USES BY ZONING DISTRICTS OF ARTICLE 3, ZONING DISTRICTS, LAND DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS, MARTIN COUNTY CODE; AFTER THE DECLARATION OF A LOCAL STATE OF EMERGENCY, AUTHORIZING THE TEMPORARY USE OF RECREATIONAL VEHICLES FOR LIVING, SLEEPING OR OTHER OCCUPANCY WHEN A DWELLING ON THE PROPERTY IS UNINHABITABLE; PROVIDING FOR APPLICABILITY, CONFLICTING PROVISIONS, SEVERABILITY, FILING WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, COORDINATION, AND AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

All interested persons are invited to attend and be heard. The meeting will be held in the John F. and Rita W. Armstrong Wing of the Blue Library, 2291 St. Monrovia Road, Stuart, Florida 34986. Written comments may be submitted to: Krista A. Storey, Senior Assistant County Attorney, 2401 S.E. Monterey Road, Stuart, Florida 34986 or kstorey@martin.fl.us. Copies of the item will be available from the County Attorney's Office. For more information, contact the County Attorney's Office at (772) 226-5442. Persons with disabilities who need an accommodation in order to participate in this proceeding are entitled, at no cost, to the provision of certain assistance. This does not include transportation to and from the meeting. Please contact the Office of the ADA Coordinator at (772) 32-53131, or the Office of the County Administrator at (772) 226-5442, or in writing to 2401 St. Monrovia Road, Stuart, FL 34986, no later than three days before the hearing date. Persons using a TTY device, please call 711 Florida Relay Services.

If any person decides to appeal any decision made with respect to any matter considered at the meetings or hearings of any board, committee, agency, council, or advisory group, that person will need a record of the proceedings and, for such purpose, may need to insure that a verbatim record of the proceedings is made, which record should include the testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be based.

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