

# Thumbs up, thumbs down

Judging winners and losers in the news

**Thumbs up:** To State Attorney Phil Archer for pursuing criminal charges against former Clerk of Courts Mitch Needelman, a campaign operative and Michigan company BlueWare LLC. The trio is accused of bribery, bid-rigging, conspiracy and official misconduct related to an \$8.5 million document-scanning contract. Archer brought in a special corruption team under the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, which discovered private financial transactions not accessible to anyone else. As for Needelman, the criminal charges alleging theft and waste of public money represent a dismal end to a long career in politics and public service.



Archer

**Thumbs down:** To the Economic Development Commission of Florida's Space Coast for getting played by BlueWare — which had only a bare-bones operation — and adhering to a secrecy agreement that made it look as though it had something to hide. The EDC says it simply facilitated the company's application for state and local relocation incentives as it would with any other company. We have long opposed the broad-yet-optional secrecy contracts the agency signs with applicants. This time, it came back to bite.

**Thumbs up:** To Betsy Farmer, executive director of Promise in Brevard, for her plans to build a living and working community in West Melbourne for young adults with special needs. The complex will include one- to four-bedroom apartments and eight businesses. "When Promise is built, we will have over 100 young adults with special needs living there, and we will be providing employment opportunities," Farmer said. The Promise Treasures thrift store is set to open in about six weeks at Wickham Road and U.S. 192 to begin generating money to help build the complex.



Farmer



NASA is partnering with the U.S. Navy to develop procedures to recover the Orion capsule and crew after splashdown. AP

**Thumbs down:** To the Florida Department of Children and Families, which, according to a *Miami Herald* investigation, had previous child-protection involvement with 20 children who have died since April 11. DCF Secretary David Wilkins resigned last month amid a widening scandal over the deaths of four young children within six weeks, all of whom had a history of contact with child-abuse investigators. Most of the deaths allegedly were caused by one of the youngsters' parents. Esther Jacobo, DCF's interim secretary, said she's ordered a review of all child deaths caused by abuse or neglect and asked a nationally renowned child welfare foundation to "scrutinize the findings."

**Thumbs up:** To Cocoa Beach Mayor Dave Netterstrom for offering an all-expense-paid vacation to the first tourists to visit from another planet. During the 1960s, the city designated itself an "Official Welcome Station for UFOs." It's a funny stunt. And who knows? Aliens may arrive before human beings explore the cosmos from the Cape again.

**Thumbs down:** To NASA — and Congress and the White House — for budget and scheduling news that makes us want to lie down in the middle of U.S. 1. Flat funding and technical challenges for the Orion crew capsule almost certainly mean delays of the next human spaceflight by the U.S. government, scheduled for 2021. Moreover, the U.S. House passed a budget that cuts NASA by 6 percent. Equipment that would enable Orion to land somewhere (like

the moon) appears decades out.

**Thumbs up:** To Larry Lawton, an ex-con who lives in Brevard County, for his continuing efforts to steer at-risk youth away from crime through his Reality Check program. Last week, Lawton was named an honorary officer with the Lake St. Louis Police Department for introducing Reality



Lawton

Check for the first time in Missouri. Lawton served 11 years in federal prison for a string of jewelry store heists in the 1990s. After his release, he started Reality Check, sharing his prison experiences with troubled teens and young adults. Lawton's program has been used in Brevard County, earning praise from many, including Rep. Bill Posey, R-Rockledge.

**Thumbs down:** To the Lee County chapter of the NAACP, which has protested Lee County government because the County Commission refuses to remove a painting of Gen. Robert E. Lee that has long hung in the commission's meeting room. We understand why the portrait of the Confederate army general would feel like a slap to the face to black people in the Southwest Florida county. But Lee County was named for the Civil War figure in 1887, and the painting accurately represents that history. If the history behind the name is troubling, then the NAACP ought to campaign for a new county name with less polarizing imagery.

*"Our goal is to help you preserve the best traditions of this historic birthplace of the Space Age and to help you ensure that all Brevard County will realize the full potential for its bright tomorrow."*