

# ON SCHOOL SAFETY, FIND BETTER WAY

*Tampa Bay Times (St. Petersburg, FL), December 23, 2013*

Hillsborough schools opt for armed guards - Dec. 19

The Times article regarding armed guards in Hillsborough elementary schools was surreal. What is our society coming to where we need armed guards for the 5- to 12-year-old level? My heart goes out to any innocent victim of random violence, but armed guards are likely to cause more incidents involving gun use.

Not even armed guards can prevent an unwanted armed individual from entering a school or causing a firearms-related incident. There were armed and trained military personnel at the Washington Navy Yard who were unable to prevent that tragedy.

Schools need to look at procedures in which students, parents, teachers and other visitors enter and exit our schools. Maybe separate entry points for students and all others would help. It's likely that the use of metal detectors is far more cost-effective and far more accurate at detecting dense metals, such as firearms, than can be detected by an armed guard.

Better behavioral awareness training for all school staff will also go a long way to help identify and profile characteristics related to an individual with unusual behavior. Security cameras with facial recognition will further the ability of school officials to identify parents in custodial situations or a face that is not recognized as belonging in the school.

There are many other workable and safer solutions that should be explored.

Ken Gagliano, Clearwater

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Benghazi attack

Misdirected blame

Two unfortunate U.S. tragic events, years apart, are long over.

In Benghazi, Libya, four brave Americans were surprised and killed. In Lebanon, 241 brave U.S. servicemen on a peace mission were surprised and killed. That was in 1983, when Ronald Reagan was president. Fifty-eight French soldiers were also killed. Both incidents were unfortunate but could hardly be blamed on any American.

I was watching a C-SPAN discussion on Iran at which one person asked questions about Benghazi. Is this kind of talk an attempt to frighten every American in the military? Should they believe they are at risk because someone is not going to protect them? This type of talk is dangerous.

Robert Hintze, New Port Richey

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Flood insurance

Problem was foreseeable

U.S. Rep Gus Bilirakis, R-Palm Harbor, would like us to believe that he didn't know what he was doing when he voted to approve the 2012 Biggert-Waters Act. According to Bilirakis, he and other members of Congress were led to believe rates would only rise \$200 to \$400 annually as subsidies were phased out.

Examination of the bill's language suggests otherwise. The Biggert-Waters Act clearly states that homeowners in flood-prone areas are going to be stuck with hundreds of millions of dollars in new premiums. For Florida's 270,000 homeowners paying flood insurance, this bill had disaster written all over it.

Even if we are to give Bilirakis the benefit of the doubt, he still should be held accountable for his actions. Florida is currently paying four times more into the flood insurance program than it receives in claims. For Bilirakis to help pass legislation that forces Florida homeowners to pay increases so that homeowners in other states can be subsidized is shameful by anyone's standards.

Jim Swain, Odessa

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In flood fix, consumers come first - Dec. 19

Insurers' health comes first

The headline for this editorial says consumers must come first in flood insurance reforms. Wrong. The actuarial soundness of any insurance program, public or private, must be the first consideration.

If the program is not actuarially sound, then the affordability problem simply becomes worse as time passes. We were living in the Florida Keys when the latest law passed that is driving up federal flood insurance premiums. We immediately sold our home and moved because we knew the premiums were going to become outrageous and that we would never be able to sell our home because of the flood insurance.

Coastal properties have a real problem as it relates to all lines of insurance, not just flood, and things are only going to get worse as the years go on. I do not know the answers, but I do know that government assuming risk for private properties is by far the worst approach.

Jon L. Shebel, Tallahassee

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Greenlight Pinellas

## Tax swap adds fairness

I would like to clarify some misconceptions I have seen in letters recently about Pinellas County's Greenlight transportation initiative.

First, funding comes through a tax swap, not a tax increase. In fact, by shifting the revenue source for the future of transportation from the property tax to a penny increase in sales tax, many people will actually end up paying less in taxes overall.

Second, the proposed system is fairer than the current one, because it will mean that everyone - including non-property owning visitors - will help pay for the systems that will ease the roadway congestion we all experience. By some estimates, visitors and tourists will pay 30 percent of the new revenue raised.

And finally, this is about creating a sustainable way for Pinellas County to address its transportation needs into the future. As we enter 2014, we stand at the threshold of many new opportunities. The economy is poised for stronger growth; our population has become younger and more diverse; and everything is becoming faster paced with a desire for more choices. The Greenlight program will allow us to keep pace with these changes, to establish a smarter, more nimble approach to our entire county's transportation needs.

Janet C. Long, Pinellas County commissioner, Seminole

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## Microsoft retiree to lead health website

Dec. 18

## Health screening

Does a Microsoft retiree taking over the health care website mean that those accessing Obamacare will now get the "Blue Screen of Death"?

Tom Flinn, Sun City Center

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