



September/October 2019

Palm Beach County District Six



Okeechobee Center and USDA Tour



At the end of June, I became aware of horrific conditions at the Okeechobee Center, a rural housing complex in Belle Glade. In one heart-wrenching case, roaches were living in the ear of a young child and rodents were biting the children's toes at night. Mold covered the walls, causing respiratory issues. Numerous units throughout the complex are in similarly poor shape. These are some of the poorest and hardest working residents in our county. No one deserves to live like this.

As County staff and community organizations jumped into action to help the residents, I immediately reached out to state and federal officials for assistance. On July 30, representatives from the United States Department of Agriculture, including State Director Phil Leary, came to the Glades to tour the property and meet with local officials to discuss a plan of action to get the necessary repairs and improvements made to the property as soon as possible. A photo of the meeting is below.

This story has made nationwide news. NBC News published an in-depth article detailing the poor conditions and historical background of the property, and discusses the systematic funding and oversight issues facing rural housing throughout the country. The story can be read here: <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/white-house/rats-roaches-mold-under-usda-s-watch-some-rural-public-n1057016>.

Our federal officials have recognized the magnitude of this issue as well. I want to thank Senator Rubio for his immediate action by including the below language in the FY 2020 Agriculture Appropriations bill that was favorably reported out of the Appropriations Committee with a 31-0 vote. Should this become law, it would be an important step to attaining increased funding and oversight for these rural properties.

Multi-Family Housing Health and Safety Concerns.—The Committee is concerned regarding sanitary and safety deficiencies in rental facilities participating in the Multi-Family Housing Program, such as those recently reported for Okeechobee Center in Belle Glade, Florida. The Committee believes such deficiencies are unacceptable and would be documented and remediated more promptly with improved inspections and coordination with state regulatory agencies. No later than 90 days after the date of enactment of this act, the Secretary shall submit a report to the Committee regarding the status and findings of all inspections within the last 5 years of properties that received financial assistance through the Multi-Family Housing Program.

I want to thank all of the local, state, and federal officials who have worked hard to address this disturbing case. It will take a continuing herculean effort to get this property in proper condition. For example, during recent inspections of the units, it was discovered that there were many missing fire detectors. Palm Beach County Fire Rescue immediately stepped up to install the detectors to address this public safety problem.

The Okeechobee Center is not the only rural housing complex facing such conditions, so I will continue to use my voice as the Chair of the National Association of Counties Agriculture and Rural Affairs Steering Committee to advocate for measures that will address these long-standing deficiencies in our country's rural housing properties.



Hurricane Dorian

I am so grateful Palm Beach County was fortunate not to experience Hurricane Dorian's landfall, but our neighbors in the Bahamas suffered a storm so destructive, so frightening, so life-changing, that they will need our help for months, if not years, to come.

The way our county immediately jumped into action to help the Bahamas is a testament to our compassion. Over the September 7-8 weekend, Palm Beach County government held a Bahamas relief drive. County staff and volunteers led six donation sites at which 14 truckloads containing 120 pallets of supplies were collected. With our partners Tropical Shipping and Carnival Corporation, the supplies were promptly shipped to the Bahamas to help those in need. I want to thank all of the staff and volunteers who helped make this happen, as well as the

numerous other relief drives that were held throughout the county after the storm hit.

FAC Cleanup Effort in Panama City

On September 25, during the Florida Association of Counties Innovation and Policy Conference in Panama City, I joined county leaders across Florida to lend a hand for Hurricane Michael cleanup. Recovery is definitely moving along, but this area continues to need much help. Thank you to Rebuild Bay County and Catholic Charities USA for helping us clear residential properties impacted by this terrible storm.





El Paso Border Tour

I was recently appointed to the National Association of Counties Immigration Task Force and was invited by the Department of Homeland Security to tour the southern border station in El Paso, Texas with Customs & Border Patrol. During the 36-hour trip, I participated in briefings with staff from Homeland Security's Washington D.C. headquarters, as well as with Customs & Border Patrol agents at the Paso del Norte Port-of-Entry. These briefings were accompanied by tours of the border facilities. I was also able to walk across the border into Mexico, where our group was greeted by Mexican officials who escorted us to the Migrant Protection Protocol Refugee Center in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua.

This trip was an eye-opening experience. Our country's immigration laws are antiquated, our system of care for those that have been processed but remain in our care is woefully underfunded, and our national leaders in Congress must act now to pass meaningful, bi-partisan legislation.

Summer Interns

I want to thank my wonderful summer interns for their hard work this summer helping out District 6 constituents! Nancy Sluggett just started her first semester at Notre Dame University and Kojo Kyerematen-Afrani started his senior year at Palm Beach Central High School. If these two are indicators of our future, we are in good hands!

As someone who completed an internship in the Florida Legislature, I know how these experiences can shape a future! If you have a chance to open your door to an intern, please do!



New Yard Waste Guidelines

As a reminder, the new yard waste collection requirements went into effect on October 1. No more than 6 cubic yards will be serviced. Furthermore, each home

should have received a new 96-gallon container for garbage pickup. For more information on the new requirements and for frequently asked questions, please visit the Solid Waste Authority's page here: <https://www.swa.org/601/2019-Collection-Contract>.

Should you have any questions or concerns about the new guidelines, please call the Solid Waste Authority at 561-697-2700.

FED UP Rally

The Southeast Florida Recovery Advocates' 2019 FED UP Rally was held on August 22. This annual rally serves as a powerful reminder of the tireless work our community does to save the lives of those battling addiction. I presented a proclamation declaring August 31 International Overdose Awareness Day. I want to thank Senators Darryl Rousson, Bobby Powell, and Lori Berman, as well Martin County Commissioner Ed Ciampi, State Attorney Dave Aronberg, and all the other speakers, organizers, and attendees for attending and inspiring calls to action as we continue to face this crisis.



9/11 Remembrance Ceremony

I attended the Fire Chief's Association of Palm Beach County's 9/11 Remembrance Ceremony at Christ Fellowship Church in Boynton Beach. This annual ceremony is a powerful reminder of the bravery and sacrifices made by first responders on that tragic day. I joined Mayor Mack Bernard, Asst. County Administrators Todd Bonlarron and Nancy Bolton, PBCFR Chief Reginald Duren and an entire fellowship hall of first responders and law enforcement from all of our agencies in Palm Beach County to reflect, to pray for the lives lost and the lives saved, and to see the future in the eyes of the 100+ student cadets. Thank you for reminding us how blessed we are. I am honored to be YOUR public servant.



CAFCI Friendship Ball

On September 28, Caribbean-American for Community Involvement (CAFCI) held its 30th Annual Friendship Ball. It was my pleasure to sponsor a proclamation declaring September 28th as Caribbean-American for Community Involvement Day. Pictured below is Legislative Aide Joseph Sophie presenting the proclamation with CAFCI President Dennis Wright. We thank all the members of this wonderful organization for the great work they do for our community everyday and the scholarships they provide our area students.

Photo credit: Carol Porter



BCC Briefs

Some highlights of recent Board of County Commission actions:

Passports – approved an application by the Palm Beach County Main Library to the U.S. Department of State Passport Services to participate in the Passport Application Acceptance program. Designated library staff members will complete the online Passport Application Acceptance Training. The Library will require appointments from the public and will set the times that the service would be available. This initiative will be conducted as a one-year trial program. If the trial proves successful, the service will continue at the Main Library and the County will work with the U.S. Department of State to identify potential additional branches to host this service.

Library fees – approved the elimination of overdue fines for library card members. Other changes to the library fee policy include raising the block limit of accrued fees

from \$5 to \$25. The policy changes took effect October 1.

Silverwood Estates – approved the contract for sale and purchase form for use in conjunction with the sale of six affordable/workforce housing units acquired by the county from Lennar Homes in the Silverwood Estates development.

Legislative Affairs – discussed and approved the proposed Palm Beach County legislative agenda for the 2020 Florida Legislative Session in Tallahassee. Many District 6 priorities were included.

Upcoming Dates

- BCC Meeting. Tuesday, October 8, 9:30 am. 301 N. Olive Ave., West Palm Beach, 33401.
- BCC Meeting. Tuesday, October 22, 9:30 am. 301 N. Olive Ave., West Palm Beach, 33401.
- BCC Zoning Meeting. Thursday, October 24, 9:30 am. 301 N. Olive Ave., West Palm Beach, 33401.
- BCC Workshop. Tuesday, October 29, 9:30 am. 301 N. Olive Ave., West Palm Beach, 33401.

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