

# EDITORIAL

ESTABLISHED IN 1924  
**Andrew Kuppers** | Assistant managing editor  
**Frank Grandinette** | Operations Director



**R. Bruce Anderson**  
 Columnist  
 Lakeland Ledger  
 USA TODAY NETWORK

## Judge Ellen Masters always made time for students

I first met Ellen Masters on the tennis court.

I was set to play mixed doubles early one Saturday morning over in Alfordville, on what were then their almost brand-new clay courts, and Ken (our match-ranger then — and now, actually) assigned me to a court with three folks I'd never played with before.

My partner informed me that one of our opponents was a Judge. "Which one?" I asked. "The woman," she told me.

Good heavens.

The cardinal rule in "mixed" doubles is a tough one — you always "go after" the woman — she was (in male patriarchist theory) less likely to return a male serve, was likely to hit it with less power, and might be less quick against a ball hit hard.

I've played this crazy game since I was in single digits age-wise, and learned early to pay little attention to "rules" like that one, but I wondered, briefly, what terrible circle of Grady Judd's Joint was reserved for adventurous weekend warriors who smacked a sitting circuit court judge with a tennis ball.

But I needn't have worried. Ellen was a crafty, speedy presence across the net, she hit hard, and my attempts at "intimidation" were completely fruitless. I suspect that Judge Masters has never been successfully intimidated in her life.

I liked her immediately and have liked her a ton ever since.

Masters' career has been stellar.

She was appointed to the bench in 1999 by then-Governor Jeb Bush, and in her long career as a judge she's served the 10th Circuit in the appeals, circuit civil, criminal, family, guardianship, juvenile dependency, mental health and probate divisions.

She was chief judge from 2019-2023, arranging the assignment of courts and judges and scheduling trials in the heart of the pandemic. Her leadership made it possible for justice to happen in the throes of one of the worst and most complex times the courts have been through.

She's been an amazing public servant, and her official biography lists awards and service markers that deserve their own column. But here, I'll write just a little about the Ellen Masters I know.

Judge Masters had an insane schedule. Judges truly work for a living in the 10th. She was always, somehow, available to my students to consult about schools, to chat about the law, to offer guidance in this tricky area when it was needed (it always is).

She always somehow made room on her calendar to come to classes and speak — but would reserve most of her time for simply answering questions: about the upsides and downsides of public service; of being a judge and how it differed so much from practicing law as an attorney. About quality-of-life "balancing" issues.

When I first came to my home institution, we did not have a pre-law minor, and I'd never really done much of that sort of thing at my past institution. A remarkable group of local Lakeland lawyers pitched in and advised me. And as the program grew, we expanded the first course in the series to include internships. Lawyers came to speak, and we also added a new program called "practicum," during students' first year. For many of my students, it was their first introduction to the courtroom.

"Practicum week" takes us to Bartow each spring, for about three six-hour days of courtroom action. Ellen Masters helped make it happen. She'd gather my students for a talk about the courts, introduce them to judges, taught them how to track cases and advised them on which ones to sit in on and which to avoid.

Judge Ellen Masters retires as the longest-serving circuit judge in the 10th. A career of 26 years in brilliant, heartfelt, dedicated, professional service. Her job never ended at the courthouse door — a generation of new lawyers owe her a huge thanks.

Judge Masters, we wish you a long, happy and well-deserved next chapter.

R. Bruce Anderson is the Dr. Sarah D. and L. Kirk McKay Jr. Endowed Chair in American History, Government, and Civics and Miller Distinguished Professor of Political Science at Florida Southern College in Lakeland. He is also a columnist for The Ledger and political consultant and on-air commentator for WLKF Radio.

### Join the discussion

Read and share your opinion at [theledger.com/editorial](https://theledger.com/editorial).  
 On Facebook, go to Ledger Editorials.

## Democrats don't run from the fight, 'we run for office'



**Your Turn**  
 Nikki Fried  
 Guest columnist

Americans everywhere are feeling the strain. Across Florida, families are squeezed by rising costs, cruel immigration policies, public school divestment, and the dismantling of reproductive rights. Meanwhile, too many Republican leaders are busy instigating culture wars instead of solving real problems.

Here's the truth: the most powerful antidote to helplessness is action.

That's exactly what Florida Democrats' *Run for Office Week* is about.

Instead of sitting on the sidelines, we're asking everyday Floridians: teachers, veterans, parents, small business owners, organizers, faith leaders — to see themselves as the heroes they have been waiting on. Because the people who care most about their communities are exactly the people we need in office.

And we're focusing where it matters most: local government. Mayor. City council. School board. County commission.

These aren't abstract titles. These are the leaders who decide whether your roads get fixed, whether your schools are funded, whether your water is clean, whether your rights are protected.

Local offices shape our day-to-day lives. These leaders are closest to the people and they are where long-term Democratic power is built over time.

Too often, people assume you must be a career politician to run. You don't.

From Feb. 9–13, 2026, Run for Office Week will encourage the folks already doing the work, the neighbor organizing block, the mom at every school board meeting, the young person fighting for their future to take the next step.

There is a place for you. And you don't have to do it alone.

Through programs like Take Back Local, the Florida Democratic Party has built real infrastructure to recruit, train, and support candidates from day one through Election Day. We meet people where they are and giving them a path to lead.

And while Democrats are stepping up, Republicans are stepping aside.

Across the country and here in Florida, Republican politicians are announcing retirements and quietly heading for the exits rather than standing up to



FDP Chair Nikki Fried, Rep. Kevin Chambliss, D-Homestead, and Miami-Dade DEC chair Laura Kelley meet with a group of voters and volunteers Oct. 10, 2025. PROVIDED BY FLORIDA DEMOCRATIC PARTY

the extremism of Donald Trump. They're running off to sunny shores while democracy faces an existential threat.

When times get hard, Democrats don't run from the fight, we run for office because it takes all of us.

In the last year alone, more than 800 Floridians have raised their hands to serve. Nationwide, Democrats have won or overperformed in 240 of 269 key elections since Trump took office. Just a week ago, Democrat Taylor Rehm flipped a +T Trump district in Texas, being the first Democrat to win there in 35 years, despite being outspent by millions of dollars.

The momentum is real. Voters want leaders who fight for affordability, dignity, and basic rights, not chaos.

For once, Ron DeSantis is right: Republicans should be worried. Democrats are competing everywhere.

This moment doesn't call for retreat. It calls for courage.

If you're wondering how to make a difference, this is it. Your community needs you. And we'll walk with you every step of the way.

Democrats can sign up on the Florida Democratic Party's website [floridadems.org/run](https://floridadems.org/run) for access to our free candidate resources and training and join our Lead Locally call at 7 p.m. Thursday to learn more about running for office in Florida.

Nikki Fried, Chair of the Florida Democratic Party, served as Florida's 12th Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Services from 2019-2023.

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### Ignoring student loan crisis risks insolvency

The student loan bankruptcy ban violates the Constitution's Uniformity Clause.

Per the U.S. Supreme Court's unanimous *Siegel v. Fitzgerald* ruling (2022), it treats student debtors differently from gamblers or credit card users based on artificial distinctions.

This "moral hazard" has created nearly \$1.8 trillion in toxic, non-performing assets, fueling tuition hyperinflation (loans are "risk-free" to lenders) and destabilizing the U.S. dollar. Ignoring it risks fiscal insolvency, crashing our fragile power grid amid surging demand, and sparking civil chaos.

Congress must pass "Middleman Elimination" reforms: Reinstate bankruptcy uniformity, abolish the Department of Education middleman (and the Dept of Ed while you're at it) and extend this principle to healthcare.

PolkCare is "free" but costs taxpayers less due to lack of middlemen, remember?  
*Gordon Watts, Plant City*

#### Elected representatives need a backbone

When are our elected representatives going to get a backbone and stop this madness?

Our country is being torn apart and demolished. Law means nothing. Armed people are in our streets killing American citizens. What about our cost of living?

This is not making America great again. Innocent people are being rounded up and deported. Many families are being torn apart, not only by the authorities, but by the rhetoric in Washington, DC.

Shame on our representatives. And shame on Grady Judd for blaming the victim because he was legally carrying a gun and never touched it or threatened anyone with it. Stop defending the Second Amendment and then turn around and say it's illegal to carry a gun in an open carry state, protest or not.

Where are our real leaders? Not in Washington, DC., Tallahassee or Polk County. Who are the "Christians" who feel that being an adulterer, being a pal of sleazy people, carrying hatred everywhere, attacking countries, tearing down our institutions, calling people

names are fit to lead this country?

Where is the Golden Rule? It too has been wiped out. You are not a Christian if you support this unholy administration. God help us all.

*Patricia Turner, Winter Haven*

#### Republicans are complicit with abuse of power

The Republican Party is complicit with the president's abuse of power:

- They approved unqualified Trump loyalist to lead critical agencies such as the Department of Defense, Homeland Security, the FBI and Treasury.

- Said nothing when Trump pardoned all 1,500-plus Jan. 6 insurrectionists — including violent people who attacked police officers.

- Were silent as the president attacked our Constitution's separation of powers — appropriating Congress' power of the purse.

- Stand silent while ICE tramples our Constitutional freedoms and due process.

- Continue to be silent as ICE physically attacks and murders American citizens.

Vote them out! We need Congressmen with backbone who actually serve the American people.

*Charles Warren, Bartow*

#### Demand an end to the lawlessness of government

Along with the unimaginable violence and ICE's wanton acts of inhumanity, this is what is happening.

People, following our immigration laws and processes, are being dragged away as they leave the immigration hearings they are required to attend. If we tolerate this lawless and brutal behavior we are perpetuating it.

Don't wait to act until it happens to someone you care about. Start by emailing or calling your senators and representatives. Simply say "I want ICE off our streets. As my Senator/Representative I'd like to know what you are doing to make that happen and stop the brutality."

Then, get as involved as much as you want yourself and your kids to live in a free and lawful America. Democracy does not self-sustain. Use it or lose it.

*Danette May, Lakeland*

### Write to us

All letters are subject to editing for clarity, length, taste and libel. Letters should be signed and contain the writer's full name, address and telephone number. Letters should be kept to 200 words. **Mail:** Voice of the People, PO Box 408, Lakeland, FL 33802 **Email:** [voice@theledger.com](mailto:voice@theledger.com)

# EDITORIAL

Join the discussion

Read and share your comments  
On Facebook, go to [Lakeland Ledger](#)

ESTABLISHED IN 1924

**Andrew Koppers** | Assistant managing editor  
**Frank Grandinette** | Operations Director



**R. Bruce Anderson**  
Columnist  
Lakeland Ledger  
USA TODAY NETWORK

## Judge Ellen Masters always made time for students

I first met Ellen Masters on the tennis court.

I was set to play mixed doubles early one Saturday morning over in Auburndale, on what were then their almost brand-new clay courts, and Ken (our match arranger then — and now, actually) assigned me to a court with three folks I'd never played with before.

My partner informed me that one of our opponents was a Judge. "Which one?" I asked. "The woman," she told me.

Good heavens.

The cardinal rule in "mixed" doubles is a tough one — you always "go after" the woman — she was (in male patriarchist theory) less likely to return a male serve, was likely to hit it with less power, and might be less quick against a ball hit hard.

I've played this crazy game since I was in single digits age-wise, and learned early to pay little attention to "rules" like that one, but I wondered, briefly, what terrible circle of Grady Judd's Joint was reserved for adventurous weekend warriors who smacked a sitting circuit court judge with a tennis ball.

But I needn't have worried. Ellen was a crafty, speedy presence across the net, she hit hard, and my attempts at "intimidation" were completely fruitless. I suspect that Judge Masters has never been successfully intimidated in her life.

I liked her immediately and have liked her a ton ever since.

Masters' career has been stellar.

She was appointed to the bench in 1999 by then-Governor Jeb Bush, and in her long career as a judge she's served the 10th Circuit in the appeals, circuit civil, criminal, family, guardianship, juvenile dependency, mental health and probate divisions.

She was chief judge from 2019-2023, arranging the assignment of courts and judges and scheduling trials in the heart of the pandemic. Her leadership made it possible for justice to happen in the throes of one of the worst and most complex times the courts have been through.

She's been an amazing public servant, and her official biography lists awards and service markers that deserve their own column. But here, I'll write just a little about the Ellen Masters I know.

Judge Masters had an insane schedule. Judges truly *work* for a living in the 10th. She was always, somehow, available to my students to consult about schools, to chat about the law, to offer guidance in this tricky area when it was needed (it always is).

She always somehow made room on her calendar to come to classes and speak — but would reserve most of her time for simply answering questions: about the upsides and downsides of public service; of being a judge and how it differed so much from practicing law as an attorney. About quality-of-life "balancing" issues.

When I first came to my home institution, we did not have a pre-law minor, and I'd never really done much of that sort of thing at my past institution. A remarkable group of local Lakeland lawyers pitched in and advised me. And as the program grew, we expanded the first course in the series to include internships. Lawyers came to speak, and we also added a new program called "practicum," during students' first year. For many of my students, it was their first introduction to the courtroom.

"Practicum week" takes us to Bartow each spring, for about three six-hour days of courtroom action. Ellen Masters helped make it happen. She'd gather my

## Democrats don't run the fight, 'we run for



**Your Turn**  
Nikki Fried  
Guest columnist

Americans everywhere are feeling the strain. Across Florida, families are squeezed by rising costs, cruel immigration policies, public school divestment, and the dismantling of reproductive rights. Meanwhile, too many Republican leaders are busy instigating culture wars instead of solving real problems.

Here's the truth: the most powerful antidote to helplessness is action.

That's exactly what Florida Democrats' *Run for Office Week* is about.

Instead of sitting on the sidelines, we're asking everyday Floridians: teachers, veterans, parents, small business owners, organizers, faith leaders — to see themselves as the heroes they have been waiting on. Because the people who care most about their communities are exactly the people we need in office.

And we're focusing where it matters most: local government. Mayor. City council. School board. County commission.

These aren't abstract titles. These are the leaders who decide whether your roads get fixed, whether your schools are funded, whether your water is clean, whether your rights are protected.

Local offices shape our day-to-day lives. These leaders are closest to the people and they are where long-term Democratic power is built over time.

Too often, people assume you must be a career politician to run. You don't.

From Feb. 9-13, 2026, Run for Office Week will encourage the folks already doing the work, the neighbor organizing block by block, the mom at every school board meeting, the young person fighting for their future to take the next step.

There is a place for you. And you don't have to do it alone.

Through programs like Take Back Local, the Florida Democratic Party has built real infrastructure to recruit, train, and support candidates from day one through Election Day. We meet people where they are and giving them a path to lead.

And while Democrats are stepping up, Republicans are stepping aside.

Across the country and here in Florida, Republican politicians are announcing retirements and quietly heading for the exits rather than standing up to



FDP Chair Nikki Fried, D-Homestead, and Kelley meet with a group of supporters on Oct. 10, 2025. PROVIDED

the extremism of I to sunny shores w threat.

When times get fight, we run for of

In the last year have raised their h crats have won or elections since Tr Democrat Taylor R in Texas, being the years, despite bein

The momentum fight for affordabi chaos.

For once, Ron De to worried. Democ

This moment d courage.

If you're wonder it. Your community every step of the w

Democrats can Party's website flo free candidate res Lead Locally call about running for

Nikki Fried, Cha served as Florida's and Consumer Ser

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### Ignoring student loan crisis risks insolvency

The student loan bankruptcy ban violates the Constitution's Uniformity Clause.

Per the U.S. Supreme Court's unanimous *Siegel v. Fitzgerald* ruling (2022), it treats student debtors differently from gamblers or credit card users based on artificial distinctions.

This "moral hazard" has created nearly \$1.8 trillion in toxic, non-performing assets, fueling tuition hyperinflation (loans are "risk-free" to lenders) and destabilizing the U.S. dollar. Ignoring it risks fiscal insolvency, crashing our fragile power grid amid surging demand, and sparking civil chaos.

Congress must pass "Middleman Elimination" reforms: Reinstatement bankruptcy uniformity, abolish the Department of Education middleman (and the Dept of Ed while you're at it) and extend this principle to healthcare.

PolkCare is "free" but costs taxpayers less due to lack of middlemen, remember?

Gordon Watts, Plant City

#### Elected representatives need a backbone

When are our elected representatives going to get a backbone and stop this madness?

Our country is being torn apart and demolished. Law means nothing. Armed people are in our streets

names are fit to lea

Where is the God You are not a Chris ministration. God I Patricia Turner,

#### Republicans are

The Republican dent's abuse of pov

- They approved critical agencies st Homeland Security
- Said nothing w

- Jan. 6 insurrection attacked police offi
- Were silent as 1

- tion's separation of power of the purse.
- Stand silent w freedoms and due p

- Continue to be murders American Vote them out!

- bone who actually: Charles Warren,

#### Demand an end to lawlessness of g

fty,  
my  
ss. I  
ess-  
ver  
en-  
dge  
civ-  
en-  
  
the  
ials  
le it  
e of  
ave  
  
ffi-  
hat  
lit-  
  
ru-  
ne-  
out  
this  
  
dar  
ost  
the  
ig a  
law  
'is-  
  
did  
one  
re-  
d in  
ex-  
m-  
d a  
nts'  
in-  
  
ing,  
El-  
my  
n to  
sed  
l.  
ing  
ril-  
Her

their future to take the next step.

There is a place for you. And you don't have to do it alone.

Through programs like Take Back Local, the Florida Democratic Party has built real infrastructure to recruit, train, and support candidates from day one through Election Day. We meet people where they are and giving them a path to lead.

And while Democrats are stepping up, Republicans are stepping aside.

Across the country and here in Florida, Republican politicians are announcing retirements and quietly heading for the exits rather than standing up to

T  
cou:  
Il  
it. Y  
ever  
I  
Part  
free  
Lea:  
abo:  
N  
serv  
and

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Ignoring student loan crisis risks insolvency

The student loan bankruptcy ban violates the Constitution's Uniformity Clause.

Per the U.S. Supreme Court's unanimous *Siegel v. Fitzgerald* ruling (2022), it treats student debtors differently from gamblers or credit card users based on artificial distinctions.

This "moral hazard" has created nearly \$1.8 trillion in toxic, non-performing assets, fueling tuition hyperinflation (loans are "risk-free" to lenders) and destabilizing the U.S. dollar. Ignoring it risks fiscal insolvency, crashing our fragile power grid amid surging demand, and sparking civil chaos.

Congress must pass "Middleman Elimination" reforms: Reinstate bankruptcy uniformity, abolish the Department of Education middleman (and the Dept of Ed while you're at it) and extend this principle to healthcare.

PolkCare is "free" but costs taxpayers less due to lack of middlemen, remember?

*Gordon Watts, Plant City*

### Elected representatives need a backbone

When are our elected representatives going to get a backbone and stop this madness?

Our country is being torn apart and demolished. Law means nothing. Armed people are in our streets killing American citizens. What about our cost of living?

This is not making America great again. Innocent people are being rounded up and deported. Many families are being torn apart, not only by the authorities, but by the rhetoric in Washington, DC.

nar  
V  
You  
min  
F  
  
**Rep**  
  
T  
den  
●  
criti  
Hon  
●  
Jan.  
atta  
●  
tion  
pow  
●  
free  
●  
mur  
V  
bon  
C  
  
**Der  
law**  
  
A  
war  
P  
es, &  
tion



**LETTERS | Opinion** *This piece expresses the views of its author(s), separate from those of this publication.*

# Ignoring student loan crisis risks insolvency (Voice of the People, Feb. 15, 2026)

Lakeland Ledger

Feb. 15, 2026, 5:01 a.m. ET

## Ignoring student loan crisis risks insolvency

The student loan bankruptcy ban violates the Constitution's Uniformity Clause.

Per the U.S. Supreme Court's unanimous *Siegel v. Fitzgerald* ruling (2022), it treats student debtors differently from gamblers or credit card users based on artificial distinctions.

This "moral hazard" has created nearly \$1.8 trillion in toxic, non-performing assets, fueling tuition hyper-inflation (loans are "risk-free" to lenders) and destabilizing the U.S. dollar. Ignoring it risks fiscal insolvency, crashing our fragile power grid amid surging demand, and sparking civil chaos.

Congress must pass "Middleman Elimination" reforms: Reinstate bankruptcy uniformity, abolish the Department of Education middleman (and the Dept of Ed while you're at it) and extend this principle to healthcare.

**Need a news break?** [Check out the all new PLAY hub with puzzles, games and more!](#)

PolkCare is "free" but costs taxpayers less due to lack of middlemen, remember?

*Gordon Watts, Plant City*

**Voice of the People, Feb. 8, 2026:** [Grady Judd blaming Alex Pretti for his own killing](#)

## **Elected representatives need a backbone**

When are our elected representatives going to get a backbone and stop this madness?

Our country is being torn apart and demolished. Law means nothing. Armed people are in our streets killing American citizens. What about our cost of living?

This is not making America great again. Innocent people are being rounded up and deported. Many families are being torn apart, not only by the authorities, but by the rhetoric in Washington, DC.

Shame on our representatives. And shame on Grady Judd for blaming the victim because he was legally carrying a gun and never touched it or threatened anyone with it. Stop defending the Second Amendment and then turn around and say it's illegal to carry a gun in an open carry state, protest or not.

Where are our real leaders? Not in Washington, DC., Tallahassee or Polk County. Who are the "Christians" who feel that being an adulterer, being a pal of sleazy people, carrying hatred everywhere, attacking countries, tearing down our institutions, calling people names are fit to lead this country?

Where is the Golden Rule? It too has been wiped out. You are not a Christian if you support this unholy administration. God help us all.

*Patricia Turner, Winter Haven*

**Voice of the People, Feb. 1, 2026:** [Support Alzheimer's Awareness bill](#)

## **Republicans are complicit with abuse of power**

The Republican Party is complicit with the president's abuse of power:

They approved unqualified Trump loyalist to lead critical agencies such as the Department of Defense, Homeland Security, the FBI and Treasury. Said nothing when Trump pardoned all 1,500-plus Jan. 6 insurrectionists — including violent people who attacked police officers. Were silent as the president attacked our Constitution's separation of powers — appropriating Congress' power of the purse. Stand silent while ICE tramples our Constitutional freedoms and due process. Continue to be silent as ICE physically attacks and murders American citizens.

Vote them out! We need Congressmen with backbone who actually serve the American people.

*Charles Warren, Bartow*

**Voice of the People, Jan. 25:** [Judge Carpanini is a credit to the bench](#)

## **Demand an end to the lawlessness of government**

Along with the unimaginable violence and ICE's wanton acts of inhumanity, this is what is happening.

People, following our immigration laws and processes, are being dragged away as they leave the immigration hearings they are required to attend. If we tolerate this lawless and brutal behavior we are perpetuating it.

Don't wait to act until it happens to someone you care about. Start by emailing or calling your senators and representatives. Simply say "I want ICE off our streets. As my Senator/Representative I'd like to know what you are doing to make that happen and stop the brutality."

Then, get as involved as much as you want yourself and your kids to live in a free and lawful America. Democracy does not self sustain. Use it or lose it.

*Danette May, Lakeland*

## **Want to contribute?**

Send letters to the editor to [voice@theledger.com](mailto:voice@theledger.com), or Voice of the People, P.O. Box 408, Lakeland, FL, 33802. Submit on the website at <http://tinyurl.com/28hnh3xj>, or go to [TheLedger.com](http://TheLedger.com), click on the menu arrow at the top of the website and click Submit a Letter. Letters must be 200 words or less and meet standards of decency and taste.