

Hugs for UCF, high-paying jobs. Slugs to petty and drag-queen obsessed politicians | Commentary

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It has been a hot minute since we handed out some hugs and slugs to those deserving of both. So let's get started.

A **hug** to the **UCF College of Medicine** for celebrating an overlooked milestone last week — when the school's 1,000th student was matched with a hospital residency program. These new doctors (or “physician Knights,” as Dean Deb German calls them) are going to some of the most prestigious programs in America, including the Cleveland Clinic, Mayo Clinic, Harvard and Johns Hopkins. But many will also remain in Florida where they're sorely needed and where UCF's medical research is already making a difference in both the medical world and the state's economy.

A **slug** to State Rep. **Randy Fine** for generating yet another petty and embarrassing headline: “Randy Fine pulls \$2 million request as Brevard Zoo considers ban on campaign events.” [Florida Today reported](#) that Fine pulled a \$2 million funding request meant to help the nonprofit zoo expand after zoo officials said they were trying to decide whether politicians should stage future campaign events at their nonprofit facilities. (Fine had held one there.) Fine's hometown paper noted that Fine has a “history of retaliation.” You may remember some of the earlier headlines generated by the distinguished gentleman from Brevard, like: “[Florida Rep. Randy Fine calls school leader 'whore,' threatens Special Olympics.](#)” Class act.

A **hug** to **Orlando Economic Partnership** and **Osceola County commissioners** for their efforts to land a 300-acre, \$431 million clean-energy technology park. As the Sentinel's [GrowthSpotter reported](#), the goal is to help Clean Tech, a clean-energy company, open a new U.S. headquarters with 1,200 jobs and salaries averaging at least \$75,000. *These* are the kind of jobs this state and community need — much more than more low-wage, service-sector ones. So kudos to all the officials who are setting their sights higher.

A **slug** to former State Rep. **Joe Harding**, sponsor of last year's so-called “Don't Say Gay” law, who pleaded guilty Tuesday to charges of wire fraud, money laundering and making false statements. The feds delivered this slug, [saying](#) “Harding fraudulently obtained and attempted to obtain more than \$150,000 in funds from the SBA to which he was not entitled.” This man was literally the face of the GOP effort to demonize

LGBTQ families in Florida. Remember that the next time one of these guys starts preaching about morality.

Also a secondary **slug** to those who keep screaming “**You can’t call it ‘Don’t Say Gay’ because those words aren’t in the bill!!**” Right. And I suppose no one should ever utter the word “Obamacare” either, because that word is never mentioned once in the [1,990-page](#) “Affordable Care Act.” Nor is the word “woke” in the law Republicans call the “[Stop Woke Act.](#)” Listen, if beefing on nicknames is the best argument you’ve got, that says a lot. Also, do you know who else also referred to the “Parental Rights” bill as “Don’t Say ...” because he knew darn well that’s what it was all about? The bill’s [own original sponsor](#) — before he got indicted anyway.

A **hug** to Seminole County Tax Collector **J.R. Kroll** for opening [a new office to serve residents in Altamonte Springs](#). OK, so a new branch office isn’t really a gigantic deal. (Heck, I’m not even convinced we need elected officials to fulfill tax collectors’ largely bureaucratic duties. To collect taxes, you need a competent office administrator, not a politician.) Still, isn’t it nice to see a tax collector make headlines for something as pleasantly mundane as a new-office opening ... as compared to [criminal charges](#) for identity theft, stalking, wire fraud, sex trafficking of a child and conspiracy to bribe a public official? Especially in Seminole County.

A **slug** to **Gov. Ron DeSantis** for trying to continue bullying the Orlando Philharmonic. You may remember DeSantis’ state regulators threatened to financially kneecap the cultural nonprofit by pulling its concession stand’s liquor license — all because the theater allowed a drag show to rent out its performance venue one night. (The Phil’s Plaza Live lets production companies of all stripes rent out its venue most every week.) The state claimed the Phil allowed a “[lewd](#)” drag show to perform in front of children. Except newly released documents show undercover state agents witnessed nothing “lewd” at all. Specifically, [the report said](#): “Besides some of the outfits being provocative (bikinis and short shorts), agents did not witness any lewd acts such as exposure of genital organs. The performers did not have any physical contact while performing to the rhythm of the music with any patrons.” Is this really how the state of Florida is using its undercover agents? The obsession Florida’s GOP lawmakers’ have with drag queens and LGBTQ issues is already odd. But now that the governor’s own agents have undercut his claims, he should find somebody else to pick on.

And finally, a **hug** to the only public school from Florida that’s still in March Madness — **Florida Atlantic University**. If you’d asked last year whether Florida State, the University of Florida or FAU was most likely to make the Big Dance, few people would’ve bet on the Owls. But coach Dusty May took the team to a crazy, impressive [28-3 record](#). As the father of a junior Owl, I’m a bit biased. But if you’re looking for a team to pull for Thursday night, consider rooting for the underdog Owls, who normally play in a tiny 2,900-seat arena and are getting a chance to spread their wings in the national spotlight.