

keysmiata says:

October 27, 2017 at 12:18 pm

Wasting taxpayer money because of their own egregious acts was bad enough before (SUFA, the sewer debacle), but it's especially difficult now when so many people have no place to stay or are dealing with their home damages. I have a hard time imagining how such incompetent people managed to hang on for so long – but this is Floriduh and corruption rules.

EagleEye says:

October 27, 2017 at 12:24 pm

This. Is. Criminal. It's outrageous behavior. You, Rick, are a terrific watchdog. Thanks a million, or 15.3 million, for your meticulous investigation! Hard to believe this is not being reported effectively. I saw the mention in the Citizen and was astounded that it got such little ink. As you say, these are the people who decide where to spend county tax dollars! They are not honest. They can't be trusted. They've been going on like this for years, until you shined the light on them. I say: "throw the bums out!" Surely, we can find a few honest people to run the county. I'm stunned. Stunned. Moreover, how could Tallahassee, or whomever is receiving these "nuanced" forms, not notice the discrepancies! Year over year? Is no one looking? That's your next assignment. Find out why the State isn't catching these oversights.

mwm1960 says:

October 28, 2017 at 11:19 am

I don't know what is more shameful, the BOCC closing their eyes and praying that this will go away or the blind eye of the other media in the Keys to these shameful County shenanigans. It would be funny except that it isn't fun to hurt taxpayers time and again and again...

Mr. Boettger, you are incredible!

mwm1960 says:

October 28, 2017 at 11:30 am

p.s. Why do they have to hire a \$300/hr. outside attorney when Monroe County already has a stable of overpaid lawyers on staff?

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Blue Paper Editor says:

October 29, 2017 at 8:53 am

Ten attorneys, in fact, last time we checked...

LindaG says:

October 28, 2017 at 12:06 pm

Just as they are closing their eyes and hoping this will all quietly go away before the IRS or state attorney gets interested, the commissioners will probably ignore your questions, Rick. But their pleas of ignorance as an excuse are a tad insincere...In the SUFA case, they knew they had broken the law all along – as evidenced by the closed sessions transcripts and the fact that the county attorney asked the SUFA attorney to quietly settle the case just an hour before the Appeals Court hearing – which ended in ruling in SUFA's favor.

Thank you again, Rick, for shining a bright light on these dark "public servants".

margiebargie says:

October 29, 2017 at 11:29 am

Thanks again.

Definitely looking forward to the rest of the series. Maybe we'll gain some insight into why the BOCC does some of the crazy things they do.

LindaG says:

February 25, 2017 at 4:57 am

So disturbing. The hypocrisy of the BOCC is galling. Excellent work, Rick.

[Rick Skwiot](#) says:

February 25, 2017 at 7:54 am

Did you CC the IRS or FBI on this article? These County Commission clowns belong behind steel bars.... and are probably wishing they could serve you a KGB or North Korean cocktail.... Watch your back!

Fltmedic01 says:

February 25, 2017 at 8:03 am

How about this board using poor judgement financially as well. Not accepting LifeNets proposal of 400,000 per year instead electing to spend over 5 million on another aircraft then more millions per year supporting two aircraft?

margiebargie says:

February 25, 2017 at 8:07 am

Thanks for staying on this. And to answer your question: No, the commissioners have no shame at all. None. Not a drop. They're mildly afraid of getting caught. I think the fact that George got nailed for ethics violations has shaken them up. But they don't feel a thing for the people they screw over. To them, the taxpayers are sheep lining up to be sheared. In fact, I think every one of the five actually enjoys abusing their authority.

If public officials can't manage and/or accurately report their own finances, how can they be trusted with taxpayer money? I would really like to know where Carruthers finally found the money to clear her tax lien. And how did she manage to get herself into such huge tax trouble in the first place? These are important questions. Carruthers is the biggest rubber-stamper of reckless spending on the BOCC (next to Kolhage).

I really do not understand Kolhage's disclosure forms. There are huge differences between reported and calculated net worth. And large unexplained jumps in asset values from year to year. Doesn't make a whole lot of sense to me.

Speaking of the animal shelters...

I looked into the 2013 tax returns for all three animal shelters one time. Here's something I noticed. (Cut and pasted from my blog.)

SHARK's tax return was prepared by Zuelch Consulting, LLC. It was signed by Christian Zuelch as the tax preparer and also as an officer of SHARK. Zuelch was on the board that year as Treasurer. Also worth noting, SHARK's accounting fees are about three times higher than the other two shelters. From the looks of things, SHARK was paying one of their own officers a premium to prepare their tax return. Weird that Comm. Kolhage, auditor extraordinaire, didn't pick that up. Zuelch Consulting, LLC went out of business about the same time SHARK did. I guess they lost their biggest client.

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Rick Boettger says:

February 26, 2017 at 9:51 am

Fascinating about the Zuelch connection, Master Investigator. I take it you got that from their 990's.

And, as always, thanks for your support.

keysmiata says:

February 28, 2017 at 9:13 am

As well, SHARK was bringing in dogs from Miami to adopt out. If I recall, there were allegations made about SUFA spending county dollars for non-county animals, yet it was OK for SHARK to do the same thing?

EagleEye says:

October 13, 2017 at 1:17 pm

Wow. Just Wow. While we generally can assume there are special unwritten rules for Key's leaders, this one can't be overlooked. Thanks from this tax payer for being our watchdog. The information is particularly troublesome in light of the harm they caused to the animal shelter and Linda, personally.

navigaiter says:

October 13, 2017 at 3:02 pm

It's a national epidemic. We're witnessing the decline and fall of Rome again. It's the implosion of an empire that is too big for its britches. Lying and cheating are "smart." The Owners are getting bolder in their class domination laws which the courts support instead of protecting our rights to life and liberty. It makes good drama and is fun to watch if you realize that what goes down comes around so you will laugh when the pressure drops on the wealthy and makes them cry for help from those they oppressed.

LindaG says:

October 14, 2017 at 3:48 am

When deposed during the Monroe County vs. SUFA litigation, Neugent wore shorts and a tropical shirt and joked about whether he should call his political chums and warn them that they might be in trouble. Kohlage became petulant and at one point, left the table because he was so angry that anyone would dare question him. I wonder if this cavalier attitude will prevail during the Ethics meeting. Superb reporting, Rick, and thank you, KWTN, for having the courage to lean forward on this story.

margiebargie says:

October 14, 2017 at 9:47 am

You are my freaking hero!

Funny story – I was looking up the latest financial disclosures just the other day and was boggling at how complete and understandable they were. Then I saw this and thought: Oh, no wonder. Lol.

Thank you!!!

margiebargie says:

October 14, 2017 at 9:54 am

p.s. I'm delighted to see the Odious Sylvia Murphy also got caught in the drag net. Long time coming.

zobop says:

October 15, 2017 at 4:43 pm

<https://therealpoop.org/scandal-sheet/>

Lest you forgot, review the above URL for other recent histories of our public “servants “.

JIMINKEYWEST says:

October 17, 2017 at 9:13 am

When will this be happening to the corrupt city of Key West ? Just maybe KW will be covering it's own ass. This is the result when corrupt get too bold and they get investigated.

JohnMiller says:

October 17, 2017 at 10:39 am

A good indicator is whether officials and politicians “re-up” over and over again. If an elected or appointed official is performing a real “public service,” then they would want to make their contribution and promptly step aside for someone else to make the sacrifice and perform a public service.

If they have a good deal going, then they will work like hell to stay!

JIMINKEYWEST says:
October 17, 2017 at 10:40 am
Bribes are hard to hide6

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JohnMiller says:
October 17, 2017 at 12:26 pm
Apparently not so hard. See: Washington & Tallahassee.

Fltmedic01 says:
October 18, 2017 at 11:04 am

I know you don't want to hear this but it's the truth. When these "commissioners" decided to spend OVER \$10 MILLION dollars instead of a mere \$400 thousand/year on helicopters it smells! I know all the arguments against Life Net and we can debate them all you want. But it's absurd to spend that kind of money. And wouldn't that \$9.6 million be nice to have right now after Irma. Maybe now we know what really was going on!

Matt Gardi says:
October 18, 2017 at 10:53 pm
Great Job Rick! No one can understate your efforts, and they go well appreciated. Keep them on task. I always remember their flipant disregard for the inventory issues I brought up....<https://youtu.be/A6aQXSxruZQ>.
Corrupt is an understatement...
Now we see in North Florida .. FDLE can arrest a clerk for letting his girlfriend use one laptop...Ha! Forget about a quarter mill in equipment.
<http://www.tallahassee.com/story/news/2017/10/17/nude-photos-lead-jefferson-clerks-arrest/772263001/>

Igm says:
April 7, 2017 at 8:20 am
Thank you, Rick Boettger and the Blue Paper for your tenacity in following this fiasco and for courageously rushing in where other media dare not tread. Bene factum!

halloween says:
April 7, 2017 at 9:22 am
Another excellent display of investigative reporting!
Marathon SPCA has some good people working there. There are a number of things I would change, though.

I think Rick is absolutely correct that the County should be prosecuting animal abusers instead of the SPCA taking on that expense. The County is darned quick to initiate legal action against some petty Code violation called in anonymously by a grouchy neighbor, but refuses to go after real criminals? Perhaps it is "professional courtesy?"

Rick makes a good observation of how the County legal staff is directed to defend unconstitutional, statutorily illegal, unethical activities of the FCAA-County partnership against a small percentage of the electorate. These are the peaceful citizens who were/are being forced to "grant" an extorted property easement and power circuit to allow extension of the County sewer collection system onto their private property for the convenience of the Partnership. County defense against litigation by citizens has cost hundreds of thousands in tax dollars and continues today. Combined with other elements such as the 1. Restriction of Trade (sole source specifications, then owner-direct purchasing that circumvented statutory public purchasing requirements) and 2. Restriction of Interstate Commerce (by requiring the grinder pump stations be purchased only from the one local distributor), and 3. Extortion (first by verbal threats of home condemnation if a property easement is not "granted), and 4. Use of the U.S. Postal Service to distribute extortion letters, and 5. Whistle blower retaliation, and 6. Fraud (forged Army Corps Environmental Assessment used to obtain Florida Finding of No Significant Impact from DEP, plus a fraudulent "Decision Tree" that eliminated vacuum sewers as a possibility while purporting to consider them based on economics), and 7. Witness tampering (telephoned threat), the Cudjoe Regional management has established a valid federal RICO case against themselves. The US Attorney in Miami did not even acknowledge receipt let alone respond to a certified letter of complaint, so one wonders how deep the corruption goes. The FBI claimed, "It's a civil matter unless you can show us a smoking gun like a cashed pay-off check." In other words, "This job pays the same whether we play cards or investigate, so guess what?"

My Latin is non-existent, so I attempted to get a translation of the last line. Not even Wikipedia was clear on it, in spite of Latin scholars weighing in, but after reading the entire discussion (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk%3ASic_sempertyrannis), I take it to mean a non-violent but adamant "Out with tyranny!" Amen to that, but what does it take besides a dagger (or spear in Virginia)? A good start would be election of Commissioners only by their district and an elected FCAA Board, also with voting limited to their district. It goes without saying that the constituent should live in their district, but we see FCAA's Chairman Robert Dean living in one district but representing another, FCAA's Melva Wagner living in a mainland county but representing another FCAA district, and the County's "King George" Neugent living in Marathon but "representing" the Lower Keys. This does not describe a democracy.

Rick Skwiot says:

April 7, 2017 at 11:00 am

Any truth to the rumor, Rick, that George Neugent will run for dogcatcher?

Igm says:

April 7, 2017 at 11:18 am

Wrong on two counts, Sloan. 1) The trucks were leased and insured by SUFA and accordingly, the County was signed off of any liability. 2) The SPCA's new animal shelter - which is badly needed- received a huge chunk of change of from the County. This was a smart move on the SPCA as it assures that no one will ever bid against them for upcoming contracts as the building is a carrot that can be pulled away from the County. This is why they also received Carte Blanche during their audit, as proven by county emails.

[Town Fool Sloan](#) says:

April 7, 2017 at 1:37 pm

I kinda doubt the county attorney would agree, just because SUFA had a lease on the vehicle and insured it, that erased a cause of action a person not part of that agreement might have against the county involving one of its vehicles being operated outside the scope of intent of the lease. ie. out of state. I doubt it ever occurred to the County that SUFA would operate a lease county vehicle out of state, and certainly not all the way to Michigan and back. Linda Gottwald and I went around about that.

A parallel example.

One of the male monitors at KOTS sexually assaults a female client. SHAL's contract with the City of Key West, to run KOTS for the city, does not shield the city from liability for what was done wrong at the city's homeless shelter, if the plaintiff was not a party to the contract between the city and SHAL. Both SHAL and the city get sued by the plaintiff lawyer, aka personal injury lawyer.

It if the County was so generous with SPCA, for housing and caring for its homeless animals, that lends to the City of Key West's argument that the County should chip in and pay half the cost of running and construction the new shelter for homeless people? I'd love to hear County Commissioner Sylvia Murphy's thoughts on that :-).

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margiebargie says:

April 9, 2017 at 8:17 am

Sylvia Murphy would say she's "perfectly happy" with the situation if it keeps her from having to think.

Pelican says:

April 7, 2017 at 2:27 pm

Neugent has long been a disgrace to the office he holds. His mistreatment of SUFA's Linda Gottwald was beyond reprehensible. Grinder Pump George's legacy will also include his reckless ramrodding of the horrid Cudjoe Regional sewer system, which has already become the poster child for cost overruns and environmental woes.

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margiebargie says:

April 9, 2017 at 8:17 am

Amen.

keysmiata says:

April 7, 2017 at 4:44 pm

What has never been mentioned anywhere is SHARK was barely in business when it pulled dogs from Miami and brought them down to the Keys for adoption. Made a big deal out of it on Facebook. I never saw nor heard anything from the county about SHARK's use of county funds to feed and shelter those dogs, yet they made a huge point of accusing Linda of using county funds for Michigan dogs. And when FKSPCA took over from SHARK, it was obvious that they would be seeking increases in the near future as they were already overpaid for what they actually did in their small territory. What I never understood is how FKSPCA could justify their money request when Linda was given such a hard time while running two shelters for less.

margiebargie says:

April 9, 2017 at 8:15 am

Thanks, Rick, for continuing to pursue this.

When you zoom out and look at the whole animal control mess, you can't help but realize how corrupt and dysfunctional Monroe County government really is. I would encourage people to also consider what is happening in the Upper Keys. Here's a quick rundown. Huge population of free-roaming cats. Highest need and lowest funding of any animal shelter in the Keys. A kill rate three times higher than the other shelters in the Keys. A shelter operator with nothing but excuses. A county commissioner who has said she is "perfectly happy" with the situation.

The animal control mess is a Keys-wide problem that requires a Keys-wide solution.

Nothing will ever change as long as people remain in their silos. If you're not willing to take up for your neighbor, don't expect them to take up for you. (Same with sewer by the way.)

What the bozo's in county government fail to realize is that many states up north are able to import adoptable animals and find them homes. When Linda found those dogs new homes in Michigan, she only did what many, many shelters do every day as a matter of routine. Only in Monroe County would it be considered some sort of crime.

I think bringing Linda on as a consultant would be a brilliant move but it will never happen with the current crop of scumbags in charge. They are 100% responsible for creating and perpetuating the situation with animal control. And their egos will never allow them to admit, much less correct, mistakes. Not to mention the need to cover up any possible criminal conduct. Long story short, the county benefits from the horrible status quo. They're not going to change it.

I totally agree that the County's legal department is most definitely part of the problem on every front. I can tell you for a fact that if some county official doesn't want to part with a public record, Shillinger will step in personally to try and stymie the request. He did it when I started asking questions about the Emergency Services Surtax.

Interesting that Neugent says he's not running again. If he doesn't, who will empty-headed Sylvia Murphy glom on to? I'm guessing she'll get Carruthers to do her thinking for her.

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[Town Fool Sloan](#) says:

October 27, 2017 at 3:46 pm

Because of past experiences I've observed of the Ethics Commission whitewashing, at best, what sure looked to me like serious ethics violations, I'm more than a little surprised they did anything with your complaints against the county commissioners.

For one example. They already had treated George Neugent getting free annual golf club memberships, because he was a county commissioner, like, hmmm, jaywalking. I viewed it as a series (annual) capital offenses, because I know that heaps of business deals are made on the golf course away from prying eyes and ears.

After Dennis Ward was elected in 2008, he went before the county commission and told them they needed to pass an ethics law with teeth that applied to them. 4 of the commissioners looked insulted. Commissioner Kim Wigington agreed and proposed a new county ethics ordinance the other 4 liked about as much as they liked Ward's invasion of their chamber. As I recall, the other 4 were George Neugent, Mario Di Gennaro, Heather Carruthers and Sylvia Murphy.

By the time the other 4 got done nibbling and snipping, and then claiming what a great ordinance they had created, it looked like something you would love to have to live by if you were an unethical elected official. When it came to a vote before the 5 in the Marathon Government Center, during citizen comments I told Kim it was a joke ethics ordinance and not to sully herself by voting for it. She cast the lone vote against it. In the 2010 county commission race, Neugent got 4 times as many votes as I got. That told me how interested the local voters were in their elected officials' ethics. I knew then that Neugent was getting free golf memberships, but I did not have the kind of evidence that a court would accept, nor even a tame ethics commission. If I had had that evidence, and if I had gone public with it, do you think it would have changed the outcome of the 2010 race between Neugent and me? Heck, it might have caused Neugent to get 5 times as many votes as I got :-).

I personally think, Rick, this you are going after is far bigger than the SUFA case, in which I got involved with Linda Gottwald personally, when she called me. I think we talked maybe half an hour while I walked around my neighborhood on Little Torch Key. I frankly did not care for some of the arguments she was making, especially justifying her taking a county van full of dogs to Michigan, which I saw no way she had the county's permission to do. Nor for her justifying herself having gone before the county commissioners in the Marathon Government Center, asking for more money for SUFA, as its director, without telling them she was leaving Monroe County and someone else would be running SUFA.

I have no clue what the financial details and arguments were between SUFA and the county government. But I did not like how it felt to me when Linda called me described above. My recollection is, by the time we stopped talking on the telephone that day, Linda was not happy she had called me. I was not happy, either, wished I had not been brought into it. But it seems I tend to get brought into lots of things I wish I didn't get brought into. I think you can relate to that.

I think you are doing really good investigating and reporting of the county commissioners' ethics, Rick, and I look forward to reading what else you report on that, and on whatever else causes you to want to chomp and gnaw down to the clean, shiny, white bone in the bright sunlight.

The pen is mightier than the sword, thus the sword defends the pen.

[Town Fool Sloan](#) says:

April 7, 2017 at 7:50 am

Rick, you worked your tail off on this and parallel Neugent universes, and for that, of course, no good deed goes unpunished.

I never got deep into the SUFA controversy, but I did have one perhaps 20 minute telephone conversation with Linda Gottwald, who called me when it was getting thick. I think I recall Linda said someone had told her she should contact me, because I covered local issues on my websites and told it like it was, or something like that.

I told Linda I was not well informed, but I had heard she had transported animals from Big Pine shelter to Michigan in a county vehicle which had been provided to SUFA for its local operations. I said, if that vehicle was used to transport animals to Michigan, where Linda was relocating, then I had a problem with that, as I did not think that was what the vehicle was supposed to be used for, at least, not without the county's permission.

I also told Linda I had a problem with her pitching a raise for SUFA at a county commission meeting I attended in the Marathon Government Center, without telling the commissioners she was moving to Michigan and someone else would be running the local SUFA shelters.

That phone conversation was strained, Linda did not come away from it happy she had talked with me. I reported it at my websites. I don't recall now that I got much deeper involved, but from time to time when SUFA came back up, I retold what you read above. And, that all I had heard about Linda and how she took care of homeless animals, was good. I told Linda that when she called me that day. I don't recall there ever was any question of her devotion to the animals in her care. That's why she transported the dogs, as I recall, to Michigan. They had not been placed with new owners, they were at risk, perhaps to being euthanized, so Linda save them. Noble.

But without the county's okay to use that vehicle to move the dogs to Michigan. Imagine a wreck involving that vehicle, say in Tennessee, and people were killed. The county gets sued for sure, since it's their vehicle.

It was said at Hometown!'s recent call to candidates that George Neugent has let out that he will not run again. I don't know what the cause fully is. Certainly, you wore him out. Perhaps he's tired of politics.

I knew during the 2010 county commission race that George's membership at Sombrero Country Club was being comped. I figured that was a felony of some kind, but I could not prove what I knew, because I did not have anyone inside Sombrero who would rat George out. So, I let that pass.

Where I feel George did the worse job, besides perhaps nearly never meeting a development he did not like, was his love affair with grinder pumps in the Cudjoe Regional Sewer District, and his haughty treatment of people in his voting district who flat were against grinder pumps.

I imagine time will prove to anyone who is not brain dead that grinder pumps should have only been used in Cudjoe Regional where they were the only way to provide sewerage collection and treatment. Maybe by then I will be in the happy place on the other side of this life, hopefully that's where I end up, and it won't matter what I think about grinder pumps.

Meanwhile, it chaps my ass that the new homeless animal shelter in Key West (Stock Island) will cost about \$5 million, which will come from animal lover donations and free city land, while the city wails it cannot afford a new homeless people shelter at \$1.2 million just down the road from the new homeless animal shelter.

[Town Fool Sloan](#) says:

April 8, 2017 at 2:36 pm

I wuz having dinner in Harpoon Harry's last night, in Key Weirido, and into the restaurant came 2 mid-20s, maybe, loud, juiced up men, one of whom went off on a rant against cats. I listened a while, watched other people listen, wondered why come he was still allowed to remain among the living.

Finally, I shouted at him. Hey, fellow, my cat would have you for a snack! You would look like hamburger! His name is "Ambush".

He's gonna come haunt you in your dreams. You gonna meet the Nightmare on Elm Street cat, for sure!

I wasn't joking about any of it, except Ambush mostly lives with one of the men who rents an apartment behind the restaurant. Reach down and pet Ambush, and shortly you will find out how he got his name.

Perhaps what the county commission needs is for ASPCA to clone Ambush and set a 100 of his progeny loose in George Neugent's home (when his nice wife isn't home).