

LOCAL & STATE B

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HI



IN MY OPINION
Fabiola Santiago
fsantiago@MiamiHerald.com

Miami-Dade gets no love from Florida

While Miami-Dade residents were hit recently with new, unprecedented toll hikes on major east-west arteries, Gov. Rick Scott was rewarding his rural conservative supporters with \$9 million to build and improve their toll-free roads.

So while down south we pay our way, the folks up north who contribute less to state revenues get a free ride.

Poor timing? Irony? A laugh to go with the slap to the pockets of Miami-Dade's toll-payers?

The governor's announcement from Tallahassee was all those things — and came by way of press releases packaged with words of praise from a long roster of who's who in the state's powerful Republican legislative leadership.

Twenty rural areas — mostly in Northwest Florida and also in agricultural Belle Glade, Pahokee, and South Bay — will receive transportation improvement funds from the state, part of Scott's "Rural Areas of Opportunity Program," a euphemism for developing what's left of the Old Florida landscape in the name of creating jobs. Never mind that it's the weather and our natural resources — not the asphalt — that lure and keep us here.

And those \$9 million — that's just peanuts.

There are billions more where those came from, promised the governor, who turned down many more billions in federal funds for high-speed rail service in Florida.

"This year we made an historic investment of over \$10 billion for transportation needs and DOT's five-year plan will invest nearly \$41 billion into our state's transportation system," Scott said. "Investing in our roads is a top priority because it will help our state continue to be a global tourist and business destination."

How caring of the governor, just reelected by a mere 64,145 votes, to be so generously selective with those global tourists visiting Gladsen and Jackson counties. And where's our cut?

After all, the governor appoints five of the 12 volunteer board members to the Miami-Dade Expressway Authority, the agency that hit drivers with the new tolls. Six members are appointed by Miami-Dade commissioners; a 13th board member is a state employee, the Department of Transportation's District Six secretary.

As much as these Scott appointees say they're there to serve this community, those members are politically beholden to the governor who appointed them, as we saw during Scott's reelection cam-

• TURN TO SANTIAGO, 2B

HEALTHCARE

Beach might switch health plans

■ The city's current plan administrator, Humana, does not include the region's largest healthcare system in its provider network.

BY DANIEL CHANG
dchang@miamiherald.com

With Miami Beach employees and retirees locked out of the region's largest healthcare system — Baptist Health South Florida — city officials on Friday said they will consider switching to a new health plan administrator, even if it costs more.

Currently served by Humana,

An estimated 1,500 Beach employees, retirees and dependents enrolled in the city's health plan essentially have become collateral damage in a dispute between Humana and Baptist Health.

one of the largest health insurers in South Florida, an estimated 1,500 Miami Beach employees, retirees and their dependents enrolled in the city's health plan essentially have become collateral damage in an on-going disagreement between Humana and Baptist Health.

The two healthcare giants

parted ways in mid-August. And while neither Humana nor Baptist revealed the reason for the breakup, hospital systems and health insurers primarily negotiate one thing: reimbursement rates, or the amount the insurer is willing to pay a hospital or physician for services provided to that insurer's members.

But about 360 employees, retirees and their dependents who are enrolled in the health plan live in an area where Baptist Hospital Miami is the nearest healthcare facility, according to a memo from the city manager to Miami Beach's finance committee.

The memo also notes that claims associated with Baptist hospitals, physicians and other providers represent between 9.9 and 17.7 percent of Miami Beach's health plan spending between 2011 through June 2014.

• TURN TO HEALTH INSURANCE, 2B

MIAMI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT



PHOTOS BY JOE RAEDLE/GETTY IMAGES

TERMINAL OF ANGST: Restaurant workers for management concessionaire HMSHost threaten to go on strike before Christmas at Miami International Airport over a contract dispute.

No holiday cheer at MIA as food workers threaten strike

■ A labor union that represents restaurant workers at Miami International Airport says it may go on strike after Dec. 22.

BY PATRICIA MAZZEI
pmazzei@miamiherald.com

A union that represents about half the restaurant workers at Miami International Airport says it's ready to walk off the job in the days before Christmas, just as MIA enters one of the busiest travel seasons of the year.

The drastic move could leave travelers hungry and thirsty at dozens of MIA's 78 restaurants — though the management concessionaire, HMSHost, says it has a plan of some sort to keep its 35 eateries open.

But members of the Unite Here Local 355 labor union say they could destabilize operations if they strike to protest contract negotiations with HMSHost. The concessionaire, among other things, wants to charge some employees for health insurance.



A WARNING: HMSHost workers threaten a strike at MIA. HMSHost wants to charge some employees for health coverage.

"We're hoping this doesn't happen," said Daniel Seymour, who said he makes about \$12 an hour as a cashier at the airport's California Pizza Kitchen. "If they don't deliver on the 22nd, then we'll strike."

A bargaining session between

the union and the concessionaire is scheduled for Dec. 22. If no agreement is reached, a strike could follow. Though no date has been set, it's likely the walk-off would take place right before

• TURN TO STRIKE, 2B

FLORIDA COURTS

Chief justice targets goof-off judges

■ In a Dec. 1 order, Chief Justice Jorge Labarga directed each chief judge to report to him any 'neglect of duty' offenses made by judges.

BY DAN CHRISTENSEN
BrowardBulldog.org

Florida's chief justice has ordered the state's 20 chief judges to monitor the work of each judge in their circuit looking for goof-offs — a move that's unnerved judges in South Florida and elsewhere.

In a Dec. 1 administrative order, Chief Justice Jorge Labarga directed each chief judge to "separately communicate" with each trial court judge in their circuit "the importance of a professional work ethic and accountability to the judiciary as a full-time commitment."



LABARGA

"Neglect of duty" offenses "shall be reported by the chief judge to the chief justice of this court," Labarga's order says.

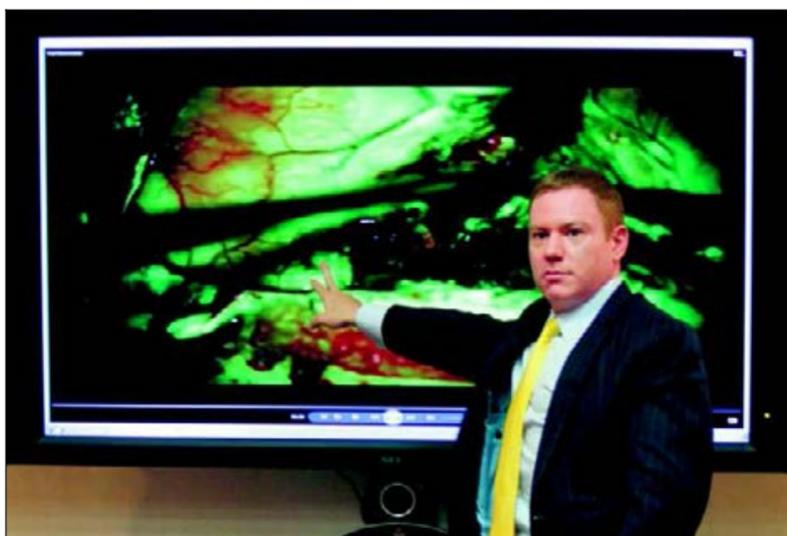
Labarga turned down an interview request to discuss what prompted the order.

"The Chief Justice simply wants to make sure that the chief judges and the judges they supervise understand that there are consequences for violations of the public trust," Supreme Court spokesman Craig Waters said. "We certainly realize that most of our judges honor their duties, but we feel it is a healthy thing to remind everyone of their ethical obligations."

Broward, where judicial misbehavior has made national headlines and County Court Judge Gisele Pollack and Circuit Judge

• TURN TO LABARGA, 2B

MEDICAL SCIENCE



MATIAS J. OCNER/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

BRAIN TUMOR 'GAME CHANGER'

Dr. Ricardo Monti, an assistant professor of neurological surgery and co-director of Surgical Neuro-oncology at UM's Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center, injected into Shawn Monti, 46, sodium fluorescein, a dye that illuminates brain tumor tissue, to surgically remove Monti's tumor. **Story, 3B**

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LOCAL & STATE

HEALTHCARE

Want Obamacare coverage Jan. 1? Act now

BY NICHOLAS NEHAMAS
nnehamas@MiamiHerald.com

Dec. 15 is the last day for consumers to sign up for Affordable Care Act health coverage that starts Jan. 1.

First-time Obamacare customers who miss the deadline will have to spend January without insurance. They'll need to sign up for coverage by Jan. 15 for coverage that starts Feb. 1. The final day to enroll is Feb. 15.

People who signed up for 2014 coverage will be automatically re-enrolled in their existing plan if they don't pick a new one by Monday.

But consumers who allow themselves to be automatically re-enrolled are taking a risk, health-care advocates say, because insurers adjust plan premiums and benefits from year-to-year.

"For some plans in which consumers enrolled last year the prices have gone up and for others

they've gone down," said Judy Clauser, project director for the Epilepsy Foundation of Florida, which received a federal grant of about \$871,000 to help people sign up for coverage.

Clauser said consumers need to shop around to make sure they're getting the plan that best meets their needs. That means looking beyond monthly premium prices, Clauser said, and making sure a plan's deductibles aren't too high and that it includes trusted healthcare providers in its network.

"It's also important to make sure your income information is up-to-date because that's how the government calculates your subsidy," Clauser said.

In Florida, 85 percent of consumers can find coverage for \$100



C.W. GRIFFIN/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

DEADLINE: Willem Muller and Kettely Mesidor assess choices in 2013. Monday's the last day to sign up for Jan. 1. coverage.

a month or less using federal financial assistance, said Pamela Roshell, Southeast regional director for the U.S. Department of

Health and Human Services.

The precise deadline to enroll is 3 a.m. Dec. 16.

Matthew Semensohn, 37, of Del-

ray Beach didn't wait.

Semensohn left his old job in January to work for a startup healthcare consulting firm. "I was on COBRA and I knew I needed to find my own coverage for next year," he said.

Last week, he used the online brokerage eHealth.com to pick a bronze-level plan on the federal exchange.

"One catastrophic event like an accident or serious illness can lead you into bankruptcy," Semensohn said.

About 138 million people nationwide have signed up for Obamacare plans since enrollment opened on Nov. 15.

Follow @MHhealth on Twitter for health news from South Florida and around the nation.

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MIAMI-DADE SCHOOLS

During break, schools push kids to read

BY CHRISTINA VEIGA
AND JEFFREY PIERRE
cveiga@MiamiHerald.com

Students may be counting down the days until the upcoming winter break. But two weeks out of school is a cause for worry for school leaders like Allapattah Middle School Principal Bridget McKinney.

For one thing, Allapattah struggles on state tests that are used to punish low-performing schools. So every minute spent in the classroom — or out of it — counts.

Then there's this: Every school break tends to bring tragedy to area schools, who often lose a student to street violence, McKinney said.

She has a solution: Literacy. The school has teamed up with pro athletes, local school bands and Miami-Dade County teachers to keep students busy through the break. They're encouraging kids to read by sharing real-life examples of why reading matters beyond the classroom.

"You're in competition with a thousand things that the child can do other than pick up a book and read," McKinney said. "Today you have to find a way to engage them in a way they find interesting and where they can have a reason and purpose to read."

This week, McKinney opened Allapattah's doors to more than 400 students from 17 Liberty City-area schools. They came for "12 Nights of Literacy," an event named for each night kids spend away from school during winter vacation. In 12 classroom sessions, students were introduced to her holistic approach.

Want to play pro sports? You better know how to read a business contract, Hall of Fame Dolphins guard Larry Little told student athletes. Like to cook? You'll have to read recipes in the kitchen, culinary teacher David Cole told kids. Plan on joining the school marching band? You should also plan on having to read sheet music.

Just ask the students in the marching bands at Allapattah Middle, Miami Northwestern and Miami Jackson Senior High. Keeping to the theme of the night, members were presented with a challenge: They had an hour to read and learn a new song before coming together



PHOTOS BY JON DURR/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

STRATEGY: Bridget McKinney, Allapattah Middle School principal, instructs volunteers for '12 Nights of Literacy,' 12 sessions for each night kids are away from school during vacation.



OPTING FOR A BOOK: Jeremiah D. Marshall, 10, of Frederick R. Douglass Elementary, attends a '12 Nights of Literacy' event.

for the first time ever. They delivered a flawless performance that had audience members clapping to the beat.

Driving all this are upcoming state tests. Students will have to take a new standardized test this spring. Officials say it will assess deeper learning, so old test-taking techniques aren't likely to help stu-

dents this time around.

Last year, Allapattah was slapped with an F grade from the state because of its performance on standardized tests. This year, the school improved to a D. The school has increased performance among its lowest-scoring kids; still only 23 percent of students passed the required reading tests, accord-

ing to state records.

"I have to take every opportunity, even on their break, to engage them. I can't have that disconnect," McKinney said.

School grades are controversial and don't take into account issues of poverty, which studies show has a profound impact on school performance.

According to the Florida Department of Education, 95 percent of students at Allapattah get free or discounted meals because their family can't afford it. To qualify for the discount, a family of four has to make less than \$24,000, according to federal guidelines.

That's why McKinney is getting everyone involved when it comes to getting kids reading. And that includes parents, said T. Willard Fair, president of the Urban League of Greater Miami.

"Our principles, our teachers and our school board members—they will do their part," Fair said. "I hope you will leave today with a commitment to make sure that everything we do here in the daytime with your children gets repeated in the nighttime."

DOWNTOWN MIAMI

Shut it Down protest falls short

BY ALEXI C. CARDONA
AND LANCE DIXON
acardona@MiamiHerald.com

Friday night's Shut it Down protest shut nothing down.

Miami police expected as many as 200 people to gather Friday evening at the Torch of Friendship in downtown Miami in protest of the Ferguson, Mo., verdict and the deaths of Eric Garner in New York and Israel "Reefa" Hernandez in Miami Beach, but only about two dozen showed up. Police had warned drivers of possible delays, but traffic was no worse than on any other Friday evening.

Protesters stood around the Torch of Friendship holding up signs that read "Hands up, don't shoot," "Black lives matter" and "White silence = white consent." They stood in front of the steel barricades police set up around the torch and chanted "We want justice."

Members of the Miami chapter of Anonymous, a community of activists known for hacking government, religious and corporate websites, said they were there in protest of the death of Delbert "Demz" Rodriguez, who was struck by a police car in Wynwood during Miami Art Week.

Only about two dozen protesters showed up. Police had warned drivers of possible delays, but traffic was no worse than on any other Friday evening.

MEDICINE

High-tech idea: Glow-in-the-dark brain helps locate tumors

BY CRYSTAL CHEW
cchew@MiamiHerald.com

Last year, Shawn Monti and his wife, Kathy, drove two hours from their home in Port St. Lucie to the University of Miami Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center in complete silence.

Shawn, 46, father of five, had just been diagnosed with glioblastoma, a fast-growing brain tumor. Doctors told him he had six months to live.

Today, the Palm Beach County sheriff's deputy is alive and hopeful after undergoing surgery at Sylvester in which doctors injected sodium fluorescein, an FDA-approved drug that illuminates brain tumor tissue, making it glow neon green under a UV light. This helps doctors delineate the good tissue from the cancerous tissue, which can be difficult to discern in the brain's complex folds.

Dr. Ricardo Komotar, the sur-

geon who performed the procedure on Monti, said this type of technology is a "game changer" for brain tumors, especially with tumors located in critical areas like Monti's. His tumor was next to his motor strip, part of the brain's frontal lobe that controls movement.

"The goal is to take out as much of the tumor as possible, while leaving as much healthy tissue behind," said Komotar, an assistant professor of neurological surgery and co-director of Surgical Neuro-oncology at Sylvester. "I think if you don't have this technology, you're not going to be as aggressive as your like."

Sodium fluorescein has been used for more than a decade, primarily in eye treatments. Only recently, however, has it been used by surgeons for treating brain tumors. With recent studies showing success in this field, doctors at



MATIAS J. OCNER/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

DOCTOR AND PATIENT: Palm Beach County Sheriff's Deputy Shawn Monti, 46, left, was referred to Dr. Ricardo Komotar.

Sylvester believe it will become the standard of care for brain tumors.

Removing as much of the tumor as safely as possible is key to maintaining the quality of life.

"It's just another piece of the

pie," said Komotar, who performed the three-hour operation while Monti was under conscious sedation, a combination of sedatives and anesthetics to help the patient relax (sedative) and block pain (anesthetic). This allowed the

doctors to monitor his motor functions and strengths. "You need to have a comprehensive approach to these tumors."

Without the sodium fluorescein, Monti likely would not have undergone brain surgery, other than a biopsy, because Komotar said it would have been too difficult to differentiate between the healthy cells and the tumorous ones. As a result, chemotherapy would not have been that successful in eradicating the tumor.

Today, an MRI scan does not show any evidence of the tumor. But Monti's battle with glioblastoma is not over. He will continue to receive radiation and chemotherapy to help prevent the tumor from recurring.

"I feel great," said Monti, who jokes when he sees video footage of his surgery. "Here's proof that I have a brain. It's been called into question many times."