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Gary Fineout and Matt Dixon's must-read briefing on what's hot, crazy or shady about politics in the Sunshine State

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Gaetz leans on Dershowitz in Twitter fight — Moody goes after proposed gun ban — A new plan to help felons win back voting rights — Garbage at the Old Capitol

By GARY FINEOUT, MATT DIXON and ISABEL DOBRIN | 07/30/2019 07:00 AM EDT

Good Tuesday morning. Rep. Matt Gaetz, a staunch ally of President Donald Trump, has a habit of taking a sharp stick to his critics out in the Twitterverse.**Let's get ready to rumble** — It happened again Monday, and it took quite a turn. At one point, the Northwest Florida Republican was getting hit over [his 2018 decision](#) to invite Charles "Chuck" Johnson, a right-wing activist who has been accused of denying the Holocaust and espousing white nationalism, as his guest to the State of the Union.**Courtesy phone for Mr. Dershowitz** — While trading blows with a Democratic strategist, Gaetz [tweeted out a screenshot](#) of an email that he says he got from famed attorney Alan Dershowitz. The email says that Dershowitz has known Johnson since he was in high school. "He is a right-wing activist or Holocaust denier. He is a provocateur for his insensitive does foolish things to make a point," the email states. "He has apologized for his insensitive misuse of the Holocaust to test censorship and has promised never again to do anything like that. I take him at his word."**'A perspective'** — When asked why he chose to share Dershowitz's email, Gaetz said in a text message: "He had a perspective he shared with me that I shared in response to being attacked in a profane tirade from a jilted former Hillary Clinton operative. As Politico reported in the past, I'm not defending CHARLES Johnson. I didn't even know who he was when a fellow member asked me to give him an unused ticket."

TRAIL MIX

'MISLEADING'? — **"Florida attorney general moves to block proposed ban on semiautomatic rifles,"** by POLITICO's **Gary Fineout**: Florida's Republican attorney general is trying to scuttle a proposed constitutional amendment that would ban the type of rifle used in last year's Parkland school shooting, a move that comes as the state's gun control debate intensifies heading into 2020.**Not a surprise** — Ashley Moody, a former judge who was elected AG last November, has largely avoided contentious issues during her first six months in office. But she opposed gun restrictions while on the campaign trail last year and opposed new age restrictions adopted by the Florida Legislature in the wake of the killings at Parkland's Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School.**Pushback** — Moody's opposition to the amendment drew the scorn of activists who are pushing the proposal. "It's not surprising that the attorney general is now openly opposing measures to protect families, playing politics with Floridians' lives in order to appease the NRA," said Gail Schwartz, chairwoman of Ban Assault Weapons Now and aunt of Alex Schachter, one of the Parkland victims.**RUNNING UP THAT HILL** — **"Felons unable to pay fines, fees can vote in Miami under this first-of-its-kind plan,"** by Miami Herald's **David Smiley and Charles Rabin**: "Former felons blocked from participating in Florida elections due to unpaid fines and fees owed as part of their sentencing may be able to vote soon in Miami under a plan announced Monday by the county's top prosecutor, public defender and clerk of courts. The plan, created in response to a controversial new law overseeing the restoration of voting rights in Florida, establishes a fast track by which judges can set aside some financial penalties that would otherwise prohibit an ex-felon from participating in elections."**THE BIG SKY** — **"Anna Eskamani registers higher-office campaign websites—just in case,"** by Florida Politics' **Scott Powers**: "Ann for Senate? Anna Eskamani for Congress? Anna Eskamani for America? Not yet."**CLOUDBUSTING** — **"Most of congressional delegation opposes energy choice ballot measure,"** by POLITICO Florida's **Bruce Ritchie**: Twenty-four members of Florida's congressional delegation have come out against a proposed constitutional amendment that would direct the Legislature to allow customers of investor-owned electric utilities to choose their energy provider.

TECHNOLOGICAL DISRUPTION - WHO WILL WRITE THE RULES?

Chapter two of POLITICO's "Global Translations" podcast, presented by Citi, is now live. Explore the emergence of 5G technology with host Luiza Savage, understand its role as the foundation for the future of artificial intelligence, and learn who will write the rules in the race to dominate technological advancement. **Subscribe and Listen**Now: [Apple Podcasts](#) - [Spotify](#) - [Stitcher](#)

TRUMLANDIA AND THE SWAMP

LOOK WHO'S BACK — **"President Trump coming to Florida next week for event at The Villages,"** by Tampa Bay Times' **Steve Contorno**: "President Donald Trump is planning a trip to Florida again next week, this time for a Medicare-focused event at The Villages."

... DATELINE TALLAHASSEE ...

INSURERS WIN — **"Justices back away from 'assignment of benefits' battle,"** by News Service of Florida's **Jim Saunders**: "Pointing to a law passed this spring, a divided Florida Supreme Court on Monday scrapped plans to take up a closely watched case about the controversial insurance practice known as assignment of benefits."**PLASTIC PEOPLE** — **"Trekks dump plastic beach litter on steps of Old Capitol urging lawmakers to act,"** by Tallahassee Democrat's **Jeffrey Schweers**: "Hauling 3,000 pounds of plastic garbage found over a 1,200-mile trek along Florida's beaches to dump on the steps of the Florida Historic Capitol makes a visual and pungent statement on a hot summer day."**TO COURT** — **"Worker files suit, says Perry Roofing didn't pay OT,"** by Gainesville Sun's **Andrew Caplan**: "State Sen. Keith Perry is facing another wage-theft lawsuit from a disgruntled employee who says he is owed money for overtime he worked for Perry Roofing. The class action lawsuit, filed in federal court last week, asks for a jury trial and could bring forward more sixth and current employees who have worked with Perry Roofing over the years. The filing is the sixth such lawsuit against the Republican senator's Gainesville-based company over the years, court records show."**'RECKLESS'** — **"Mayhew rejects auditor's report on Jackson's overpayments,"** by POLITICO's **Alexandra Glorioso**: The Agency for Health Care Administration rejected a claim that Florida Medicaid overpaid Jackson Memorial Hospital \$436 million in reimbursements for the treatment of low-income patients.**FLORIDA'S 'BROKEN CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM'** — **"Lawmakers, cops call for support of bill named after slain Largo 2-year-old Jordan Belliveau,"** by Tampa Bay Times' **Kathryn Varn**: "Police, state lawmakers and a brain doctor laid on the pressure Monday for the Legislature to pass a child welfare bill named in honor of 2-year-old Jordan Belliveau."**WHO WANTS THIS JOB?** — **"Search begins after financial regulator firing,"** by Fox 35: "Gov. Ron DeSantis and the Florida Cabinet on Monday formally began the search for candidates to become the state's third top financial regulator in little more than a year."**REMEMBER DONNA ARDUIN?** — **"As Alaska's budget uproar rolls on, a top Dunleavy advisor has seen it before,"** by Anchorage Daily News' **Michelle Theriault Boots**: "State bureaucrats rarely become household names. But say the name 'Donna Arduin' to an Alaskan these days and they're likely to know exactly who you're talking about."**Just noting** — Donna Arduin was budget chief for Gov. Jeb Bush and was one of the advisers who helped craft then-candidate Rick Scott's 7-7-7 plan that contended that tax cuts and slashing budgets would create jobs. Cynthia Kelly, the budget chief who worked for Scott and Gov. Ron DeSantis, recently retired and is relocating to Colorado. So there is an opening....— **WHERE'S RON?** — Gov. Ron DeSantis will deliver remarks at the Florida Sheriffs Association Summer Conference in Tampa.

PENINSULA AND BEYOND

HOW CONVENIENT — **"Palm Beach County criminal investigation seals Jeffrey Epstein records,"** by Sun Sentinel's **Skyler Swisher**: "A new criminal investigation examining wealthy financier Jeffrey Epstein's time at the Palm Beach County jail effectively shut down the public's ability to review records related to the case."**CAN TALLAHASSEE HELP?** — **"Some Palm Beach County political leaders back independent probe of PBSO-Epstein,"** by Palm Beach Post's **Hannah Morse**: "A few local political leaders say they want Gov. Ron DeSantis to order an independent investigation of how the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office's handled Jeffrey Epstein's incarceration. It's the second time in six months a Palm Beach County constitutional office has been the focus of scrutiny, though the reaction this time around has been measured. In January, it was elections chief Susan Bucher, who was suspended by DeSantis."**DON'T SLANDER ME** — **"A Fort Myers councilman tired of insults at meetings wants them banned,"** by News-Press' **Melissa Montoya**: "Who decides what's appropriate speech at a city council meeting? Two Fort Myers City Council members have an idea about that. Led by Councilman Fred Burson's motion, the council voted 6-1 at a recent meeting to have City Attorney Grant Alley draft an ordinance prohibiting "abusive, derogatory, hurtful, insulting, aggressive, hateful, racist, rude, vulgar, threatening, menacing, hostile, nasty, belittling, offensive, foul and cursing" language at city council meetings."**'A NEW ERA?'** — **"What's next for Puerto Rico? A reckoning with its colonial status,"** by WaPo's **Julio Ricardo Varela**: "The resignation of embattled Puerto Rico governor Ricardo Rosselló last week was never a question of if, but when. Late last Wednesday, after dragging out the inevitable for hours — at one point even having the assembled media wait endlessly for a statement that never came — a recorded social media message confirmed the news, and thousands of Puerto Ricans celebrated in the streets of San Juan."**SOMETHING TO PONDER** — **"Do charter schools pose a threat to local Treasure Coast school districts?"** by TCPalm's **Sommer Brugal**: "How does a state become a leader in school choice? It needs a state legislature that supports programs and scholarships that encourage school choice and pave the way for new charter schools to open, student enrollment at charter schools to outpace growth at district schools, and enrollment numbers at public schools to decline."**HORRIFIC** — **"ECSO deputy accused of urinating in girl's mouth, FDLE says there may be more victims,"** by News Journal's **Colin Warren-Hicks**: "An Escambia County Sheriff's Office deputy who was arrested last week is accused of urinating into the mouth of a young girl multiple times over the span of nearly two years. Jerome Zaid, 33, was arrested Friday and charged with one count of battery of a child and one count of sexual battery of a child under 12 years of age."**WATER WOES** — **"Businesses sue FPL and contractor for losses in water crisis,"** by Sun Sentinel's **Marcia Heroux Pounds**: "Five businesses that lost thousands of dollars during Fort Lauderdale's water shutoff are suing Florida Power & Light Co. and a contractor that drilled into a critical water main."**CHANGES?** — **"Army Corps mulls lower Lake O level to curb discharges, harmful algal blooms,"** by News-Press' **Tyler Treadway**: "The Army Corps of Engineers plans to change how it operates Lake Okeechobee to reduce the public health risk from toxic blue-green algae blooms in the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee rivers. The "algae crisis has caused substantial and widespread impacts to Florida communities over the last several years," according to a July 10 intra-agency email announcing the proposed change by Melissa Nasuti, head of the Corps' Florida planning and policy division."**CRAWL THE SEQUEL** — **"Trapper captures alligator chasing swimmers near Pasco County,"** by Tampa Bay Times' **Frank Pastor**: "Sharks, stingrays, even jellyfish. But among the dangers you'd expect to find in the Gulf of Mexico, alligators would be far down the list. If on it at all. But that wasn't the case Saturday in the waters just off the coast of Pasco County."**MOONLIGHT** — **"FSU Film School grad's movie named Best Movie of the Decade,"** by Tallahassee Democrat's **Randi Atwood**: "Moonlight, the Academy Award winner for Best Picture in 2017, which was written and directed by FSU Film School alum Barry Jenkins, has been named Best Movie of the Decade by the website IndieWire."**IT GETS WORSE** — **"Health officials, experts warn of deadly mosquito-borne virus found in Florida chickens,"** by TCPalm's **Max Chesnes**: "Several Florida chickens recently tested positive for a mosquito-borne virus known to sometimes cause fatal brain infection and swelling."— **"Toddler dies after falling nine floors from condo balcony,"** by Gatehouse Media Florida— **"Chaotic, bloody fight breaks out after one boat hits another in Florida Keys: report,"** by Orlando Sentinel's **Tiffini Theisen**— **"Tampa Bay condo owners say their association is a 'shill' for a billionaire real estate company,"** by Tampa Bay Times' **Susan Taylor Martin**— **"Xerox scam nets Haynes Brothers furniture family members prison time,"** by News-Journal's **Frank Fernandez**— **"Court rejects Kamiyah Mobley kidnapper's appeal,"** by Times-Union's **Eileen Kelley****BIRTHDAYS: Bob Nave**, vice president of research at Florida TaxWatch ... **Nancy Dahlberg**, business writer and editor*Want to make an impact? 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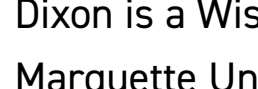
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Florida

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Matt Dixon came to POLITICO Florida in March 2014 after five years covering the Sunshine State's government and political scene.

He served as Florida Times-Union's bureau chief for four years. During his tenure, he was first to break the news of former Lt. Gov. Jennifer Carroll's resignation, reported the Florida Department of Transportation covering-up reports or bid rigging and collusion, and uncovered a quiet last-minute budget item that saved the tobacco industry hundreds-of-millions of dollars. He also helped build Scripps Newspaper's first ever Florida bureau.

Over his career, Dixon has been recognized for both his political and investigative work, most recently winning a 2015 Green Eyeshade Award for investigative reporting. He has also been awarded the Gene Miller Award of Investigative Reporting, and the Florida Press Club's top government reporting award.

Dixon is a Wisconsin native and graduate of Marquette University. He has lived in Florida since 2008, where he came immediately after graduation to work for the Villages Daily Sun.

He also covered city and state government for the Panama City News Herald before joining the Times-Union.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Gary Fineout came to POLITICO Florida in February 2019 after spending more than two decades covering Florida politics and government.

He spent the previous seven and a half years working in the Tallahassee bureau of The Associated Press. Prior to that, he has worked for The Miami Herald, The New York Times Regional Newspaper Group, Daytona Beach News-Journal and The Tallahassee Democrat.

Fineout grew up in Florida and is a graduate of Florida State University.

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Isabel is a Web Producer.