

From city residents, taxpayers and city-county voters  
Time to seek the assistance of the ACLU and the FL FAF

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Tampa Bay Times February 8, 2026 Letter to the Editor

Rays tell Hillsborough they'll cover at least 50% of Tampa stadium cost | Feb. 3

**Not again** Regarding the Tampa Bay Rays' proposed stadium deal in Tampa, I have a modest suggestion: If you can afford to own a Major League Baseball team, **you can afford to build a place for it to play.** The new ownership group wants applause for offering to cover "at least" half the cost of a new stadium while helpfully suggesting new taxes for the rest. How generous. Apparently, the definition of "investment" has changed to mean "risk-free, publicly subsidized profit center." I don't care how cleverly the proposal is packaged or how many funding mechanisms are floated. Heck, I'm still paying for Raymond James Stadium through the half-cent Community Investment Tax. Now I'm supposed to sign up for **another long-term subsidy so millionaire and billionaire owners can increase franchise value?** Hard pass. Stadium deals are always sold as once-in-a-generation opportunities, yet somehow the public is left holding the bill, while the team keeps the revenue, the leverage, and the option to leave anyway. Given the political makeup of our local elected officials, the outcome may be predictable. That doesn't make it any less absurd. This is simple: If the Rays are a sound investment, their owners should invest in them. **Let the fat cats build their own stadium. David Burg, Tampa**

Reading the following you may learn why Albert Einstein said "Earth is the Insane Asylum of the Universe"

Topic for discussion: Professional Sports (and YOUR TAXES)

Def

Professional sports refer to organized athletic competitions where participants are paid for their performances. This contrasts with amateur sports, where athletes typically do not receive compensation for their participation. The rise of professional sports is closely

New York Times https://www.nytimes.com › opinion › sports-gambling-major-leagues.html

Opinion | Gambling Is Killing Sports - The New York Times

Sports Gambling: The Problem and Potential Solutions – Cornell Journal of Law and Public Policy

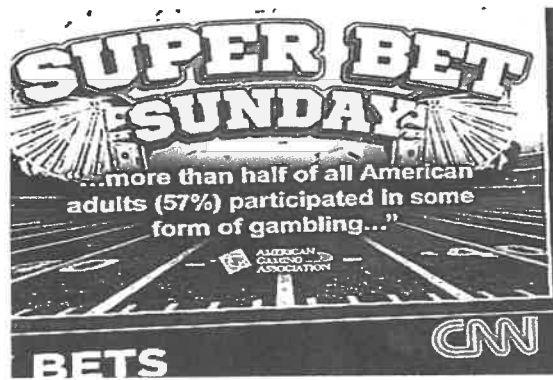
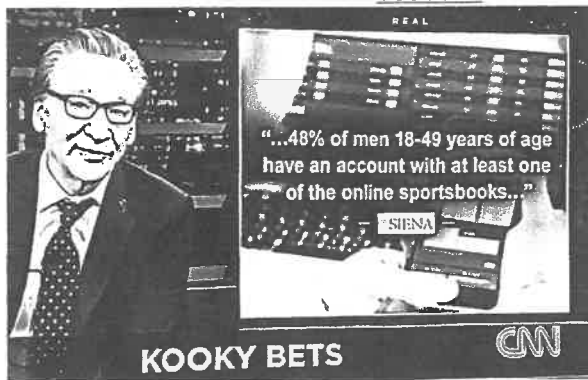
A national plague, an addiction out of control ruining people lives. Moreover, the millions/billions being approved by politicians to subsidize Pro Sports teams with billionaire owner is a natural disgrace.

Anyone, to include our politicians if having any common sense/wisdom/compassion would know those tax dollars should rather be used for the many NEEDS, and to end/lessen all the poverty, of everyday families and seniors, the working class that are struggling

Less than a decade ago, sports gambling was effectively outlawed throughout much of the United States. Now, it is legal in the vast majority of states, and has grown into an all-consuming part of the culture and identity of American athletics. Television programs on broadcast networks like ESPN highlight betting lines, with commentators proposing attractive wagers

Video New Rule: Super Bet Sunday | Real Time with Bill Maher (HBO)

YouTube Real Time with Bill Maher



And this – have a look

Stadiums: Last Week Tonight with John Oliver (HBO) - YouTube

John Oliver Explains Why Funding Of Sports Stadiums Makes No Sense at All - TPM – Talking Points Memo

Jul 13, 2015 · Cities spend massive amounts of public money on privately-owned stadiums. Cities issue tax-exempt municipal bonds that .....

**And this for discussion:**

Genesis 6:11-14, Genesis 6:17-18 NIV - Now the earth was corrupt in God's - Bible Gateway

The Bible story of Sodom and Gomorrah is one of the most compelling and cautionary stories in the Book of Genesis. These ancient cities, known for their rampant wickedness, were destroyed by divine judgment, leaving a lasting impact on religious and cultural discussions about sin and morality.

- In 1992, the US Congress passed the Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act (PASPA). It mandated states not to legalize sports betting apart from parimutuel horse racing, dog racing and jai alai.
  - Then Gambling became legal in Las Vegas in 1931 when Nevada legalized casino gambling.
  - Thereafter it spread all over the USA. The **get rich quick disease** caused countless divorces, suicides and many other \* social ills. \* def
- A social ill refers to a **societal problem or dysfunction** that negatively impacts a large number of individuals and has adverse consequences for society as a whole. Examples of social ills include **poverty, gender inequity, and unemployment**.

Many people would say, if you like 'real' sports

- ✓ Go to a k-12 school game and watch the kids play for THE SPORT

Others would say, stop paying your hard-earned money using your credit cards going to those profession sport games where the come and go contacted millionaire paid players are PLAYING FOR THE MONEY - NOT FOR YOU OR YOU HOMETOWN. Stop paying the outrageous prices for those tickets and

The **prices of hot dogs and beer at sports games** can vary significantly by venue and league. Here are some key points: **NFL Stadiums: The average cost for a beer and hot dog is around \$15.02 across all NFL stadiums. The Cost of a Beer and Hot Dog at NFL Stadiums Is Skyrocketing — With Prices Going as High as \$19**

- STOP HELPING TO MAKE THE TEAM Billionaire Owners EVEN RICHER.
- Stio ties of the spin of using millions/billions of the people taxes for stadium as many **independent studies** have said the alleged economic impact to the community is **minimal, at best. And this: Matthew 5-3 / What Does the Bible Say About Jesus And The Poor?**

The bottom line is:

**Tell your local to state Politicians TO STOP embracing and approving *your* various public taxes to subsidize those Pro sports teams.....( AND STOP taking wanting the Pro Sports campaign money) if not VOTE THEM OUT OF OFFICE, or some have said: RECALL THEM.**

- Also DEMAND YOU LOCAL TO STATE POCIANS TO OFFER A VOTE to taxpayers to allow them to decide if they, we, the people, want or do not want our taxes to be approved to those Pro sports teams wanting a new stadium to renovate. It's been out of control for a **long long time** and the time has come to say **Enough is Enough.....WE HAVE OTHER NEEDS for everyday families, seniors and hard working people, e.g. to fund and have affordable health care, to lower our cost of living, to end/address all the poverty that prevails, and so on**

**Footnote: The Curse of poverty has no justification in our age...The time has come for us to civilize ourselves by the total, direct and immediate abolition of poverty.**

If our economic system is to survive, there has to be a better distribution of wealth ... we can't have a system where some people live in superfluous, inordinate wealth, while others live in abject deadening poverty.

here is nothing new about poverty. What is new, however, is that we have the resources to get rid of it. **MLK**

**The question is, what don't some people or inept politicians understand what MLK said?**

**Pinellas County *nonpartisan* Taxpayers Alliance 'News & Views' Newsletter**  
(Now affiliated with The Independent Journalism Free Press)

**This informative issue for city-county taxpayers of February 7, 2026**  
Today's News & Views is provided to have **informed citizens**, taxpayers and voters

**This issue focused on the City of Clearwater FL** 1 of 3

**Note: This overview has been sent to the Florida ACLU to review and the apparent city ignoring/suppressing the peoples *Rights* under the U.S. 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment and Florida Constitution.**

In the United States, the right to free speech is a fundamental aspect of the First Amendment, which protects individuals from government interference in their ability to express opinions and ideas. This

**\*What provoked us to look back with our recollections, observations living and reporting on the city of Clearwater FL. Note some of those of the TBTA editorial board who have contributed to this overview have first arrived in the C of C some 50 years ago.**

A. \* This TBT's story appearing in today's paper

**\*BY COLBI EDMONDS TIMES STAFF WRITER**

Clearwater officials have temporarily lifted restrictions on public comment, opening the floor for speakers to share their thoughts on issues of their choosing. The Clearwater City Council unanimously voted Thursday to reinstate public comment on agenda items at Clearwater City Council meetings. The council on Thursday temporarily reversed that decision on items not on their agenda for the next three months. The comment period is limited to either 30 minutes or 10 speakers, each allotted three minutes. Council members did not have any debate Thursday evening, but in recent meetings have discussed the issue at length. The city has struggled to maintain decorum the past few years, as people increasingly use antagonizing language and behavior during public comment. "I do appreciate the concern for the safety of the members of the council, as well as the public, but I think it's an opportunity that the residents of Clearwater need," said **Vice President of the Clearwater Neighborhoods Coalition Patrick Raftery**, who regularly attends council meetings but was not speaking on behalf of the organization. In 2023, **former Mayor Brian Aungst Sr. proposed that the city adopt decorum rules for City Council meetings. He said repeated appearances from a Clearwater resident and a YouTube activist were impeding city business.**

The City Council approved changes to the rules of conduct during meetings and prohibited a number of behaviors, including obscene gestures, name-calling, interrupting speakers and refusing to leave the lectern. But some members of the public ignored the rules, which they said violated their First Amendment right to free speech. Michael Taylor, a Port St. Lucie resident, attended meetings throughout 2024, where he extended his middle finger, yelled curse words and refused to leave — all for his YouTube channel. And during a March 2024 City Council meeting, Clearwater police arrested resident Daniel Holuba for refusing to leave after he was told he violated city rules. In July 2024, the City Council voted to suspend public comment on nonagenda items after disruptions like these, which **Mayor Bruce Rector** said created "a circus" at meetings. Residents and staff had also said they felt unsafe, and the online videos incited threats of violence against city officials. Taylor was charged with stalking City Manager Jennifer Poirrier and of violating public records laws by posting her personal address online. Poirrier declined to comment, citing ongoing litigation. **"My grievance is that this board has restricted the First Amendment rights of nearly everybody," Holuba said Thursday. "The constitution needs to be restored now."** The city held two town hall meetings last year, as options for people to address the council members, but they were unsuccessful. When the city initially suspended public comment, Council member Ryan Cotton, saying he was concerned about limiting free speech, was the singular "no" vote. He broached the topic late last year. "Clearwater is strongest when its citizens are engaged," Cotton wrote in an email Friday. "My role, and the role of this council, is to keep the doors open, the microphones on, and the conversation ongoing." The resolution City Council approved Thursday is in place until May 8. The council can then decide whether to keep or amend it. **Contact Colbi Edmonds at cedmonds@tampabay.com**

**Preface.** It would take volumes to express our history that we experienced and reported on for the last 50 years. As such what is presented is a very short summary of our recollections:


- Some of us, then Northerners remember coming to Clearwater on a vacation in the 70's Our first stop was Clearwater Beach. Not as *'fancy as it is now'*, yet we loved it with the soft white sand!
- Driving along the Gulf Road there we could see the Gulf in many places. Nowadays, sad, many big Hugh hotels line the area.
- Prices ( e.g. hotel/motel rates, restaurant menu items/drinks , parking fees, etc. , adjusted , we reasonable for everyday citizens and or tourist. We cant remember is we were forced to pay an extra bed tax at that time. Also we did not have to pay a county \$5.00 per day parking charge to go to the county parks, one is on Sand Key.
- We can remember the very old Bridge from CB to Sand Key and had to drive on it very slow! Think it was 25-cents fee { but not sure)
- Cost of living for everyday residents/families, home prices, rents, etc was low, nowadays very high.

- We remember driving through the Clearwater minority area aka as the Greenwood Black Area. We wondered why the city and politicians taking the people taxes had neglected this area .

As of 2023, the **poverty rate in Clearwater, Florida** is **13.6%**, which is higher than the state average of 12.3%.

Additionally, **11.1%** of high school graduates and **10.0%** of non-high school graduates live in poverty.

 City-Data.com

The **poverty rate in Clearwater, Florida, is approximately 15.38%** as of 2026. This rate reflects the income level below which a household is considered to be living in poverty. 

- Over the years we interviewed many residents there and heard year after year comments like:
- ✓ We are invisible! We pay taxes also **and are ignored**. They don't want a black or minority person on the city council; it's always white VIP connected men, or some white women on the city council.
- ✓ For decades their collective priority is to use city-county taxes for their love of the MLB Phillies and fund the stadium for them, hosting them for a few spring training games. We have NOT benefited in anyway with this or other Pro sports MLB teams here on in Pinellas County. They lie about an ROI aka "*economic benefit*" for the community. It is the BIG LIE, and it continues. Worse some city politicians want even more county bed tax money to accommodate the Phillies and of course city taxes make up the additional costs
- ✓ The other BID LIE is the city-county BCC members rather focus on **Record Tourism** which HAS NOT HAD a ROI in the black community **or in fact the city-county**. The poverty (city-county) overall taxes/fees, cost of living, rents, etc etc has not been lowered because of their constant shameful BIG LIE(S).
- ✓ We remember the CB Roundabout and the opposition of it. **Confusing then as it is today** with signage posted everywhere drivers [ and esp. first-time tourist) don't have time to observe with all the confusion and traffic.
- ✓ Heard: best TBT's staff writer covering Clearwater: **Tracey McManus Tampa Bay Times**
- ✓ Best TV station exposing the worse about Clearwater: WFLA their series **YOU PAID FOR IT. You Paid For It | WFLA** / e.g. **Clearwater fire department payroll mistakes cost taxpayers a bundle / You Paid For it: Globetrotting by Pinellas County Commissioners**
- ✓ This insanity: Once proposed:  
Clearwater wants overhead cable system of gondolas from the mainland to Clearwater Beach
- ✓ Clearwater to put up [\$72K] fences at the downtown main library to keep out the homeless. Now that a humanitarian way (to use the people taxes) to address those that are homeless, many veterans having PDS.
- ✓ **Clearwater Sugar Sand Festival Pier 60 Sugar Sand Festival** The cost for **non-wealthy city families/seniors** is shameful. \$14 each and for kids older then 3, The math: a city family of four, \$14 per X 4 is \$56.00 ( taxes and parking costs/ high food prices, etc ?) **OMG and local taxpayers paying the same as out-of-town tourist? R U kidding.**
- ✓ This and more history in the Public Record or city council tapes of meetings- have a look

Back to today's story. **BY COLBI EDMONDS TIMES STAFF WRITER**

Clearwater officials have temporarily lifted restrictions on public comment

Let's start with his honor Brian Aungst.

- For over 30 years, and living in Clearwater, coving the C of C meetings, what has been observed more often then not?
- So many time the elected mayors have been rude to nice speaking city residents. In recollection, August ( all on tape) after a nice speaking citizen was concerned with some unwise spending, Brian , theater ,in a hostile manner scolded the man saying in effect.....*people like you come here and talk complaints, let we have the facts, you don't!*
- **Another time he again lost it on TV about a clearwater cabins group .....and later did apologize.**
- **Mayor Hibbard, again like others knowing more then fitness**
- **George Cretekos. Wow, what a politician! His claim to fame is lying about the HUGE economy impact of having the Phillies being hosted in Clearwater for a few spring training games and bringing in tens and tens millions of ROI benefiting all the citywide residents. That was the BIG LIE ever said, and it continues, said in Clearwater and WE HAVE THE FACTS , independent studies etc. TO PROVE/dispute their big lie.**

- **What has all the past mayor have in common, and the current one? They all love FS 125.0104 which the 6% extra bed tax aka TD Tax, taken from tourists, many being their relatives coming to visit them staying in any one of the following: Tourist Development Taxes - Pinellas County Tax Collector Note local residents pay that tax also if on a **Staycation**.**
- **Tons of city taxes over the years for downtown and the ROI?**
- **What does their love for FS do? Chapter 125 Section 0104 - 2019 Florida Statutes - The Florida Senate**
- ✓ **Eg it helps to promote the profits of those big and smaller businesses; big hotels engaged in tourism via using those public taxes for. That right using the peoples taxes to benefit the private sector for profits businesses!**

3 of 3

1. "Promotion" means marketing or advertising designed to increase tourist-related business activities. And using those taxes for this
3. "Retained spring training franchise" means a spring training franchise
- (5) AUTHORIZED USES OF REVENUE.—
  - (a) All tax revenues received pursuant to this section by a county imposing the tourist development tax shall be used by that county for the following purposes only:
    1. To acquire, construct, extend, enlarge, remodel, repair, improve, maintain, operate, or promote one or more:
      - a. **Publicly owned and operated convention centers, sports stadiums, sports arenas,**
    4. To fund convention bureaus, tourist bureaus, tourist information centers, and news bureaus as county agencies or by contract with the chambers of commerce or similar associations in the county, which may include any indirect administrative costs for services performed by the county on behalf of the promotion agency;

In summary:

Does anyone one with any common sense have to wonder why informed citizens/taxpayers are fed up and upset when speaking to those ego-driven self-serving politicians?

Of course the at the end of the day, our US Constitution, that many died to protect and preserve, guarantees the Right of free speech, even at the Clearwater city hall.

Of said it works every way"

Many politicians want citizens, the public, to come to the podium, or emails etc, to express their love for them. To say what a great job they are doing, they love, welcome and encourage the flattery said to them. That is no secret and ongoing.

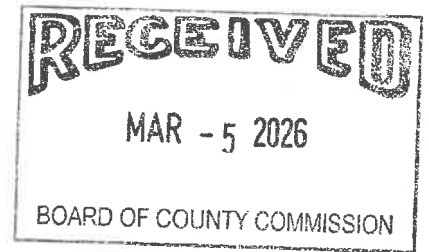
Free speech also gives the right to citizens to complain, to use perhaps some words the politicians don't like....and then say ok, we will now revise the speaking rules, not for them but for us. The history in Clearwater is clear. Many politicians have willfully provoked citizens to become upset. It's all on the Public Record. Now again they want to silence peaceful yet sometimes emotional laypersons free speech.

Our **Founding Fathers** has great heated debates and often bitter words said in their deliberations. This is what democracy looks like, then and now. And we, the people, and with the ACLU, and our attorneys will once again have to remind the city of Clearwater pompous ego-driven politicians of our constitution Rights/freedoms. ...and while many informed citizens will later want to vote them out of office? Many Politicians forget, we the people pay them to serve us as **Public Servants** and as competent fiduciaries. We don't have nor want *Kings nor having a Autocracy - Wikipedia* to rule us.

Or said in Clearwater with the city government past and present (come and go) inept ego-driven politicians while the waste our taxes on **non-essentials: *The more things change, the more they are the same.*** ...or just gets worse.

**CC:** Press and TV stations, cba, Clearwater Neighborhoods Coalition, Sand Key Civic Assoc, Pinellas county BCC members, FL DOGE, Clearwater HOA's, Chambers of commerce in Clearwater, FL1346 S Ft Harrison Ave, Clearwater, FL 33756, CPCC Largo, Downtown Clearwater Merchants Assoc 1006 DREW STREET, CLEARWATER, FL, 33755/ area colleges, NAACP, etc

A 3rd Attempt



Good evening Commissioners [Name], [Name], and [Name]  
Thank you for giving me a few minutes to speak.

Life has a way of teaching us lessons we never signed up for. Some lessons come gently. Others arrive like a storm.  
What I went through here was one of those storms.  
The kind that breaks you open before it shows you anything useful.  
And yet, I stand here today to say something simple:

Thank you.

Not because the experience was easy.  
Not because it was fair.  
But because inside that unethical hardship was a lesson I couldn't have learned any other way.

When everything fell apart, I found myself standing at a crossroads with no healthcare and no support from you.  
And in that place of confusion, pain and visual scars as daily reminders of our time together,  
I did something simple but life-changing:  
I returned to the Church and renewed my Faith.

Not out of fear.  
Not out of obligation.  
But because I needed to remember who I was before the storm – and who God still knew me to be.  
That return didn't erase the hurt. It didn't magically fix everything. But it gave me enough strength to start healing.  
Enough clarity to see myself honestly again. Enough courage to stand back up and tell you my story with my voice this time.

And that's why I'm here today.  
Not to revisit the past.  
Not to reopen old wounds.  
But to speak from a place of peace, and to honor the truth of what I've walked through.

So thank you – not for the pain, but for the perspective.  
Thank you for the lesson hidden inside the struggle.  
It helped shape me into someone who can stand here today with honesty, dignity, and faith.  
And I'm grateful for that."

And speaking honestly... I want to share something small, but meaningful.  
Years ago, my manager once asked me,  
'Why do you care about your name so much?  
I told him,  
"Because my name is attached to dozens of old tickets" – and every one of those

tickets represents a person waiting for help.  
Those silent pleas mattered to me. They still do.

In my Zootopia story I left for each of you to read, I talked about needing approval to fix simple problems – approval for a \$30 part, or approval to recycle a perfectly good piece of returned gear.  
Every time, I just wanted to help the person in front of me.  
That's who I was then, and that's still who I am now.

So when I say thank you, I'm not thanking the storm.  
I'm thanking the perspective it forced me to find.  
I'm thanking the clarity that came after the breaking.  
And I'm thanking the gospel for giving me enough strength to stand here with dignity and peace.  
And commissioners... don't worry – I'm not asking for approval for any \$30 parts tonight.  
Just your time, and I'm grateful you gave it."