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TRUMP'S REVIVED TRAVEL BAN BACK IN EFFECT TODAY

Officials from the departments of State, Justice and Homeland Security were finalizing the rules late Wednesday for visitors from the six mostly Muslim nations subject to the restrictions. The Homeland Security Department has said only that it will implement the travel ban "professionally, with clear and sufficient public notice." **Nation, 2A**

State presents TBX alternatives

Department of Transportation officials are looking into at least a half-dozen alternatives to the controversial plan. Tampa Bay Next, a \$6 billion expansion of local interstates, includes adding toll lanes to Interstates 275, 75 and 4. **Local, 1B**

Detectives: Woman had boy's child

Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office officials say that Marissa Mowry, 25, was jailed Tuesday after being accused of having sex with an 11-year-old, getting pregnant and raising the baby for three years. **Local, 1B**

Fewer minions makes it better

Despicable Me 3 gives Steve Carell dual roles, and that makes it more amusing than expected. **Steve Persall review, 2B**

Looking forward to his opportunity

Center Brett Howden, 19, who was a first round pick in 2016, hopes to be the next long shot to crack the Lightning lineup. **Sports, 1C**

Court peppers prosecutor

Aramis Ayala defends her anti-death penalty stance before the state Supreme Court.

BY STEVE BOUSQUET
Times/Herald Tallahassee Bureau

TALLAHASSEE — Orlando prosecutor Aramis Ayala on Wednesday defended her "absolute discretion" to never seek the death penalty in murder cases, as skeptical justices of the Florida Supreme Court bombarded her lawyer with sharp questions.

Ayala claims that Gov. Rick Scott violated state law when he transferred two dozen murder cases to another prosecutor, and

she wants the court to return the cases to her office.

"No such authority exists," Ayala's attorney, Roy Austin, flatly told justices in a packed courtroom, calling the shifted cases "stolen."

Ayala sued Scott, but it was Ayala who was on the defensive Wednesday.

If a prosecutor can adopt a "blanket policy" of never seeking a death sentence, Chief Justice Jorge Labarga asked, "why do we need a Legislature?"

Justice Charles Canady, a former Republican member of Congress and state legislator, took issue with Ayala's "absolutist" position, and noted that a governor can suspend a state attorney for misfeasance.

"Why couldn't this be viewed as an instance of misfeasance?" Canady asked.

Having served as legal adviser to former Gov. Jeb Bush, Canady has wide knowledge of the reassignment of cases among state attorneys.



"My duty is to seek justice, which is fairness, objectivity and decency. There is no evidence that death sentences actually protect the public."

Aramis Ayala, Orlando prosecutor

The state's high court devotes the bulk of its time to reviewing appeals of death sentences. The death penalty has been in disarray for two years after the U.S.

Supreme Court struck down the limited role of juries as unconstitutional.

Ayala, a Democrat, was elected **See AYALA, 3A**



CHERIE DIEZ | Times

Bear Creek Elementary principal Willette Houston and rising fifth-grader Jonaven Viera celebrate the St. Petersburg school's first A grade Wednesday during the school's YMCA after-school program. At left is rising fourth-grader Jonathan Cafaro.

UNDER PRESSURE, REPORT CARDS UP

Florida school districts continue an upward trend in standardized test results.

BY JEFFREY S. SOLOCHEK
AND CARA FITZPATRICK
Times Staff Writers

Following a trend, Florida's school grades showed strong gains in the third year after the state changed its grading formula and the standardized tests that students take every year.

Statewide, the number of schools earning A's and B's jumped 20 percent, to 1,834, while those receiving F's dropped 61 percent, to 43. Among schools that earned an F a year ago, 79 percent improved by at least one letter grade, according to results announced Wednesday.

The news came against a backdrop of a recently closed legislative session that

saw lawmakers limit turnaround options for the state's lowest-performing schools and made it easier to shut them down if they continue to score poorly. The Florida Department of Education still is sorting out the details of the new law.

Some of the schools most affected by the law made huge jumps this year.

In Pinellas County, for instance, Melrose Elementary — Florida's lowest-performing elementary school three years ago — brought itself up to a C from an F. Pasco County's two F-rated schools, Hudson and Calusa elementary schools, likewise improved to C.

Miami-Dade County, which had 16 F **See GRADES, 4A**

Takeaways from local districts

- Hernando**
 - Only one school drops a letter grade.
- Hillsborough**
 - Number of A schools rises from 41 to 51.
 - District has three F schools, 15 fewer than in 2015.
- Pasco**
 - All but four schools improve or maintain 2016 grades.
 - Giant strides at seven struggling elementary schools, each up two grades.
- Pinellas**
 - Melrose Elementary, Florida's lowest-performing elementary three years ago, climbs from an F to a C in one year.
 - Campbell Park and High Point elementary schools go up two grades.
 - Bear Creek Elementary rises two grades to get its first-ever A.
- Across the state**
 - Miami-Dade goes from 16 F schools in 2015 to none this year.

Hands across the bay: not yet

Hillsborough and Pinellas officials can't even agree to meet for issues such as transit.

BY MARK PUENTE
AND STEVE CONTORNO
Times Staff Writers

Tampa Bay political leaders often tout taking a regional approach to solve the area's most pressing issues. But the challenge has been getting Hillsborough County and Pinellas County leaders together on the same page.

Or in this case, in the same room.

Pinellas County Commission Chairwoman Janet Long has been jockeying behind the scenes to schedule a joint meeting of both county commissions to discuss transportation and infrastructure problems — issues that cross county lines.

But Hillsborough County Administrator Mike Merrill sent a letter to Long this month saying it's too soon for elected leaders of both counties to meet. He said they have a lot of work to do in terms of "data, community engagement, options, costing and recommendations" before they can schedule a meeting.

"It's very disappointing," Long said. "I don't know how you solve problems if you don't talk to each other."

Merrill said he wants agendas and possible solutions laid out in advance of any discussions. Anything less amounts to a "social event." He noted that commissioners already held an informal meet-and-greet at the Westin Tampa Bay on the Courtney Campbell Causeway in June 2016. He said Long's **See REGION, 3A**

TODAY'S WEATHER

Late day storms

8 a.m. 77° Noon 85° 4 p.m. 88° 8 p.m. 83°

50% chance of rain
More, back page of Sports

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Get News at Noon

The Tampa Bay Times will soon launch a daily newsletter called News at Noon. It'll be the perfect way to catch up with the latest breaking news and our top stories right in your inbox each weekday. To sign up, go to bit.ly/newsatnoon.

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Doc Ford's may anchor new pier

Writer Randy Wayne White flies in for the ground breaking with his restaurant partners.

BY LAURA REILEY
Times Food Critic

ST. PETERSBURG — The story begins with Yucatan shrimp.

St. Petersburg Mayor Rick Kriseman took a trip down to Sanibel Island to visit Doc Ford's Rum Bar & Grille, a sprawling good-times restaurant named for the central character in a number of Randy Wayne White's novels. Butter, garlic, cilantro and mild Colombian chilies — Kriseman

was grooving on the shrimp. And what's more, he liked the folks behind Doc Ford's.

Wednesday morning at the groundbreaking ceremony for the \$66 million St. Petersburg pier project, there they were: Randy Wayne White and restaurant partners Mark Marinello, Marty Harrity and Mark Futch (who had flown them all up in his seaplane). Nothing is official, but the large anchor restaurant

Pier ground breaking

"Today is not a dream," Mayor Rick Kriseman says at the ceremony for the pier project. **Local, 1B**

in the new pier project is likely to be Doc Ford's, White's fourth restaurant location. If it is approved, it will likely be the largest restaurant in St. Petersburg, with upward of 450 seats in an indoor-outdoor setting.

In an already dense restaurant environment, the prospect of 450 more seats, especially backed by a nationally known author, may

make downtown restaurateurs a little skittish. At what point is St. Petersburg saturated with places to eat and drink?

"The study that we did indicated that we could have even more restaurants out there than the ones we're talking about," Kriseman said. "This restaurant will be different from anything that we have in the downtown core area."

For the novelist-turned-restaurateur, this project is about his affection for St. Petersburg.

"Over the past two years, we've met and enjoyed time with city **See PIER, 5A**



SCOTT KEELER | Times

St. Petersburg Deputy Mayor Kanika Tomalin, from left, pilot Mark Futch, Mayor Rick Kriseman and author Randy Wayne White disembark from a seaplane Wednesday in St. Petersburg.