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The Florida Times-Union

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AG probes communications on JEA contract

Records sought on mayor, city official in Ballard deal

David Bauerlein
Jacksonville Florida Times-Union
USA TODAY NETWORK

State Attorney General James Uthmeier's office is seeking records of any communications by Mayor Donna Deegan and Chief Administrative Officer

Mike Weinstein that would show opposition to JEA awarding a lobbying contract to Ballard Partners.

The April 17 subpoena issued to the city of Jacksonville and JEA also calls for any similar communications by top JEA staff and several of its board members. City Council member Rory Diamond

said he understands the attorney general's investigation is looking into whether there was any illegal influence on JEA's procurement process.

The subpoena by the Attorney General's Office of Statewide Prosecution does not identify any specific state statutes related to procurement law, and it's not clear what restrictions would apply to the circumstances surrounding JEA's

award of the lobbying contract.

After Deegan became mayor in July 2023, she canceled the city's contract with Ballard Partners, a global firm whose partners at its Jacksonville office are former Jacksonville mayor Lenny Curry and Jordan Elsbury, who was chief of staff for Curry at City Hall.

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Activists gather outside the North Portico at the Florida Capitol to protest the proposed redistricting map April 28. ALICIA DEVINE/TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT

REDISTRICTING SESSION BEGINS AMID PROTESTS

House speaker defies DeSantis, rejects AI, vaccine issues

John Kennedy
Capital Bureau
USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

Gov. Ron DeSantis' push to defy the Florida Constitution and make four Democratic-held congressional districts more likely to elect Republicans began taking shape in a special session of the GOP-controlled Legislature.

The session, which began April 28, is poised to run through May 1. DeSantis is responding to President Donald Trump's demand for red states to create more Republican-leaning districts in a desperate bid to retain the GOP's wafer-thin control of the U.S. House.

On the eve of the session's start, De-

Santis debuted a proposed map that could change the state's current, 20-8 Republican majority in Congress to a 24-4 dominance.

Most threatened by the DeSantis plan are seats held by Democratic U.S. Reps. Kathy Castor of Tampa, Darren Soto of Orlando, Jared Moskowitz of Parkland and a South Florida seat recently vacated by Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick, who resigned amid an ethics investigation.

Outside the Capitol, dozens of protesters rallied in opposition to the red-

istricting push, including representatives of the League of Women Voters, Florida for All and Equal Ground.

Along with redistricting, DeSantis also wanted lawmakers to take up new safeguards against artificial intelligence and expand vaccine exemptions for parents of school kids. But House Speaker Daniel Perez, R-Miami, quickly dismissed these measures, saying that his chamber would not take up the matter.

"There were no bills filed on these policies prior to the start of this special session," Perez told House members in opening the session. "Consequently,

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Memorial to shooting victims is vandalized

Racial attack killed 3 at Dollar General in 2023

Christina Burgess
First Coast News

A memorial honoring the victims of a racially motivated shooting at a Dollar General store in Jacksonville has been damaged, drawing concern from community members and city leaders.

The memorial outside the 2161 Kings Road store was originally created by community members to honor the three people killed in the Aug. 26, 2023, attack.

On April 27, three memorial displays were found heavily damaged. Two were completely destroyed, while all had photos torn from their frames and flowers scattered across the ground.

"The community came together to put this up, which made it even more powerful and impactful," Jacksonville City Councilman Rahman Johnson said. "Why would somebody damage it? I don't know why."

The shooting claimed the lives of Anolt "AJ" Laguerre Jr., Angela Carr and Jerrald Gallion after a gunman entered the store and opened fire.

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The memorial to the victims of the 2023 hate crime attack at the 2161 Kings Road Dollar General store has been vandalized nearly three years later. PROVIDED BY FIRST COAST NEWS

Trump weighs peace offer, says Iran in 'state of collapse'

Michael Loria and Christopher Cann
USA TODAY

President Donald Trump on April 28 said Iranian officials have warned the country is in a state of collapse and want a U.S. blockade lifted, as the White House weighs a peace offer from Iran that seeks to end the two-month war.

"Iran has just informed us that they

are in a 'State of Collapse.' They want us to 'Open the Hormuz Strait,' as soon as possible, as they try to figure out their leadership situation [Which I believe they will be able to do!]" Trump said in a social media post. He did not say how that message was communicated to Washington.

The U.S. blockade on Iranian ports and ships, which was a response to

Iran's tightening grip on the Strait of Hormuz, costs the Middle Eastern country about \$400 million per day, according to analysts.

The White House confirmed April 27 that Iran submitted a proposal but did not say whether Trump would reject or accept the deal. The proposal would end Iran's closure of the Strait of Hormuz in exchange for the United States lifting its

blockade on Iranian ships and ports, the Wall Street Journal and Associated Press reported. The proposal would also postpone discussions on Iran's nuclear program. Trump has said ending Iran's nuclear program is vital.

The latest proposal comes amid a fragile ceasefire and a U.S.-Iranian

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