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Capturing America's Stories with the Smithsonian

They grew up under dictators, and now they're worried about America

Banners of presidents Donald Trump and Abraham Lincoln reading “Growing America Since 1862” hang over the entrance to the United States Department of Agriculture in Washington, DC, on May 15. A historical analysis by Gallup shows Trump’s approval ratings in August of his first years in office – both as the 45th and 47th president – are lower than any other modern president at the same time in their administrations. KEVIN LAMARQUE/REUTERS FILE

Immigrants say country is now at ‘tipping point’

Trevor Hughes and Terry Collins USA TODAY

As a child in Cuba, Mike Fernandez watched as his teachers were replaced with government instructors, books vanished from classroom shelves and ultimately, Communist Party officials took over his dad’s tiny sandwich stand. • Now the self-made billionaire and longtime Republican campaign donor watches uncomfortably from south Florida as President Donald Trump takes many of the same steps he saw under former Cuban leader Fidel Castro. Like many people who fled to the United States from authoritarian regimes, Fernandez says the United States appears to be at a tipping point, with Trump centralizing power to silence dissent and punish people he’s declared enemies while bullying private businesses to fall in line.

“There’s something wrong, and we all know it,” Fernandez told USA TODAY. “Many people are hoping it’s going to go away on its own, and it’s not.”

Fernandez

from American voters who endorsed his muscular leadership approach.

See **TIPPING POINT**, Page 4A

FL CFO calls out equity and inclusion office

David Bauerlein and Alan Festo
USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

Gov. Ron DeSantis and state Chief Financial Officer Blaise Ingoglia during an Oct. 1 press conference at Jacksonville International Airport outlined a list of “wasteful spending” initiatives across the state, including in Gainesville and Alachua County.

Ingoglia specifically pointed out that the city of Gainesville pays its director of equity and inclusion an annual salary of \$189,000 — funds he says could be used to help lower property taxes, road repairs or give raises to law enforcement.

Gainesville and Broward County were the first targets in July of the state’s Department of Government Efficiency for on-site audits of city spending records and policies. The DOGE team visited Gainesville on July 31 and Aug. 1

A graphic shared on X by DeSantis on Oct. 1 also listed examples across the state of what the DOGE team found to be “reckless spending and woke initiatives.”

The graphic included the city of Gainesville’s “mandated employee training on identity and culture,” and Alachua County’s use of \$31,000 for Planned Parenthood’s “Teen Time” program.

The organization’s “Time For Your Teen” program brings teens between the ages of 13 and 19 and their parents together to talk about things like sexual health, STIs, pregnancy prevention, healthy relationships and decision-making skills.

The DOGE team visited Alachua County Aug. 13-14, and Ingoglia announced on Sept. 25 that it had found more than \$80 million in excessive spending in the county’s general fund.

In Jacksonville, DeSantis and Ingoglia poked fun at a hologram-like projection of Mayor Donna Deegan as a case of local government spending out of control.

See **INGOGLIA**, Page 2A

Some worry U.N. humanitarian aid will be replaced

Emma Batha
THOMSON REUTERS FOUNDATION

LONDON – Fifteen-year-old Palestinian Mahmoud Jamal Al-Attar set out to collect food from an Israeli-controlled distribution site in the southern Gaza Strip one day in August, but like many others he never made it back; he died af-

ter being shot in the chest. The teenager is among hundreds of Gazans killed near aid hubs run by the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, a private Israeli and U.S.-backed outfit set up in May that bypasses the United Nations coordinated system that has long supported the enclave. The shootings have been widely

blamed on Israeli forces outside the aid sites. A GHF spokesman said its armed contractors had not used lethal force. However, the emergence of GHF has fueled a growing debate over the privatization and militarization of aid, and the future of the United Nations-led humanitarian aid system in the face of massive funding cuts.

“What’s happening in Gaza sets an incredibly dangerous precedent for humanitarian crises globally,” Alexandra Saieh, Save the Children’s global policy lead, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

“We all know that what happens in

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