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President Donald Trump has brought his Mar-a-Lago style to the Oval Office, adding gold-framed portraits, gold decoration on the ceiling and gold coasters branded with his own name. Gold objects fill the fireplace mantel.

SAUL LOEB/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

# NORTHERN MAR-A-LAGO? DECOR RESEMBLES CLUB

## Planned ballroom, patio on former Rose Garden look similar

**Antonio Fins**  
Palm Beach Post  
USA TODAY NETWORK

Tall flagpoles, a courtyard, gold fixtures and now a massive ballroom — is President Donald Trump Mar-a-Lago-ing the White House?

When Trump was the nation’s 45th president, his Palm Beach club served as the “Southern White House.” The president hosted summits with Chinese President Xi Jinping, the late Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, then-Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro and leaders of Central American nations. It was reported that a Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility, or SCIF, was available at Trump’s opulent club and residence to accommodate high security discussions.

Now, as the 47th president, it is the White House that is beginning to resemble a northern Mar-a-Lago. Trump has redecorated the Oval Office with gold fixtures and decor, put a courtyard where a fabled garden once stood, added tall flag poles to the executive mansion’s exterior and has torn down the historic East Wing to build a vast ballroom.

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U.S. Republican Senators and other guests sit at tables under umbrellas as President Trump speaks while hosting a Rose Garden Club lunch, at the White House in Washington, DC, on Oct. 21. KEVIN LAMARQUE/REUTERS

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# ACSB member: Comments on Kirk are protected speech

**Chelsea Long**  
Gainesville Sun  
USA TODAY NETWORK

Alachua County School Board Vice Chair Tina Certain appeared in front of the State Board of Education on Nov. 13 to answer for comments she made on social media about the late conservative activist Charlie Kirk.

Education Commissioner Anastasios Kamoutsas invited Certain to attend the meeting in Crawfordville after she called Kirk a “31yr old uneducated white boy,” on her personal Facebook page the day of his memorial on Sept. 21.

Kirk was killed by a gunshot to the neck on Sept. 10 while speaking at Utah Valley University in Orem, Utah.

State leaders have repeatedly criticized Certain and Alachua County School Board (ACSB) leadership for a pattern of misconduct and unprofessionalism. Kamoutsas said at Thursday’s meeting he was “horrified” and “outraged” by Certain’s social media posts and comments.

Certain said as an elected member of the school board, she is deeply committed to principles of ethical conduct and professionalism.

“I’ve always conducted myself with integrity [and] with the best interest of students, families and educators at the heart of every decision that I make,” she said.

Certain argued that, regardless of her position, she retains her First Amendment right to express personal opinions and criticize public figures.

She called her personal Facebook post a play on Kirk’s own rhetoric, and said that while it was “frank” and “poorly worded,” it is constitutionally protected speech.

Certain was alarmed by the summons she received from Kamoutsas, not for misconduct, but for comments she made on her personal social media page unrelated to school board matters with which the state board disagreed.

“There are urgent issues facing education in Florida that deserve this board’s attention,” she said.

The state board contended that Certain’s post “raised concerns regarding [her] ability to serve as a school board member.” Certain

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