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TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT

TUESDAY, APRIL 21, 2026 | TALLAHASSEE.COM

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WWII veteran Dan Wagner takes in the sights of his memorial, which he finally gets to visit for the first time alongside his granddaughter Tammy Converse. Many within the Tallahassee Honor Flight group stopped to ask for a photo. See dozens more photos of the day at tallahassee.com. PHOTOS BY ARIANNA OTERO/TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT

FLORIDA'S 2ND CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

And then there were 12 hopefuls

James Call
USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

Campaign contributors have already put up nearly \$8 million for the 12 candidates in the race for the north Florida Congressional seat that includes Tallahassee and Panama City, according to Federal Elections Commission first quarter campaign finance reports.

Two of the candidates are late entries in the race and not required to submit a report covering the first three months of the year.

But the total haul of \$8,040,448 by 11 of 12 candidates ahead of the August primary underscores the high stakes of a race unfolding for a seat in a narrowly divided U.S. House. Republicans hold a four-vote majority, putting Florida's 2nd Congressional District in play as the GOP looks to protect its hold as Democrats hope a public frustrated by the affordability crisis will flip the seat.

Candidates have until June 12 to qualify for the primary election that will be held Aug. 18. Qualifying for the ballot includes filing required paperwork, paying fees or submitting petition signatures, and signing a candidate oath.

But for now there are 12 candidates; the eight GOP contenders account for roughly \$7 million of the total raised so far. Most of that money is in a \$5 million loan businessman Keith Gross made to his campaign.

Democrats have raised about \$745,000 combined. Brice Barnes is the latest candidate to join the race. The Democratic fundraiser and strategist entered the pool of candidates with a big splash April 9, announcing she had raised \$100,000 in the campaign's first 24 hours.

That puts her in eighth place in money raised among those in the race so far, according to the FEC.

The year's first campaign report from candidates covers fundraising through March 31 and provides some insight into who is gaining traction in the race to represent a 16-county, mostly rural district of farms, forests, fishing villages, the beaches of Panama City and the state capital in

Honor Flight takes North Florida vets on an emotional, whirlwind journey

Arianna Otero
Tallahassee Democrat
USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

As Vietnam Navy veteran Denny Knott opened up his letters on the plane ride home, he couldn't hold back his emotions.

The tears began to flow as the joy of such an immense day took over. All he wanted was to hug and thank everyone involved in Honor Flight for the day he'd just lived.

Veterans from Tallahassee, Lake City, and even as far as Pensacola, all fought through the heat as they got their chance to fly to Washington, D.C., for the capital city's 12 annual Honor Flight, coinciding with the nation's 250th birthday.

From sunrise to sunset, the group of nearly 75 veterans were treated to surprise after surprise as they were taken on the journey of a lifetime to finally visit the memorials made for them. In the span of a whirlwind 16-hour day, here are some of the memories made along the way.

See **HONOR FLIGHT**, Page 2A



Vietnam veterans take their time at their memorial as they search for the names of fallen soldiers. Many looked for help among the memorial staff, even asking for a name rubbing to bring home with them. For many, this portion of the trip was deeply emotional.

See **RACE**, Page 3A

Florida is on fire as burn bans, windy conditions sweep the state

Kimberly Miller
USA TODAY NETWORK - Florida

Unusually volatile fire weather staggered through the Panhandle down into the gut of subtropical Central Florida on Monday, April 20, with rare early morning eruptions in air sucked dry by a rain-barren cold front.

Red flag warnings stretched from west of Panama City to Jacksonville and south past smoldering Gainesville, which suffered smoke-choked evacuations over the weekend.

Past the hills of Ocala through Disneyfied Orlando and into Lee County, fire weather watches were raised into Tuesday evening with parched relative humidities and winds gusting to 25 mph.

Alex Booth, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service office in Jacksonville and its fire weather program leader, said he was watching hot spots on satellite imagery Monday morning when typically higher daybreak humidity levels would douse embers.

"That's a kind of prelude to what we will likely see this afternoon," Booth said. Because we have higher winds and a very dry air mass, the burn window is opening sooner."

Where have burn bans been issued in Florida?

Burn bans had been issued in 32 Florida counties as of April 17 and

See **FIRE**, Page 2A



The Florida Forest Service cut firebreaks April 16 on a 400-acre wildfire that started late April 15 in the Balu Forest in Gainesville. The fire spread quickly but was knocked down through a multi-agency firefighting effort that included water and retardant drops from the air. The fire was about 30% contained as of about noon April 16, according to fire officials.

ALAN YOUNGBLOOD/
GAINESVILLE SUN

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