



Lester Johnson, a restaurant owner in Richmond, Virginia, is pictured during a news conference to call on Republicans to pass Affordable Care Act tax breaks on Capitol Hill on Sept. 16. ANDREW HARNIK/GETTY IMAGES

Obamacare tax credits divide state GOP allies

Some fear economic chaos if subsidies lapse

John Kennedy
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Powerful conservative groups are calling for letting Obamacare tax credits expire even as one of Florida’s biggest business organizations continues to push hard for renewing them – fearing

economic upheaval in this state if the subsidies lapse. Associated Industries of Florida recently touted a survey it conducted which showed 79% of voters supported extending the tax credits, scheduled to stop at year’s end. That includes 81% of Republican voters. About 4.7 million Floridians receive

health insurance through the Affordable Care Act marketplace, the most of any state in the nation. Experts warn that close to half of them will be priced out of the marketplace if tax credits now in place go away if Congress does not act. The Republican-leaning AIF is part of a coalition of Florida business groups. They have banded together as Florida Conservatives for Affordable Health

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Polk State College has hired an attorney to review the use of foundation funds to cover certain students' fees.
PHOTOS BY ERNST PETERS/THE LEDGER

Polk State probes use of scholarship funds to pay fees

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Polk State College has opened an investigation into whether the administration’s use of scholarship funds to cover student fees, but details are scarce. At the District Board of Trustees meeting on Sept. 29, trustee Ashley Bell Barnett revealed Polk State has hired a Tampa-based attorney Terin Barbas Cremer to do an internal investigation. However, Barnett said she’s concerned as Polk State trustees have not been provided with any contract or details on the scope of Cremer’s investigation. Madison Fantozzi, Polk State’s spokesperson, confirmed “a review is underway” but would not confirm any further detail, including the name of legal firm hired. The investigation stems from a heated conflict between Barnett and President Angela Garcia Falconetti, who requested that Polk State College Foundation approve the use of up to \$125,000 in schol-



Polk State President Angela Garcia Falconetti said the foundation funds were used according to state statute.

arship funds to pay outstanding student fees. Barnett has accused Falconetti of violating protocols by using the funds to aid select students to artificially inflate the college’s enrollment numbers. Falconetti

has asserted her one-time action complied with state law at a Aug. 25 meeting. Barnett asked why Polk State did not ask Anastasios Kamoutsas, Florida’s commissioner of education, to direct the state’s Inspector General’s office to investigate the use of funds and provide a report, as she asserts is provided for under Florida statute 1001.64(3). The statute reads, “A board of trustees shall ask the Commissioner of Education to authorize an investigation of the president’s actions by the department’s inspector general if the board considers such investigation necessary. The inspector general shall provide a report detailing each issue under investigation and shall recommend corrective action. If the inspector general identifies potential legal violations, he or she shall refer the potential legal violations to the Commission on Ethics, the Department of Law Enforcement, the Attorney General, or another appropriate authority.”

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Polk Schools reviewing teacher over song

Gary White
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A video of a Polk County teacher singing a variation on “Happy Birthday to You” to a kindergartner has gone viral, fueling allegations of racism — and alleged death threats toward the teacher. Polk County Public Schools is now investigating the incident, which took place Sept. 29 at Floral Avenue Elementary School in Bartow. The boy to whom the teacher sang is now too upset to return to school, his mother said. Desarae Prather of Bartow shared the video with The Ledger, having also posted it on Instagram and TikTok. The 28-second clip, apparently shot by the teacher, opens with fellow students sitting around the boy at a table in what appears to be the school’s auditorium. Prather’s son, who had turned 6 just three days earlier, wears shorts and a dark shirt bearing the school’s logo. After the students finish singing “Happy Birthday to You,” a woman is heard addressing the boy. “Would you like the funny song now that I sing to you?” she asks, prompting a nod from the boy. “OK, it goes like this,” says the woman, who proceeds to sing in a jazzy style accompanied by finger snaps: “Happy birthday to you. You live in the zoo. You look like a monkey, and you smell like one, too.” As some students laugh, the teacher giggles and adds, “Whoo, give him a clap, everybody.” Prather’s son is Black, and she said the teacher is White. The teacher, who is not seen in the clip, emailed a copy of the video to Prather later that day. “My reaction, it was I couldn’t believe it,” Prather said by phone on Oct. 1. “It’s nothing funny.”

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