



Food banks will feel fallout for months

NEWS, 3A

Map may test GOP in Florida

John Kennedy
Capital Bureau
USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

Democratic wins in Virginia and New Jersey governor’s races were among the most visible signs of voters having second thoughts about Republican leadership. Midterm congressional elections next year loom as an even sterner test for the GOP in Florida and across the nation.

Republican turnout was down this month and seemingly reliable GOP voting blocs, most notably Hispanics, re-

jected the party’s candidates. Miami U.S. Rep. Maria Salazar, a Republican, went on social media right after Election Day with her fears.

“The Hispanic vote is not guaranteed,” Salazar said on Miami’s Calle Ocho, or Eighth Street, in the heart of her district that leans Republican. “Hispanics married President Trump, but they are only dating the GOP

“I’ve been warning: If the GOP does not deliver, we will lose the Hispanic vote all over the country,” she added.

Now, the fact that Democrats politically rebounded with victories in key

races across the country has cast a cloud over Gov. Ron DeSantis’ push for more congressional redistricting in Florida.

Hispanic votes turn in Virginia, New Jersey

Democrat Abigail Spanberger won 67% of Hispanic voters in capturing the Virginia governor’s race. In New Jersey, fellow Democrat Mikie Sherrill was elected governor with 68% of Hispanic voters, according to exit polls.

New York City’s election of Zohran

Mamdani, a Democratic Socialist, as mayor was powered by record-setting turnout, especially among younger voters.

Florida had few high-profile races to gauge sentiments. But in the state’s most Hispanic county, Democrat Eileen Higgins, a county commissioner, was the top vote-getter in the non-partisan Miami mayor’s race. She’s headed to a Dec. 9 runoff against Republican Emilio Gonzalez, a former Miami city manager endorsed by DeSantis.

See MAP, Page 2A



City of Lakeland officials and Lakeland Fire Department staff stand with state Chief Financial Officer Blaise Ingoglia, third from left, to accept \$34,575 in state grants to be used to purchase decontamination equipment for the city’s future Fire Station 8 on Nov. 12. SARA-MEGAN WALSH/THE LEDGER

State law forces vote on Polk school tax

Paul Nutter
Lakeland Ledger
USA TODAY NETWORK

Reversing their earlier stance, a consensus of the Polk County Commission on Nov. 14 now say they will vote for a school district referendum asking voters for a 1 mil increase in ad valorem property taxes because Florida statute requires the board to vote for it.

The vote would come Nov. 18 after the commissioners and the public have time to speak on the matter during public comments – and not during the first week of January, as the board voted to do at its last meeting.

Like it or not, current state law requires the commission to approve a referendum on a tax increase for schools once the district initiates a request for one.

The School Board voted unanimously in April to draft a referendum, asking voters to approve a levy of one mill, or \$1 for every \$1,000 of assessed property value, the Ledger has previously reported. The district estimates that the tax would generate about \$80 million over four years.

County Attorney Randy Mink advised the commission that it had “no discretion” and the vote was “ministerial in nature,” at the Nov. 14 agenda review in Bartow.

Troutman champions a change in statue

That is something first-term Commissioner Becky Troutman has asked state Rep. Jennifer Canady (R-Lakeland) to change, because she does not want the residents to blame the commission for a tax increase.

“We are working through state statute to get this changed. I think we are going to be successful in that,” Troutman said at the agenda review. She said in the future, she wanted the School Board to vote on a mileage increase, and a referendum would then go directly to the supervisor of election to place on the ballot.

Canady did not respond Nov. 14 to an email and a phone message for comment.

Mink told the commission on Nov.

See SCHOOL TAX, Page 2A

State funds aid three Polk fire departments

Money to be used for life-saving equipment

Sara-Megan Walsh
Lakeland Ledger
USA TODAY NETWORK

Three Polk County fire departments received state grants totaling more than \$186,000 to be used toward the purchase of new equipment for first responders that could be life-saving.

Blaise Ingoglia, the state’s chief financial officer, presented the funds to the leadership of Auburndale, Frostproof and Lakeland fire departments at Lakeland’s Fire Station One on the afternoon of Nov. 12.

“We must be sure that our fire stations and firefighters have the equipment they need to keep our families safe and keep themselves safe,” Ingoglia

said. “Unfortunately, firefighters are at a higher risk of being diagnosed with cancer.”

Firefighters face and increased risk of mortality for most cancers, especially skin and kidney cancers, according to a study by the American Cancer Society published in July 2025.

The funds came from the state’s Firefighter Assistance Grant Program, which provides money to volunteer and combination departments to improve emergency response safety and services, and the Firefighter Cancer Decontamination Grant program, established to help protect the safety and health of firefighters by providing funds to help mitigate exposure to hazardous, cancer-causing chemicals.

Frostproof Fire Department

Frostproof received \$139,986 from

the Firefighters Assistance Grant Program. Fire Chief Jerry Riner said the funds will be used to replace all the fire department’s self-contained breathing apparatuses.

“Our SCBAs at this time are approximately 20 to 25 years old,” Riner said. “This allows us to replace every SCBA we have at the station.”

Along with the new breathing equipment, the money will allow the department to get thermal-imaging cameras attached to the regulators so first responders going toward a burning building or vehicle can better anticipate what to expect.

Lakeland Fire Department

Lakeland Fire Chief Doug Riley accepted an oversized display check for

See GRANTS, Page 2A

