

Orlando Sentinel LOCAL & STATE

Fine opposes gender assignment



Rep. Randy Fine, R-South Brevard County, said Monday he will sponsor a bill aimed at preventing parents and doctors from providing gender assignment treatment to transgender children. **STEVE CANNON/AP**

Lawmaker wants treatments for minors classified as a felony

By **Steven Lemongello**
Orlando Sentinel

In the wake of fierce criticism of the so-called “don’t say gay” bill, GOP state Rep. Randy Fine says he will sponsor a bill aimed at preventing parents and doctors from providing gender assignment treatment to transgender children.

Fine, R-Palm Bay, said Monday the bill he plans to file next year would make providing drugs or surgery to a minor for gender

assignment a felony child abuse crime punishable by prison and/or loss of a medical license. He said the bill would not affect “mental counseling” for minors.

The American Medical Association has called gender assignment care, which can include puberty-blocking drugs and hormone treatments, “medically necessary” and “evidence-based” and called on states to not ban the practice because of a significantly heightened risk of suicide from “societal stigma and discrimination.”

Idaho, Arkansas and Texas have banned such treatment for minors, and legislators in several other GOP-led states have called

for similar bans.

In an interview with the Orlando Sentinel, Fine said his proposal was spurred by the backlash to what critics call the “don’t say gay” bill signed last week by Gov. Ron DeSantis.

The law prohibits discussion of sexual orientation or gender identity in schools up to the third grade and limits it to “age-appropriate” students in higher grades. Republicans argued the bill protects parental rights, while Democrats and LGBTQ groups contend it was intentionally vague and could have a chilling effect on teachers,

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INDEPENDENT FILMMAKING IN FLORIDA

Authentic voices look for new avenues

By **Amanda Kondolojy**
Orlando Sentinel

Big budget film and television studios have all but left Florida due to inaction from legislators on tax incentives. However, while Netflix, Disney or HBO won’t have cameras rolling in the state any time soon, independent filmmakers have been filling some of the void left by these massive production companies.

John Lux of Film Florida says the status of the film industry in Florida is “a mixed bag,” but high-profile independent projects from the past few years have been a bright spot. “Independent films, which Florida has been known for, [are] very strong. In the last decade, high-profile independent films like ‘Moonlight,’ ‘The Florida Project’ and ‘Life and Nothing More’ show the quality of work that Florida produces.”

2021’s “Zola,” which won two Independent Spirit Awards this year including best female lead for star Taylour Paige, was also shot in Florida.

These big-budget independent films produced in Florida are an important avenue for showcasing the state on a national stage, but it is in the smaller independent film scene where movie fans can really get a feel for the unique heart of Florida.

South Florida filmmaker Edson Jean is currently promoting his first full-length feature film “Ludi,” which follows a hardworking nurse who learns her self-worth as she chases the American Dream in Miami’s Little Haiti neighborhood.

“The movie was inspired by my mom’s earlier years as an immigrant,” Jean says, adding that he started working on the film specifically because he hadn’t seen stories like his mother’s represented on-screen.

This year’s Florida Film Festival at Enzian will also be screening independent documentary films tackling everything from habitat loss in the state to the Pulse nightclub shooting, using an authentic lens to bring light to unique subjects in a way that only those who know and love Florida could.

While Jean and other filmmak-

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The Artemis I rocket sits at Kennedy Space Center’s Launch Pad 39-B ahead of its planned tanking test Monday. A new valve issue forced mission managers to call off the test again Monday. **COURTESY**

NASA hits new snag with Artemis test at KSC

Axiom Space mission could be threatened

By **Richard Tribou**
Orlando Sentinel

NASA looked to complete its Artemis moon rocket tanking test at Kennedy Space Center after an issue forced a scrub on Sunday, but a new valve issue forced mission managers to call it off again.

NASA officials had already pulled the plug Sunday on the tanking test of the fully integrated Space Launch System rocket and Orion capsule at KSC’s Launch Pad 39-B when it wasn’t able to keep the mobile launcher on which the hardware sits safely pressurized.

That issue was mitigated overnight, but Monday’s redo effort still faced a series of issues which teams worked around, but were ultimately stymied by a vent valve, also located on the mobile launcher, that supplied pressure to the core stage of the massive Space Launch System rocket.

“Due to the vent valve issue, the launch director has called off the test for the day,” reads a post on NASA’s Exploration Ground Systems twitter. “The team is preparing to offload LOX and will begin discussing how quickly the vehicle can be turned around for the next attempt. A lot of great learning and progress today.”

Already the weekend delay created a domino effect pushing the Axiom Space civilian launch

to the International Space Station to no earlier than Friday.

Some fans meant to provide positive pressure within the mobile launcher and keep out hazardous gasses failed, as did a backup set of fans. It couldn’t address the issue Sunday afternoon because it required humans to be on site.

Mission managers, though, gave the OK to go on Monday with countdown clock to resume with T-6:40 with good weather conditions expected. If all goes well, the test will complete in at 6:02 p.m.

The primary goal is to simulate a countdown short of lighting up the powerful engines capable on producing 8.8 million pounds of thrust on launch. Instead, NASA looks to simply fill and drain the

core stage with 730,000 gallons of super-cooled liquid hydrogen and liquid oxygen.

The push to Monday for Artemis forced SpaceX and Axiom Space, looking to send the first all-civilian crew to the ISS, to delay the static fire of the Falcon 9 rocket on Pad 39-A less than 2 miles away, as there is only a limited supply of safety apparatus at KSC in case of pad emergency.

That has now been pushed to Wednesday, and the launch to Friday targeting 11:17 a.m.

The four passengers, three who paid \$55 million each plus a former NASA astronaut, remain in quarantine at KSC ahead of their planned 10-day mission called

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UCF stresses ‘cyber hygiene’ as Russian invasion of Ukraine fuels concerns

By **Daniela Vivas Labrador**
Orlando Sentinel

When Russian forces invaded Ukraine last month, there was a widespread fear Russia would deploy cyberattacks against Ukraine and others as part of their military strategy.

Even locally, the University of Central Florida Information Security Office sent out an email to its employees last month to raise awareness about cybersecurity concerns for the university. The email, which said that due to the current global events “there is an increased likelihood that UCF may become the target of disruptive activities,” was sent as Russia began its invasion of Ukraine.

Despite Russia’s vast cyber capabilities, they have yet to deploy any

large-scale cyberattacks during its current military campaign but David Zambri, UCF associate vice president and chief information security officer, still stresses that “cyber hygiene” is critical during these times.

“Any enemy of the United States or someone can benefit by attacking industries,” Zambri said, “whether it is to steal information, whether it is to take down critical infrastructure. There are a lot of bad folks out there and they will utilize a situation like this to attack companies, corporations, universities, etc.”

While security professionals say it is unlikely that any such attack would target individuals, “one computer could be a gateway into the corporate or university network,” Zambri said.

The UCF Information Security Office’s main objective is to protect the digital personal information of more than 70,000 students and 12,000 employees, according to UCF Facts 2021-2022, including student personal and financial information, as well as the university’s financial records, making employees’ awareness of good cybersecurity practices critical.

“First, it is intellectual property,” Zambri said. “As well as, I would say equally, personal information of our students, faculty and staff or anyone who does business with UCF.”

In addition to personal and financial information, UCF hosts several online programs, adding to this already large student body, which all rely on the same network.



Students at the UCF Student Union work on their course assignments within the university’s cyberspace on March 4. **DANIELA VIVAS LABRADOR/ORLANDO SENTINEL**

“It is really important to ensure that the university continues to operate and run,” Zambri said. “We live and work and learn from all over the place today. It is not a traditional classroom model — it is mixed mode, it is distance learning — so we want to make sure we can maintain that for our students and

our faculty and staff.”

UCF advised programs and staff to use antivirus programs, strong passwords and multi-factor authentication, which is good digital practice for everyone.

Steps such as multi-factor

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Top aide joins FDLE chief in announcing he's resigning

By Jeffrey Schweers
Orlando Sentinel

Just over a week after FDLE Commissioner Richard Swearingen turned in his letter of resignation, one of his two assistant commissioners announced that he is also leaving as of May 1.



Richard L. Swearingen, Florida Department of Law Enforcement commissioner. COURTESY

Tom Foy, assistant commissioner in charge of investigations and forensic science, announced his retirement Monday, Florida Department of Law Enforcement spokeswoman Gretl Plessinger confirmed in an email.

"He planned to retire in February but agreed to remain longer at the request of the Commissioner," Plessinger said.

Foy is one of two assistant commissioners, each of whom has over 30 years with the agency.

No other members of Swearingen's staff were planning to leave, Plessinger said.

Swearingen initially said he was stepping down as of September 1, but quickly and without explanation changed

mental protection and veterans' affairs.

The new law allows the governor's appointment for FDLE commissioner to be approved by a majority of the Cabinet, not unanimously. The appointment still requires Senate approval.

The law was created after Agriculture Commissioner Nikki Fried's objection last year to DeSantis' attempt to appoint Shawn Hamilton as environmental secretary without full Cabinet approval.

Fried, the only state-wide-elected Democrat and a candidate for governor, said the timing of Swearingen's resignation seemed more than coincidental.

At last week's Cabinet meeting, which Swearingen did not attend, DeSantis dismissed questions about whether he was happy with the performance of the commissioner, who has run the FDLE for eight years.

"I think he's faithfully served the state for decades, and we very much appreciate it," DeSantis told reporters.

the effective date to May 1.

"While I have thoroughly enjoyed my 38 years at FDLE, it is time for the agency to move in a new direction," Swearingen told the governor and Cabinet.

Swearingen's announcement came two weeks after DeSantis signed a new law giving him more power over appointing agency heads for law enforcement, environ-



Taylor Paige accepts the award for best female lead for "Zola" at the 37th Film Independent Spirit Awards on March 6 in Santa Monica, Calif. JORDAN STRAUSS/INVISION/AP

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ers in the state are able to use the power of independent filmmaking to tell new stories, oftentimes once a movie becomes a financial success these creatives are forced to leave the state to secure access to financing for bigger projects.

"The way the industry is, the first feature is really just a calling card," according to Jean, who says many independent filmmakers use their early projects in Florida to put themselves "in a position to now engage with investors or financiers and see if [they] can get the second one done more traditionally," oftentimes leading them out of the state.

This situation is very common for student filmmakers, especially. According to Film Florida, every

year more than 5,000 students graduate from Florida-based colleges and universities with film or digital media degrees, from the 30+ colleges and universities in the state that offer these programs.

And while Florida institutions offer students the space and resources to learn their craft and produce that all-important first feature independently, "those students are graduating and leaving our state to find jobs because of the lack of jobs in Florida," according to Lux.

Regional efforts are underway to help keep at least some independent filmmakers in Florida, especially in large metropolitan areas. "Here in Miami, they've been constantly trying to make efforts to support film," according to Jean who specifically mentions Oolite Arts as an organization helping to

foster independent voices in the filmmaking community.

However, these efforts will need to be increased to stem the flight of independent filmmakers from Florida. "There isn't a quick answer," Jean says, when asked about what kind of support independent filmmakers need to keep creating content in Florida. But investments in building a community, financing for lower budget projects and incentives are at the top of his wish list.

"Independent films bring a more keen eye [to] the communities, the cities [and] the people," Jean says. "They reflect Florida in a more authentic way"

Want to reach out? Email me at akondolojy@orlandosentinel.com. For more fun things, follow @fun.things.orlando on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter.

Pennsylvania tourist to stay on Florida's sex-offender registry

Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE — A Leon circuit judge has dismissed a Pennsylvania man's challenge to a Florida law that kept him on a sexual-offender registry after a 10-day family vacation to Disney World in 2015.

Circuit Judge Angela Dempsey dismissed the case last week, in part finding that a statute of limitations had expired. The man, identified in court docu-

ments as John Doe, reported to the Orange County Sheriff's Office when he came to Florida because he was on a Pennsylvania registry at the time as a result of a child-pornography conviction in 2002.

Doe was removed from the Pennsylvania registry in 2016 but remained registered as a sex offender in Florida, according to a lawsuit filed in 2020.

The lawsuit, which named Florida Depart-

ment of Law Enforcement Commissioner Rick Swearingen as a defendant, contended that the Florida law violated his constitutional privacy and due-process rights.

But attorneys for the state argued, in part, that the lawsuit was filed after a four-year statute of limitations had expired.

That is because Doe registered as a sex offender in Florida in 2015 but didn't file the lawsuit until 2020.

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authentication are already mandatory for all faculty and staff, and will also become mandatory for students to access their email starting in May.

"UCF had the plan last year," Zambri said. "There were some technical reasons why it was stalled, technically it was capable of being done but there were some internal reasons why it had to be paused. So that

will affect all students in May."

Zambri said those being digitally cautious should avoid acting on "too good to be true" emails, emails with misspellings, unsolicited emails from unknown senders or emails from someone you believe you know with strange requests, also known as phishing.

He also suggested using a virtual private network, or VPN, when accessing the internet using publicly available WiFi to protect your information.

"Just due diligence," Zambri said. "Everyone owns a piece of technology and whether it is the router you use for WiFi at your house or your cell phone or your computer, make sure to patch it. Make sure there is antivirus on it if appropriate, and use a VPN if you are out in the public space."

This story is part of a partnership between the Orlando Sentinel and UCF's Nicholson School of Communication and Media.

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students and the LGBTQ community.

Fine said opponents of his new law would be part of a "radical grooming minority that tried to sexualize our children," echoing recent conservative rhetoric that opponents of the "don't say gay" bill included pedophiles.

Asked if his proposed bill, first announced on Twitter, goes against the concept of parental rights espoused by DeSantis and Florida

Republicans, Fine said, "parents don't have a right to abuse their children. So if you agree with my premise ... that cutting off the penis of a 12-year-old is child abuse, then a parent shouldn't have the right to do that."

Transgender children are not offered puberty blockers or hormone treatments until they reach puberty, according to the Washington Post, and the care is reversible. Gender surgeries for minors are rare and are usually not recommended before the age of 18.

Asked about Dempsey Jara, a 10-year-old trans-

gender girl who spoke at an Orlando roundtable Thursday with U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona, and what she would be able to do under the proposed law, Fine said, "he can dress however he wants."

"I don't have any issue with people getting mental counseling or those kinds of things," Fine said. "... When I was 10 years old, I might have wanted to be an astronaut. Was my entire life supposed to be upended because of that?"

He also claimed "a very large percentage of people" who transition "change their

mind."

Jaime Jara, Dempsey's mother and a teacher at Liberty High School in Kissimmee, slammed Fine and his bill.

"Show me the stated research indicating large percentages of people who change their mind," Jara said via email. "It does not exist from any reputable source. In fact, there is ample evidence showing that medical intervention is life and death for transgender children."

Jara continued, "as Randy Fine is intentionally misgendering my daughter, I will

respond accordingly. Ms. Fine, and other Republican politicians like her, claim that they are all about preserving parental rights. What about mine? Are parental rights only granted to Florida citizens based on party affiliation?"

She added, "Withholding medical treatment from transgender children is a road to inevitable death, which I am sure brings great delight to Ms. Fine, as she would rather my child just disappear or die off anyway. ... Ms. Fine, you are a politician, not a doctor. Mind your business and stop pandering

to your base with attacks on children."

Democratic state Rep. Carlos Guillermo Smith, the Legislature's first openly LGBTQ Hispanic member, also condemned Fine's proposal.

"Florida Republicans are on a dangerous course, retaliating against any person or business who expresses support for the LGBTQ+ community," Smith said. "This latest threat to criminalize parents and doctors who provide life-saving care for LGBTQ youth should shock the conscience of all Floridians."

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