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Tampa seeks to decriminalize marijuana

CAYLA BUSH  
Staff Writer  
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Between 2010 and 2014, 44,860 marijuana possession cases were closed in Miami-Dade County, accounting for 10 percent of all cases filed in the city’s criminal court system.

In response to these numbers, county commissioners took steps to decriminalize misdemeanors and provide officers with the option to forgo an arrest, and instead issue civil citations with $100 fines for people caught with less than 20 grams of marijuana.

“We have better things to do with our police resources,” said Commissioner Sally Heyman, sponsor of the ordinance. “For goodness’ sakes, we don’t have to destroy the lives of so many.”

Palm Beach County also made similar changes to county code in 2015, sparking a change within the state, leading to more counties looking at options to do so.

But the cities lie behind other regions of the United States that have used civil citations for decades, said Allen St. Pierre, executive director with the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws, a Washington, D.C.-based advocacy group. Civil citations were adopted by leaders of many college towns -- including Ann Arbor, Michigan, and Madison, Wisconsin -- as far back as the 1970s, St. Pierre said.

The move by Florida communities to adopt citations stems in part from concern about the cost of enforcing drug laws. It also may reflect changing attitudes about use of the drug now legal for recreational purposes in Alaska, Colorado, Oregon, Washington and the District of Columbia.

“Usually, we have to go on bended knee armed with loads of data to make a persuasive argument to change the law,” St. Pierre said. “Almost all the people leading those efforts are baby boomers; they have a much greater propensity to favor World War II reform than the World War II generation.”

Marijuana arrests disproportionately fall on black and Hispanic people, a 2013 American Civil Liberties Union study found.

Between 2001 and 2010, there were 8 million arrests, of which 88 percent were for possession.

The report found that black people were 3.73 times more likely to be arrested for possession than their white counterparts even though marijuana use is roughly the same between the two groups.

A switch to citations would help employment levels in communities with high number of minorities, helping alleviate high poverty levels in those communities, St. Pierre said.

Florida communities that have adopted civil citations levy a range of fines for possession.

Miami Beach and Miami-Dade County fines are $100. Hallandale Beach has escalating fines from $200 for the first

SEE WEED, PAGE 2

Group lotto tickets increase as jackpot hits billions

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A $1.4 billion Powerball jackpot with chances of winning the jackpot is 1 in 292 million, becomes a lot more likely once friends, office peers, and family members pool their resources in purchase communal tickets.

Like March Madness, in which office pools capture the frenzy of the nation during the NCAA men’s basketball finals, lottery office pools have been around since the lottery began and ramp up each time jackpots soar.

These pools mostly are informal affairs, where a trusted individual agrees to collect a couple bucks from participants, heads to a gas station or Publix, buys tickets and watches the drawing. The idea is that there are more tickets in the pool and that increases the chances of winning, though infinitesimally. If one of the tickets hits, all share in the jackpot.

This idea is one that is particularly of interest to students who want to participate in having a communal pool.

“For some students, however, the question becomes how fair and how open would the drawing be. I think that having a communal pool is fine, so long as there are established rules as to how the money would be split if we won,” said Eric Watt, a senior studying English.

Experts say there could be some pitfalls to this system, particularly if more than $1 billion is at stake.

“I would say to make sure that everybody is in agreement with doing it jointly,” said Wayne Clark, a South Florida attorney who has written scholarly articles about March Madness office pools. “If 10 people are in, they all have to agree to the terms. Not nine and a friend someone invites in.”

The pool organizer should keep everyone up to speed on details, like when the drawings are, how much is collected, how many people are in. That person also should shoot messages with the numbers of the purchased tickets to everyone in the pool.

“When (the pool organizers) get the tickets, they can just scan them and email those images to everyone before the drawing,” Clark said. “That way, you have a way to prove these are the 10 tickets. And if the organizer buys 10 more tickets for himself and his family, they clearly are not among the ones in the pool.”

Agreements also must be made about what happens to partial winnings; should they be doled out to participants or rolled into future drawings.

If everyone’s in agreement, likely would not be a need to put it all in the form of a written contract, he said.

“I don’t know if it’s necessary to put it in writing,” Clark said. Making copies of the tickets available to the pool participants should do the trick, he said. And that’s easily done with a smart phone.

“Technology has changed so much these days,” he said. “It’s is so much easier to make sure everyone is on the same page.”

SEE LOTTO, PAGE 2
Rhino poaching in Zimbabwe soared in 2015, says activist

The number of rhinoceroses poached in Zimbabwe more than doubled last year, the head of a trust dedicated to protecting the animals said Tuesday. At least 50 rhinos were poached in the southern African country in 2015, up from 20 the previous year, Lowfeld Rhino Trust Director Raoul du Toit told dpa.

“Until 2015, rhino poaching in Zimbabwe actually declined steadily from its peak in 2008, when about 150 rhinos were poached,” he said. Much of the poaching takes place in private wildlife parks, where most of Zimbabwe’s 800 black and white rhinos live after their populations in national parks were decimated by poachers, according to du Toit. Most of the rhinos poached in 2015 were black rhinos, which are classified as critically endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

Donald Trump won’t drop birther question, and Ted Cruz is fighting back

Canadian-born Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, continued to come under fire Sunday over whether he is a “natural-born citizen” eligible to be U.S. president. Cruz, a lawyer, has said that his citizenship is “settled law” and on CNN’s “State of the Union” on Sunday it is “clear and straightforward” that he became a U.S. citizen at birth in Calgary because his mother was a U.S. citizen. His presidential primary campaign even released his mother’s U.S. birth certificate over the weekend after denying she had become a Canadian citizen, although her name appears on a 1974 Canadian federal election voter roll.

Obama’s pick for FDA commissioner approved

A Senate panel on Tuesday cleared President Barack Obama’s nominee to head the Food and Drug Administration, cardiologist Dr. Robert Califf. While he was approved on a voice vote by the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, Califf’s close relationship to the pharmaceutical industry still raised concerns. “His extensive ties to the pharmaceutical industry give me no reason to believe that he would make the FDA work for ordinary Americans, rather than pharmaceutical CEOs who are more focused on making obscene profits than saving lives,” Vermont independent Sen. Bernie Sanders, who sits on the Senate health committee, said in a statement Tuesday.

Tampa reconsidering marijuana legalization

WEED, PAGE 1

“I’d like to see the state legislature reconsider the criminalization of weed, because there are so many resources that are being drained by penalizing users.” said Sofia Barrera, a junior studying anthropology. “At the end of the day, that’s taxpayer money that can be better spent. It can bring the arts back to schools, or improve the quality of textbooks with that money.”

Additional reporting from TNS Staff

Comunal lottery over billion dollar jackpot

LOTTO, PAGE 1

That’s not to say problems can’t arise. A group of employees who participated in an office pool and won a California lottery 10 years ago were sued by a handful of colleagues who believed they had an oral agreement to get in on the pool winnings. The suits were eventually dismissed.

In 2012, three employees of a Chicago bakery sued for what they said was their share of a $118 million jackpot from the Illinois State Lottery. They said they regularly took part in the betting pool that began the year before, but didn’t contribute to buy the winning pool ticket because the pool organizer failed to collect from them that week. The Florida Lottery doesn’t keep track of how many tickets are purchased through office and workplace pools, but a lot of ticket purchases are through pools, said Florida Lottery spokesman Shelly Gerteisen.

“We know there are pools that play and we know pools have won,” she said. “Sometimes we have group claims and sometimes, even through they play in a pool, they just send just one representative to come up and claim the winnings.”

Sales of Powerball tickets are soaring, she said Monday.

Between 6 and 7 p.m. Saturday, a couple of hours before the drawing for what was then a $900 million prize, Powerball tickets were flying out of the computers across Florida at a rate of 42,000 a minute, she said.

Monday morning, she said, 9,763 tickets for Wednesday’s Powerball drawing were being sold each minute. “That’s high for a lotto,” she said. “The closer we get to the drawing, that number will continue to rise.”

Monday, the estimated jackpot was bumped to $1.4 billion, but it likely would jump before the drawing at 10:59 p.m. Wednesday. The winner can opt for a lump sum payout of $868 million, of which taxes would take about 25 percent, Gerteisen said.

The Powerball jackpot has rolled 19 times, since the Nov. 7 drawing and now it’s the biggest jackpot ever offered. Since Powerball first was available to Florida residents in 2009, 10 from the Sunshine State have won jackpots, including Gloria McKenzie of Zephyrhills, who won $590.5 million in May 2013. At the time, it was the largest jackpot in the game’s history. Florida’s 13,000 retail outlets put the state among the top-selling Powerball states, with sales that have exceeded more than $3.2 billion since 2009.

Additional reporting from TNS Staff
**Discussions about racism must be honest**

**THE GROWL**

With racism and police brutality receiving mainstream attention, it seems as if history is repeating itself. Watching unarmed black citizens gunned down for minor offenses by white police officers and seeing zero just being served, feels too similar to the days where “white only” signs line the streets of every community. But in reality, history isn’t repeating itself.

The justice system has always been flawed by the detriment of communities of color. To those who have never experienced systemic oppression, conversations of racism and police brutality are quite new. However, as an Afro-latina I can guarantee that many black Americans have had these kinds of conversations and have had their own experiences with systemic racism long before it received mainstream attention.

Why is it that decades after segregation was abolished and our government ruled that minorities must be treated with respect, racism still plagues this country?

There are plenty of reasons as to why this is so, but the most basic reason has to do with the way conversations about racism are conducting.

As a black person, I have to tiptoe around the certain buzzwords in order to keep the conversation civil with my white colleagues. Words like “white people,” “white supremacy” and “privilege” must be omitted, otherwise my rhetoric is mistaken for a personal attack against white people.

White supremacy allows for so many unarmed black citizens to be gunned down for little to no reason by the very people who are supposed to “serve and protect” them.

It’s an uncomfortable truth and it may be a tough pill to swallow, but the strength and history of white supremacy must be included in conversations about racism; pretending white supremacy doesn’t fuel the system that is racism would only be dishonest.

When I say “white supremacy systemically oppresses black people,” the response from my white colleagues is almost always “But I’m white and I’m not racist.” I’m glad you have basic human decency to not oppress people based on their race, but that’s not relevant.

Resolutions are not achieved without hard work

**PHILANTHROPY POST**

As we all embrace the new year, people everywhere are dragging out notebooks and pens to write down resolutions they want to make in their lives. However, according to a 2015 study conducted through the University of Scranton, only eight percent of Americans succeed in maintaining their resolutions.

These resolutions are made through the decision that something isn’t working, and something needs to change to make it work. We all know change is hard because it interrupts the flow of our lives with new beginnings. Starting something requires us to experience discomfort. This makes beginnings the most bountiful experiences people have; it is hard because it interrupts the flow of our lives with new beginnings.

Resolutions work fine for the first week of the new year, maybe even the first month. There is all this energy in the air, and everyone wants to start fresh. But after a month, we get tired and run out of steam. Like a machine, we stop and the discomfort of making your dream a reality feels worse than just dreaming about it. Netflix is comfortable and welcomes us back.

Yet, many movies and books tell us that through believing in ourselves and following our hearts, we can succeed and take the wheel to captain our ships. They ultimately tell us to go after our dreams with a club. While it doesn’t exist, it is hard because it interrupts the flow of our lives with new beginnings.

Maybe Shia LaBeouf was onto something.

From an evolutionary perspective it is natural to resist anything that causes us hardship like putting our procrastination in check. It is easy to watch Family Guy reruns, it is less easy to turn off the television and write a book. You ultimately have to decide if the discomfort of getting up and going for it is greater than the dream or if it’s the other way around.

Of old, familiar patterns to make way for new ones. It is a transition. Spring, summer, fall, then winter: the seasonal cycle. We are born, we grow, we learn, we die: circle of life.

It doesn’t exist. As much as I love the idea of magic, there is no magic spell to take you where you want to be. There is no trick, there is no tip. There is just you and an amount of time. Some people choose to sleep in, others will choose to wake up before the sun to make time for their goals because they matter enough.

Hard work is hard. Insightful, I know. Hard work is so often overlooked in the shadow of a great dream. There is value in doing the work, people throughout history have proved it time and time again. The most difficult part of it all is starting. Something requires us to experience change and consequently feel discomfort. This makes beginnings the most bountiful experiences people have; it takes determination to experience middles, to keep going.

Instead, I am saying that white supremacy allows for uncomfortable truth and it may be a tough pill to swallow, but the strength and history of white supremacy must be included in conversations about racism; pretending white supremacy doesn’t fuel the system that is racism would only be dishonest.

**SEND US YOUR LETTERS**

Have something on your mind? Send your thoughts (400 words maximum) to opinion@fiusm.com or drop by our offices at 6100 SW 11th St. With your letter, be sure to include your name, major, year, and copy of your student ID. The Beacon will only run a letter once per month from any individual.

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**EDUCATIONAL POLICY**

Editorials are the unified voice of the editorial board, which is composed of the editor in chief, management, and the editors of each of the five sections. The Beacon welcomes any letters regarding or in response to its editorials. Send them to opinion@fiusm.com.
On Jan. 10 David Bowie - British singer, songwriter, actor, fashionista, and all-around personification of the word “cool” - passed away after a 18 month battle with liver cancer, leaving a vacuum in the world of music that could never possibly be filled.

Over the course of five decades and 20 plus albums Bowie helped to pioneer, reinvent, or epitomize virtually every style of popular music from rock to soul to electronica, ceaselessly reinventing himself and his modes of expression to adapt to changing times,技术创新者instead of merely managing not to lose his essential qualities as an artist.

No matter what kind of music you like, Bowie has something for you, from the glam-rock of “Ziggy Stardust” to the avant garde instrumentalism of his Berlin-era albums like “Heroes”, to the drum & bass fueled anthems on “Earthling,” there is no sound or style that was the same after Bowie laid his long white fingers on it.

Even hip-hop owes something to the man (besides his mellifluous voice) with Freddie Mercury, “Under Pressure” providing the driving sample on one of the earliest, truly “hard-rock,” rap tracks “(I Can’t Get No) Satisfaction.”

Bowie was the first white artist to be weird, to take on a persona then discard it, to pull off the role-playing with such aplomb and to walk in between definitions and preconceptions - he was made for a man like Prince to dress like a woman and a woman like Annie Lennox to dress like a man.

He was master of his own fate until the end, using his diagnosis as fuel to reinvent himself one last time on his final release, ‘Blackstar’ which came out on Jan. 8, on his 69th birthday and only two days before his death.

While we mourn the loss of an icon, let us celebrate the fact that in true Bowie fashion, he exhibited total creative control to the end and left us with one final statement and that this swan song is one of his most profoundly unique releases and a perfect final chord in the symphony of his life.

Bowie passed in peace. His work, completed, surrounded by his family, the space oddity returned to the ether, ashes to ashes. He is survived by his wife, Iman, and his children, Duncan and Alexandria.

This week, we mourn for the world’s loss but as the planet reverberates with a million stereo speakers playing “Life on Mars” let us earthlings turn and face the strange changes together - to the starman waiting the sky.
Disney embraces Star Wars franchise, releases themed ‘Disney Infinity’ game

Disney has fully embraced the culture juggernaut everyone has at least heard of--the Star Wars franchise. This fact becomes even more apparent with the announcement about Star Wars in Disney parks and Disney characters decked out in Star Wars costumes. Disney’s wildly popular video game franchise “Disney Infinity” traveled to a galaxy far, far away just last year with their third major update, promising a playset - essentially the equivalent to an actual video game with story modes containing six hours of gameplay - for “The Force Awakens.” Before we move on any further, please be aware there might be spoilers, this is a complete and honest review.

On the movie’s opening day, the playset was out, along with its corresponding characters: Rey and Finn, the protagonists, and Poe Dameron and Kylo Ren. Reminiscent of previously released Star Wars playsets, it’s mission heavy, requiring a lot of fighting and planning up.

The interesting part is that much of the gameplay and missions don’t require characters to use the force, allowing a character like Rey to not be force sensitive in order to get to the most out of her character. In fact, the story mode doesn’t actually give away any spoilers whatsoever. It follows the basic plot of “The Force Awakens” with Finn and Rey needing to escort BB-8 to the resistance in order to deliver a map with coordinates to Luke Skywalker.

Poe Dameron disappears after the TIE fighter crashes on Jakku, Rey and Finn bump into Han on his freighter with the Millennium Falcon, Rey is captured by the First Order and Finn goes to rescue her from Starkiller Base, which inevitably blows up.

Crucial spoilers, like the identity of Kylo Ren, the killer plot twist that ensues because of his identity, and more importantly Rey’s big moment, all are omitted from this playset.

One could argue that it’s more of a general plot designed for those who already watched the movie and just want to have fun--and really that’s what it was. It was entertaining to play with these characters and to see the things they can do. It wasn’t necessary to relive the story, which is really the point of the Disney Infinity franchise.

The gameplay was smooth, while also fairly well complex in each character’s combo attacks. Though lacking somewhat in diversity in its individual abilities, the playset makes up for it in a variety of activities that require certain characters to achieve three stars on replayable missions. The playset is now available, as well as all other separately sold components. In order to play it, you’ll need the Disney Infinity 3.0 game, which can be bought through starter packs or downloaded to the console.

Lifestyle Points is a weekly column covering various life interests. For questions or comments please email fusucom. For the complete review visit fusu.com.
For the first time in the history of the NFL, all four road teams advanced past Wild Card round last weekend. The Pittsburgh Steelers managed to pull out a 16-16 victory at Cincinnati in a dirty, controversial ending later that night against the Bengals. Sunday, Jan. 10, the Seattle Seahawks, joined by Lady Luck, defeated the Minnesota Vikings 10-9, on a shanked 27-yard field goal by Vikings’ kicker, Blair Walsh. Remember holders, laces in. To wrap up the weekend, the nation saw a glimpse at the true Aaron Rodgers, as he led the Green Bay Packers to a 35-18 victory against the Washington Redskins.

These teams will find themselves in a familiar position in the Divisional Round of the playoff schedule. The Chiefs and the New England Patriots will start the weekend playing at 4:35 p.m. Jan. 15, followed by the Packers versus the Arizona Cardinals at 8:15 p.m. The Seahawks and the Carolina Panthers will have the early kickoff Sunday, Jan. 17, at 1 p.m. To finish the weekend and decide the final team to advance to the Conference Championships, the Steelers will travel West and face off against the Denver Broncos at 4:40 p.m.

The last time the Chiefs and Patriots played, the entire nation, aside from the New England organization, started questioning whether quarterback Tom Brady still had it in him. The Chiefs dominated the game early and Brady had a breakout season, as we saw in the Super Bowl last year and throughout this NFL season, Brady clearly still has it in him.

Sunday, Jan. 9, we saw the Kansas City Chiefs march into Houston and dominate the Texans with a 30-6 annihilation. The Pittsburgh Steelers managed to pull out a 16-16 victory at Cincinnati in a dirty, controversial ending later that night against the Bengals. Sunday, Jan. 10, the Seattle Seahawks, joined by Lady Luck, defeated the Minnesota Vikings 10-9, on a shanked 27-yard field goal by Vikings’ kicker, Blair Walsh. Remember holders, laces in. To wrap up the weekend, the nation saw a glimpse at the true Aaron Rodgers, as he led the Green Bay Packers to a 35-18 victory against the Washington Redskins.

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For the Chiefs the second time in two years. What a way to end the regular season and are consistently putting pressure on opposing quarterbacks and stopping the run game.

Their opposition, the Steelers were thought to be the dark horse for these playoffs. As the sixth seed, they wouldn’t host a single game, but their explosive offense is top-three in the league and quarterback, Ben Roethlisberger is as good as it goes.

In the game against Chicago Bears, which was a position to start the game, the Cardinals turned the MVP award into his third season. His performance was impressive, putting pressure on opposing quarterbacks and stopping the run game.

His team only posted a .271 batting average, which doesn’t sound too shabby at all. With four of its most important players in the lineup and quarterback, Ben Roethlisberger is as good as it goes.

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Former student’s transfer was ‘right fit’

JASON DILL
The Bradenton Herald
TNS Staff

When Jacob Huesman committed to Florida International University last week, it was for his next step after completing his senior season at Braden River.

Then last week happened.

Appalachian State, famous for knocking off Michigan when it was a 1980s insiders program, offered Huesman last week.

The quarterback, who led Braden River to the Class 7A state semifinals this past season, needed some time to think.

“It all happened so fast,” Huesman said.

“I did a lot of research about the school and the football program as well. The numbers don’t lie. They said. “I did a lot of research about the school and the football program as well. The numbers don’t lie. They said.

Sadly, the school and the football program as well. The numbers don’t lie. They said.

Huesman said he discussed the choice with his parents and Braden River coaches before he decided to try to commit to the Mountaineers, which is now a Division I program playing in the Sun Belt Conference.

Appalachian State had a quarterback for next year’s class in Zeb Noland, but he flipped to Iowa State on December. That was the reason for the Mountaineers to offer Huesman, who completed 67.8 percent of his passes during the regular season last fall.

“Fan base is wild,” Huesman said.

“It’s in Boone, North Carolina. So it’s a small community and everybody rallies behind the football team. They sell out games and the fans go nuts for them, so that’s a really good environment to play in.”

Huesman said Appalachian State is expecting him to compete for the backup quarterback job as an incoming freshman.

That’s something Huesman, who tossed 14 touchdowns against just three interceptions during Braden River’s unbeaten regular season last fall, enjoys.

“If that’s what they want from me, then that’s exactly what I’m going to do. I’ve worked very hard and I’m a very, extremely competitive person.”

Appalachian State finished runner-up in the Sun Belt Conference this past year after going 11-2 on the season and 7-1 in conference play.

For Huesman, though, switching from FIU wasn’t an easy choice.

“I was on board completely with FIU until, literally, last week when Appalachian State offered me,” Huesman said.

In addition to Huesman’s official visit on Jan. 22, the Mountaineers are working to bring in Braden River teammate, tight end Ryan Neuzil, for an official visit on Jan. 23.

Wade voiced a reality that permeated the Heat locker room after a game in which they did a lot right and still came up short, falling 111-103 to Golden State at Oracle Arena. They had one of their best offensive nights of the season, shooting 49 percent, but they couldn’t take advantage of big leads.

“ать the near decade of dysfunction has come to an end?”

They have the ultimate confidence in their game,” Wade said. “Damn, I miss that.”

It was still a six-point game, 107-101, when Curry ended it on a 3-pointer with 26.9 seconds remaining. He lost Tyler Johnson on a screen and got the ball out of bounds, but the Heat could get there to help.

Wade played through a shoulder injury to put up 20 points, a team season-high 11 assists and seven rebounds. Bosh was solid with 15 points, 12 rebounds and four assists. Four other players scored at least 13.

“Just you have to know who you’re playing, man. They’re the champs. That’s how it needs to work. Some mistakes you make, they capitalize, and damn, what do you want me to say on that one? I can’t say anything. He made a 3 in my face, damn. That was a hell of a pass. I didn’t even see it coming.”

Wade scored a game-high 31 points, but shot 11 for 27 to get there. He made 4 of 11 from the field, and the rest of his team combined to go 3 for 12.

While Whiteside out, Spoelstra went small and gave rookie Justise Winslow his first career start. He scored seven points and had three rebounds in 26 minutes. Curry scored a game-high 31 points, but shot 11 for 27 to get there. He made 4 of 11 from the field, and the rest of his team combined to go 3 for 12.

The game was tied early in the third when the Warriors began testing Miami’s resolve. They pushed ahead 69-59, and the Heat quickly worked it back to a five-point game. The game reverted to a Golden State run up 80-70 in the last two minutes of the third quarter, but Miami countered with seven straight points to close it.

“ать the near decade of dysfunction has come to an end?”

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Student Government Association celebrates the new year and the start of the spring semester by opening positions for students to apply for SGA at the Bay Biscayne Campus.

Positions currently available in the Executive Branch, the Legislative Branch and the Judicial Branch. The general requirements for the application include, but are not limited to: being a registered Fiu student under no academic or disciplinary sanctions as detailed in the Student Code of Conduct, maintaining no less than a 2.0 term grade point average and the students should be attending at least half of their classes at the campus he/ she represents.

Candidates for the positions can run for and hold only one office at a time. The must be available to meet once a week with the SGA team and staff.

The Student Government Association gives candidates an opportunity to serve student’s needs and resolve issues while gaining leadership experience.

Students involved with SGA will be involved in activities such as funding student clubs and organizations, programming diverse events, providing services and resources, and addressing all student’s concerns.

The application requires a few documents to be submitted, which include; a resume detailing work and extracurricular experience, a personal statement and any additional materials which you believe would be helpful in the evaluation of the application. SGA works closely with other councils and student organizations, it is in fact responsible for the distribution and management of about $10.6 million in student fees, according to SGA’s OrgSync page.

For more information, visit the student government website.

Federal wildlife managers want Florida’s manatee, the whiskered luming lorn that came to represent the lught to save the state’s vulnerable wildlife, removed from the endangered species list.

In a news conference at the Miami Seaquarium on Thursday, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said that a population estimated at just over 6,000 should be reclassified as simply “threatened” despite a record number of deaths in recent years. They called the down-listing a positive move signaling a recovery and stressed that the change would not reduce protections already in place.

Based on the best available scientific information, we believe the manatee is no longer in danger of extinction,” said Mike Oehler, the agency’s deputy regional director. “While we’re proposing this change in class, we also recognize there are areas we have to do better.”

The decision comes under mounting pressure from developers and the boating industry who have long complained that slow speed zones and other protective measures are too strict. Last year, the conservative Pacific Legal Fund sued federal officials after petitioning for the removal in 2012, arguing that boat collisions and other threats have been largely reduced.

But conservationists say the decision directly contradicts the agency’s plan to save the manatees by not relying on population counts.

Between 2010 and 2013 the population went backwards and they’re not even talking about that,” said Pat Rose, executive director of the Save the Manatee Club. “To suggest the threats are controlled is just not the way to approach it.”

They also worry that the change will be echoed around the state, where endangered species and environmental causes are coming under increasing threat.

In a 2014 response to the proposed down-listing, the group raised concerns about the state’s willingness to protect manatees: State environmental enforcement cases fell by 68 percent in 2013, the Department of Environmental Protection’s budget and staff have been slashed and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission has fallen behind on management plans in key manatee habitats.

Even federal wildlife officials ruled a 2007 recovery plan as outdated but have yet to revise it.

According to that plan, success should not be determined by “how many manatees exist,” but by how well actions keep the gentle sea cows from harm. Between 2010 and 2013, more than 2,400 manatees were killed, or nearly half the population counted last year.

Critics of recovery efforts also have complained that annual aerial counts conducted by the state are inaccurate.

In reaching their decision, wildlife officials used computer models to calculate the risk of extinction to manatees. They concluded over the next century, the odds were about 2.5 percent. However, those models included a factor in the recent deaths from the 2010 cold snap, a red tide event or an increasing number of boat fatalities in 2015 because the information was not available, said Kim Valade, the agency’s manatee recovery coordinator.

They also stressed repeatedly that protective measures would remain in place and any new threats to manatee habitat would come under federal scrutiny.

“If they want to get a permit from us, we’re going to ask do you have a manatee protection plan,” said Larry Williams, the agency’s Florida supervisor.

Video: Miami Seaquarium veterinarian explains reclassification of manatee

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced the reclassification of the manatee from endangered to threatened.

Maya Rodriguez, a veterinarian at the Miami Seaquarium, talks about the meaning behind the reclassification.

West Indian manatees, which are found in the U.S. along the southeast coast and Puerto Rico and were first protected at the turn of the century, have long served as a measure of how well booming Florida co-existed with its fragile wildlife. With no natural predators, their biggest threats came chiefly from human activity: Pioneers slaughtered them for hides and modern-day boaters ran them down by the hundreds.

Their numbers started to climb after the Save the Manatee Club, co-founded by Sen. Bob Graham and Jimmy Buffet in 1981, sued the state and federal government in 2000 to force better boating regulations and other measures. In 2007, after counts recorded more than 3,000 manatees, federal managers considered down-listing them but backed off.

The Pacific Legal Fund, a group that advises property rights and reduced government regulation, welcomed the announcement but criticized the agency for “siding with their hands.”

“It has taken eight years and two lawsuits to get federal officials to follow up on their own experts’ recommendation to reclassify the manatee,” attorney Christina Martin said in a statement. “We are glad to see that the manatee is doing well, but all taxpayers should demand that the government do much better, going forward, in following the requirements of the Endangered Species Act.”

But conservationists fear the agency is acting too hastily by not including recent deaths in models, which could indicate not enough is being done to protect warm water wintering habitats. Later this year, the U.S. Geological Survey is expected to complete a report that looks at whether the deaths affected the population, Valade said, which will be part of the agency’s final decision at the end of the year.

About 60 percent of the state’s manatees now winter around power plants. Some worry those habitats aren’t sustainable for the future and worry that without manatees to protect them, springs could also come under attack. They also worry the federal decision failed to consider impacts from climate change.

“The manatee is a metaphor species,” Rose said. “They pull and push along protections for the whole ecosystem.”

While federal officials insist existing rules won’t change, Rose said that without the endangered classification, protections could begin to erode. Already, he said legislation being proposed in Brevard County to undermine the state’s Manatee Sanctuary Act.

State officials at the news conference, including Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioner Lisa Pridly, who has argued to lift protections for the Florida panther, say the state’s management plan remains “adaptive.”

“If things get better or worse, we can change on a case by case basis,” said Ernie Marks, the agency’s south region director.

Rose said the group may consider its own legal action, but first hopes to persuade state and federal officials to come up with a warm water contingency plan and enforce the Manatee Sanctuary Act, which has established low speed zones around the state.

Thursday’s proposal is now open to public comment for 90 days. A public hearing will be held Feb. 20 in Orlando.