

OPINION

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Panic attacks

Thank you, guest columnist Stephen Neely, for writing about your mental health issues. I wished it had been written when I first started having what I now know were panic attacks. It started after I graduated from a very prestigious college, and then was accepted to Stanford for my MBA. It was told that I had to wait a year and get real job experience. I tried in California but was told that even though I had a college degree, I did not have enough work experience. I started having heart palpitations and went to the hospital.

I was told there was nothing wrong with me. I still felt the same symptoms and went to my primary care physician, as I was also losing weight. As he palpated my abdomen he commented: "My, aren't we fashionably thin." I went to another doctor and told him that it was a mental disorder. He said if I knew that I had a mental disorder, then I could not be crazy.

Finally, I went home, where my parents realized I was no longer my vivacious self. They got hold of our family doctor. He prescribed me medication for panic attacks. I took it for four days and felt fine again.

I still get panic attacks, but now that I know what they are, I know how to handle the situation.

Holly Haley, New Port Richey

Letters are edited for clarity and length.

Column

DeSantis should veto CHOICE Act. It's bad for Florida business

Beware entrepreneurs, it's about to get harder to start a business in Florida. Gov. Ron DeSantis is set to sign the duplicitously named CHOICE Act — a law that greatly expands companies' ability to enforce noncompetes against their employees. The result will be fewer opportunities for workers, reduced growth for businesses, and less innovation across the state.

Noncompetes are exactly what they sound — contracts that suppress competition. They prevent workers from accepting competitive offers or starting rival firms. Under Florida's new law, employers can keep workers out of the market a full four years without pay. This leaves workers locked in, unable to pursue better career opportunities and without the leverage to insist on fair working conditions.

But workers are only the most obvious victim of noncompetes. Businesses — and ultimately consumers — suffer, too. That's because a dynamic economy depends on a mobile labor market where talented workers are free to create new businesses, and new businesses free to hire needed talent. This is especially true in sophisticated, cutting-edge industries.

California proves the point. Known for its vibrant tech industry and flourishing start-up community, the Golden State is the largest U.S. economy to categorically ban noncompetes. That flexible labor policy facilitated the rise of Silicon Valley and continues to make Cal-



The CHOICE Act passed in the Legislature. Now it's up to Gov. Ron DeSantis to sign it into law or not.

(PHOTO BY AP/WIDEWORLD)

ifornia the country's leader in innovation and technology.

Over a decade of economic research demonstrates this connection. Studies consistently show that noncompetes impede growth, limit firm entry, suppress wages, reduce worker productivity and motivation, hurt small businesses, and leave consumers worse off.

Policymakers have started taking note. More than two dozen new state laws have sought to restrict the use of noncompetes. Many are bi-partisan efforts. This year, Ohio Republican Louis Blasingame introduced a state bill that would ban noncompetes altogether. Former Florida Republican Senator Marco Rubio has been a critic of noncompetes and co-sponsored a Congressional bill prohibiting some noncompetes. Even the current Trump-appointed Federal Trade Commission Chair, Andrew Ferguson, despite distancing himself from a Biden-

era regulatory ban, has vowed to pursue noncompetes that he considers bad for the economy.

Florida meanwhile is galloping in the other direction. And not for the first time. The Sunshine State was already infamous for having the most anti-worker, pro-noncompete law in the country. Its prior law, in effect since 1996, was the subject of a widely cited empirical study documenting the downward effects of noncompete enforcement on small businesses. Yet rather than consider the data, Florida has doubled down on proven bad policy.

Ironically Florida styles itself a freedom to work state: It is also one of the strongest defenders of employment-at-will. In an at-will state, companies and employees can terminate employment at any time for any reason or none at all. It is a harsh rule, especially for workers, but has been justified in the name of market flexibility. It ostensibly

gives both workers and employers the freedom to abandon existing relationships in favor of better job matches.

Noncompetes sabotage that deal. Employers can continue to fire their workers when ever they wish. But workers laboring under these restraints can't leave their jobs without leaving their line of work. The result upsets the balance in the at-will rule and contradicts the very freedoms Florida purports to prize.

So why did Florida pass this self-contradictory, anti-market law? Because despite their harms, noncompetes give a short-term edge to some players — well positioned incumbents. Established firms get to hold onto their existing workforce by threat of lawsuits rather than compete with their rivals or their own employees. Indeed Florida's new act was championed by a hedge fund billionaire and DeSantis ally whose lobbyists helped draft its terms. Sadly, the bill sailed through the legislature without a full accounting of its broader, long-term economic impact.

The CHOICE Act may please a handful of entrenched corporations, but its advantages will be temporary and come at significant cost to Florida's future. For talented workers, innovators and entrepreneurs the only "choice" is to leave the state for a more favorable economic climate.

Rachel Arnow-Richman is professor of law and Gerald A. Rosenthal Chair in Labor & Employment Law and at the University of Florida Levin College of Law. She has written and consulted extensively on noncompete reform.

Column

Planned Parenthood won't back down from its mission in Florida

By any measure, the past three years have been among the most difficult in the history of reproductive rights in Florida. Amid the chaos and cruelty, one thing has remained constant: Planned Parenthood's unshakable commitment to providing compassionate, accessible care.

From abortion bans to restrictions on gender-affirming care for adults and minors alike, politicians in Tallahassee have been relentless in their attacks against our bodily autonomy, an assault that has only succeeded in triggering a wave of devastating consequences throughout our communities. When the 15-week abortion ban was implemented in May 2024, it was more than just bad policy — it was a cruel, calculated attempt to strip people of their medical freedoms and force women to remain pregnant against their will and, in some cases, against the medical expertise of their doctors. In May 2024, lawmakers doubled down and implemented the current six-week abortion ban, cutting many women off from care before they even realize they are pregnant.

They then took things a step further, refusing to fix the law's vague, dangerous language, despite desperate pleas from both doctors and patients, and set about using taxpayer dollars to actively interfere with citizens-led efforts to restore Floridians' basic reproductive rights, as we saw with Amendment 4 in November.

Through it all, we at Planned Parenthood of Southwest and Central Florida have not just refused to back down — we have ramped up our efforts to expand care and meet the needs of the

Floridians who rely on us.

Since the near-total, six-week abortion ban went into effect, we've continued providing abortion care in six of our nine health centers. In that time, we've seen a flood of patients forced to travel for care; however, thanks to our dedicated staff and providers, these patients are met not with closed doors, but with understanding and support. Over these last 12 months, our compassionate, trauma-trained navigators have worked tirelessly to assist over 1,700 Florida patients who were beyond six weeks pregnant to find legal, out-of-state abortion options.

These patients often receive help with finding transportation, childcare, meals and hotel accommodations — for what is frequently their first time traveling out of Florida. As abortion restrictions have increased across the country, this has only become more challenging, but we have remained steadfast and adapted to overcome every obstacle.

For example, when North Carolina became one of the few states in our region where abortion was still accessible up to 12 weeks, their mandatory 72-hour delay forced Florida patients to be away from work and family for up to four days. So, we took steps to credential our Florida-based providers in North Carolina, allowing patients to begin their care in our offices and spend more time at home with their families before traveling out of state. This was a small solution in the face of the larger problem — but it saves patients time and money, and, in some cases, ensures they can access care before it's too late.

While others close doors and cut services, we continue expanding ours. In just the last six months, we've grown to offer prenatal and infertility care, vasectomies, sedation for



Planned Parenthood of Southwest and Central Florida provides care to nearly 45,000 patients across 22 counties.

(TAMM LIVINGSTON/KANSAS CITY STAR)

IUD placement, and free pregnancy tests and emergency contraception — not just in our health centers but on college campuses across our region. We worked diligently to reopen gender-affirming care services despite the dangerous, anti-scientific roadblocks put up by our government. We've reduced wait times for appointments to just three to five days and have slashed the cost of birth control pills to \$9. We offer long-acting contraceptives at prices 30% below the market rate, and, at a time when many private providers are turning away Medicaid patients, we continue to welcome them.

While our Legislature chooses to ignore the 57% of Floridians who voted in support of reproductive freedom, we're stepping up — filling the gaps, meeting the moment and refusing to let our patients fall through the cracks.

I've dedicated 26 years of my life to Planned Parenthood because I believe that health care is a human right. I believe in the power of people to decide their own futures. And I believe in fighting for a world where health care isn't dictated by politics.

As my dear friend Cecil Richards said shortly before he passing this year: "It's not hard to imagine future generations one day asking, 'When there was so much at stake for our country, what did you do?' The only acceptable answer is, 'Everything we could.'"

At Planned Parenthood of Southwest and Central Florida, we're still here. We're still fighting. And we're still providing care to nearly 45,000 patients across 22 counties through nine brick-and-mortar health centers and our virtual telehealth platform.

No matter what the future brings, Planned Parenthood will hold our ground, dig in, push forward, and continue doing everything we can to fight this — together. Our patients are counting on it.

Barbara A. Zdraewy is a community activist who served as Planned Parenthood of Southwest and Central Florida's CEO for 24 years and currently serves as interim CEO for the organization. As a nurse, she helped to start the first hospice program in Key West caring for those affected by HIV/AIDS. This article first appeared in the Sarasota Herald-Tribune.

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Here's how to improve Trump's 'Big Beautiful Bill' | Letters

Here's what readers are saying in Friday's letters to the editor.



U.S. President Donald Trump makes comments to journalists outside the West Wing of the White House in Washington on May 8. [YURI GRIPAS | Abaca Press]

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