

Hurricane Delta eyes Gulf Coast and Panhandle

By **KIM MOODY**
STAFF WRITER

SEBRING — Just 20 minutes after Tuesday's 11 a.m. update of Hurricane Delta, the National Hurricane Center announced the storm was upgraded from a Category 2 to a Category 4 hurricane. Hurricane Delta strengthened as expected and reached maximum sustained winds of 130 mph and even higher gusts, according to Meteorologist Paul Close with the National

Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Highlands County Emergency Manager LaTosha Reiss told commissioners Tuesday morning that the Panhandle is experiencing a hurricane season like Highlands did in 2004 when Hurricanes Charley, Frances and Jeanne crossed the state with Highlands in the nearby center of the crosshairs.

As of Tuesday morning's report, hurricane-force winds extend outward up to 25 miles from Delta's center and tropical

storm-force winds extend outward up to 90 miles from the eye. Delta's eye is only four miles wide, and is dubbed as a "pinhole" eye, according to Close.

Delta was moving about 16 mph west-northwest toward the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico today as a Category 4. Delta will bring an "extremely dangerous" storm surge. Heavy rainfall associated with Delta could bring flooding to



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COURTESY/NOAA

County's COVID cases up by 21, two deaths

By **KIM MOODY**
STAFF WRITER

SEBRING — Highlands County saw an increase of 21 new cases of COVID-19 infections overnight, according to the Florida Department of Health. The new infections bring the total cases of coronavirus to 2,265, including 12 non-residents.

There has been two new deaths, bringing the total to 94 for

Highlands County. The deaths include an 88-year-old female and an 83-year-old male. FDOH is reporting a total of 244 hospitalizations, or 11% of all cases. According to the Agency for Health Care Administration, or AHCA, there were 14 people hospitalized with COVID-19 as of 3:15 p.m. The previous day, there were 24 people hospitalized.

The new cases stem from 185 tests processed. Tuesday's report shows a positivity rate of 10.19%, a sharp increase from Sunday's 8.79%. The new positivity is the highest it has been since Sept. 22. The World Health Organization standard for reopening is a positivity rate of 5% or less for 14 days.

Tuesday's report shows a median age of 43, whereas on Oct. 4, the median age was 70.

Of the 2,265 local cases, 376 have been reported from long-term health care facilities. That is equivalent to 17% of the cases for the county. The county's correctional facilities are reporting 65 cases of infection, or 3% of all cases.

Statewide, the new cases rose by 2,251, bringing the total cases of infection to 720,125, including non-residents. There were 92 new deaths reported on Tuesday from the FDOH. The overall death toll is 14,767 people.

The median age for infection on Oct. 5 was 40 and the overall age for the state was also 40 years old. Tuesday's state report from FDOH shows a positivity rate of 5.26%. While still a relatively low percentage, it is a good tick higher than the 3.89% on Oct. 4. It is the highest percentage rate since Sept. 22.

In other counties, the new cases of COVID-19 have risen by triple digits, they include: Brevard — 113, Broward — 143, Dade — 459, Duval — 149, Orange — 169, and Palm Beach — 101. Dade County still has the highest increase but has come a long way from the quadruple digits it saw in the height of the pandemic. A few counties were lucky enough not to see any new cases and include Gilchrist, Gulf, Jefferson, Liberty counties. Lafayette County, which enjoyed 11 days of no new cases, broke that streak Monday by adding three new cases of infections.

Nationwide, the cases have climbed to 7,485,331 and 210,616 deaths as of Tuesday.

Globally, there are 35,632,890 cases reported and 1,046,325 deaths attributed to coronavirus.

See the 'Cases by the County' graphics on page A10

Residents bring Tuck's posts to Commission



COURTESY PHOTO/HIGHLANDS COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSION

Commissioner Arlene Tuck tells audience members on Tuesday that she does not espouse racism, is the first Hispanic woman to serve on 'this board' — the Highlands County Board of County Commission — and will not apologize nor resign for racially-charged posts on her social media page, which she has said was hacked.



COURTESY PHOTO/HIGHLANDS COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSION

Chantel Gilmore, a business owner and minister in Sebring, pleads with Commissioner Arlene Tuck to see how racially-charged posts on Tuck's social media page have hurt members of the community, like her.

Tuck gives challenge, not apology

By **PHIL ATTINGER**
STAFF WRITER

SEBRING — If county residents at Tuesday's Board of County Commission meeting wanted an apology from Commissioner Arlene Tuck, they didn't get one.

Several members of the community attended, asking for explanation as to why Tuck's social media page has displayed racially-charged memes over several months. The meme that broke the issue showed up on the page late Sept. 23, white letters on a purple background stating, "If Blacks now have their own National Anthem then they need their own welfare system paid for by Rich Black Athletes." It was taken down before morning, but members of the community had already gathered screenshots of that and similar posts, and added them to her page the next morning when she posted that she'd been hacked.

Chantel Gilmore, business owner and a Sebring minister, told Tuck she should apologize, learn from it and let others learn.

"What that post said, that was heart-wrenching. It was. Whether you want to acknowledge it or not, it was," Gilmore said. "I know we want this to move away and go, but it doesn't if it's not addressed correctly."

In response, Tuck invited people to run against her.

"For the past two years, I have devoted my life to making Highlands County a better, safer place for all of the citizens," Tuck said after most had spoken. "If you do not feel I am qualified to represent the people of Highlands County, you are welcome to run against me in 2022. God willing, I will be on the ballot [then]."

Tuck said she has lived 62 years in Highlands County, raised her children and helped raise her grandchildren, and is not racist and will not resign.

"As a Hispanic woman, I fully understand racism," Tuck said. "I am the only non-white person to ever hold [an] office on this commission."

She then said she would not comment about it more that day or in the future, drawing applause from supporters in the audience.

One supporter, Dana Orr of Avon



MARSHALL



MILLER



EDWARDS

Park Lakes, said he's known Tuck for some time and had "never heard so much as a 'damn' come out of her mouth."

"We have other issues to deal with other than just not liking each other," Orr said. "If she said 'I didn't do it,' and I have no reason to think that it happened, then we should take that person at their word."

John Nelson, head of the Tea Party of Highlands County, said "social media stuff is garbage to start with," and implied people search social media to find things to complain about. He said Tuck's posts were not racist but "based on facts," and then said he, like all veterans, swore an oath to protect the U.S. Constitution, including the First Amendment and free speech, a right he said Tuck was exercising.

Theodore "Pink Tie" Murray, running for U.S. Congressional District 17, then said any elected official takes an oath of a united nation. Anything they say, especially on publicly-viewable social media, is on the record and must hold to a higher standard.

"You can go on my Facebook page and see whatever you want to see," said Murray, who said some family members make racist posts that he will not share. "I don't go ahead and say I was hacked."

Brandee Shattenberg, a registered Republican, told Tuck it is unacceptable to categorize different ethnic groups into "us and them," even though social media allows that.

"We, a multicultural community, can't let you or anyone sharing your views be in a position to make decisions for our future or the future of our youth," Shattenberg said.

Audrey Ascuitto, former Democratic candidate for the Florida Legislature, agreed. "Our community and our county is so much better than that."

Tonya Marshall of Avon Park said



COURTESY PHOTO/HIGHLANDS COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSION

John Nelson punctuates his statement with volume as he defends Commissioner Arlene Tuck's First Amendment rights on her social media page, on which were found several racially-charged posts.

when pages get hacked, people usually shut the page down or delete content.

"Your page is still up and the content is still sitting there," Marshall said, "which leads me to believe that, one, it wasn't hacked, and two, you know it's there and you don't care because you know nothing is going to happen to you, other than this."

Marshall said Tuck should represent "all of us, even the ones who don't look like you," and no longer believes Tuck can represent her fairly.

George Miller, pastor of the Emanuel United Church of Christ, said many "beautifully melanated" friends who help the community did not know how to address the issue of Tuck's and other officials' posts. He felt he had to say something, because such posts even make him, a white man, feel unsafe.

"Social media is called social media because it's available to society," Miller said, adding, "Commissioner Tuck, you were not hacked; you were caught."

"Whether you are sorry or not, it's O.K.," Sherona Edwards said. Edwards said racist attitudes are taught, and each generation must try not to pass on those views.

"You have a granddaughter that's running for the Florida House of Representatives," Edwards said. "You

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Good morning To
Patricia Poll
Thanks for reading!

