

# A Little Shame Might Be Just What's Needed These Days At BOCC.

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Robert Bridges

Wise words from Robert Bridges, editor and the [Lake City Reporter](#), whose editorial appeared there today March 15, 2017.

Those following our posts recounting the recent shenanigans at the Columbia County BOCC will understand completely where Mr. Bridges is coming from, and will most likely agree.

And it is not just the election issue last summer; at the last February meeting, it was revealed that Chair Ron Williams bypassed his elected county attorney and sought legal advice elsewhere, and passed it on to the board as truth with no opportunity for comment.

The conduct of the board needs to adjust to the needs of its constituents and to work toward constraining its biases.

Comments by OSFR historian Jim Tatum.

-A river is like a life: once taken, it cannot be brought back-

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## We Can Do Better On Ethics

By “we,” we mean county government, and by “better,” we mean not just better than we are now, but better than at least one state agency, that being the Florida Elections Commission.

In fact, we expect the Columbia County Commission to do considerably better when it convenes Thursday to take up ethical reforms of its own. The FEC shouldn't take all the blame, as the agency can only do what it's been empowered to by the Legislature.

Still, its handling of one recent case is revealing. Columbia County Commissioner Ron Williams was caught breaking state election law last August when he made a county employee type up and send answers to a questionnaire from this newspaper.

It's far from the worst thing a local politician has ever done.

But it does evince a certain disdain for the rules that bind the rest of us, as well as a sense of entitlement that comes with more than 30 years in office. Williams could have been hit with a \$1,000 fine, which isn't much in itself. Instead, he escaped even that, managing to fork over just \$250 for his misstep.

Williams tells us there was no deal, and the FEC folks aren't allowed to say. But the final language of the consent order ending this case is rather oddly worded, making reference only to the county employee's having "sent" the document, not to her having been forced to type it up first.

That may seem a small point, but watering down an already weak provision does more to mock the rule of law than to inspire confidence in it. Why bother? Here's why we can do better here at home. County Attorney Joel Foreman, knowing his proposed ethics reforms are worthless without some means of enforcing them, has suggested including a provision for the public reprimand of those who go too far astray.

We think he's got something there. This is still a small town, where elected officials can't easily escape their constituents.

They see them at the supermarket, the post office and at church. The public rebuke of those who routinely flout the law would surely get everyone's attention.

And a little shame might be just what's needed these days at BOCC.