

Tampa Bay Times

Governor steps in it — all week

By Daniel Ruth, Times Columnist
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As bad weeks go, you might argue John Edwards, on trial for being a louse in North Carolina, was practically tiptoeing through the tulips compared to Florida Gov. Rick Scott, who over the course of a few short days may have successfully managed to offend more people than crazy-as-a-loon Gainesville pastor Terry Jones contemplating a match and a Koran.

First Gov. Clouseau jetted off to Miami for a publicity stunt to sign a loopy bill that would prohibit state and local governments from hiring companies for contracts worth at least \$1 million if they also do business with either Cuba and Syria. Obviously, Syria was glued onto the legislation only after the regime's leader, Bashar Assad, decided to turn his country into the Cambodia of the Mediterranean.

This was always little more than a feckless and unenforceable political bone tossed to the Miami Cuban community. All the governor had to do was fly in, sign this cooked-up legislation, say bad things about Fidel Castro, have a cup of *cafe con leche* and get out of town.

But noooooooooo! Scott had to commit the worst possible boo-boo in politics. He admitted it was all just theater. No good would come from this.

After putting his Gov. Le Petomane signature on the "Cuba — Bad!" bill, Scott then said, in effect, he was just kidding; that the legislation was really a federal issue. The Cuban exiles went ballistic and accused the governor of stabbing them in the back, which, of course, he had.

Good grief; who was handling Rick Scott's public relations strategy on this deal? Ozzie Guillen?

Fresh from alienating South Florida, Gov. Leghorn then turned his energies to irritating half the population by announcing he wants to redirect \$31 million in funding for the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

With all the twisted reasoning of a viral email attacking Barack Obama's birth certificate, Scott argued it was inappropriate to target a specific private entity to receive state funds, a rationale one never hears from the governor when it comes to shoveling public voucher money into private schools.

Scott was also peeved the coalition's president, Tiffany Carr, was making \$300,000, an awful lot of money, sure, but pretty much in line for salaries for CEOs of comparable nonprofit groups.

Still, in the end, the optics of a governor wanting to deny funds for a group that fights against domestic violence will hardly endear Scott to women. Who handled the PR on this doozy? Bobby Brown?

But Scott's lollapalooza of pandering policy was only hitting its stride, thanks to the tin horns of Florida Legislature.

They prohibited cities from enacting gun-control laws, so Tampa faces the prospect of banning stuff like water pistols, urine-filled baggies, sticks and other toys of mischief in the downtown area during this summer's Republican National Convention. But not guns, which has pretty much made Tampa a national laughingstock.

Since Floridians seem to enjoy shooting each other whenever their feelings are hurt, Mayor Bob Buckhorn sensibly concluded banning water balloons, while still being able to walk around locked and loaded, made little sense and asked Scott to issue an executive order to also ban firearms during the four-day convention.

Scott, no surprise here, said no. Then he went off on a rant about protecting the Second Amendment for paranoid, law-abiding, itchy trigger-finger citizens. The governor also got it wrong when he wrote back to Buckhorn that the mayor was trying to ban firearms from all of downtown. He wasn't. Only the "Event Zone" set aside for protesters, parades and rallies would have been affected.

At least if things go badly because some goober gets riled up, Tampa will know who to blame. Brilliant. Who was the PR genius for this rootin'-tootin' decision? The NRA's Tugboat Annie of Ammo? Marion Hammer? You may all nod, now.

Finally, in his never-ending quest to find government programs that actually work so he can kill them off, once again Scott vetoed funding for the state's 11 regional planning councils, which help local governments develop all manner of programs from hurricane evacuation routes, luring business investment and affordable housing programs.

Why? Scott based his decision on the ramblings of the Cato Institute and one of its deep thinkers, Randal O'Toole, who sees a United Nations conspiracy to take over the world in Arbor Day proclamations. Scott complained the effectiveness of the planning councils can't be measured. But that's only because the governor abolished the agency that evaluates them. Insert "duh" here.

You may slap your forehead now. And it's only Friday.