

By DONALD F. FANNIN

I've followed Doug Guetzloe's career since the 1970s when Doug was student body president at Florida State University. At that time, young Charlie Crist happened to be student body vice president.

After graduation, Doug Guetzloe successfully pursued a calling to public service through political activism as an opponent of government waste and corruption, primarily through the Ax the Tax organization he established and heads.

Charlie Crist chose elective political office as his pathway for public service. Over the years, he rose steadily through the legislative ranks to statewide office and now, of course, holds the Florida governorship.

I've been impressed by Crist, and by Guetzloe, for the courage, persistence and optimism each has shown -- even at times when the odds against success in facing a particular issue have seemed virtually insurmountable. Despite their detractors of one sort or another I've also regarded both men as fundamentally honorable, dedicated to their separate approaches to public service and worthy of the public's trust.

Although I've had contact with Guetzloe and Crist for one reason or another over the years I've never happened to meet either man face-to-face.

On matters of government waste, corruption and the like I've corresponded with Guetzloe. On matters related to such things as the 1983 abduction, robbery and murder of my daughter, the death penalty and so forth I've corresponded with Crist.

Most recently, while he was serving as state attorney general, Crist kindly kept an eye on a development relating to the status of the two men who are serving life terms imposed for first-degree murder in the killing of my daughter.

From the late 1990s to 2003 -- when I had an opportunity to engage in a stint of admittedly fiery, highly-partisan and controversial political writing about government waste and corruption -- I spoke by telephone with Doug Guetzloe from time to time. Occasionally, I called his daily radio program in Orlando to make one point or another.

Largely due to my retirement and changing situation nowadays I have not had direct contact with Guetzloe in the past three years or so. However, I've continued to follow his career.

I've also continued to follow the career of Orange/Osceola State Atty. Lawson Lamar, who I first became aware of in the mid-1970s when -- after years as a newsman -- I worked as a Florida state parole and probation officer stationed in Orlando. Parole and probation people work daily with the state attorney's office, the public defender's office, judges of the Ninth Judicial Circuit, private attorneys, the jails, court clerks, local businesses and the like.

Lawson Lamar and I most definitely are not pals. However, we do happen to have various mutual acquaintances.

In the 1970s Lamar was a young assistant state attorney. In his hopes for higher office he worked industriously to hold the favor of his mentor, then-State Atty. Robert Egan. Obviously, Lamar succeeded in his political quest, even serving awhile as sheriff.

Both Lamar and Egan belong to a Central Florida governmental-political-business-social establishment that long has ruled. It is an establishment notable for its corruption, incompetence, arrogance and waste. Evidence of the problem permeates community activities from horizon to horizon.

In the 1990s, County Commissioner Linda Chapin, a Democrat, became Orange County's first county chairman. That was during Republican Glenda Hood's years-long reign as mayor of Orlando. Hood had succeeded then-Democrat Bill Frederick, who, in his own case, spent 12 years as mayor.

During her county tenure, Linda Chapin had a bitter campaign clash with Fran Pignone, a bosom buddy of Chapin who also served on the county commission. A high point of that fight occurred when Pignone said that, as a pal of Chapin, and as a political insider herself, she well-knew Linda Chapin functioned as a "gatekeeper" who presided over, and protected, "the most corrupt government in Orange County history."

That situation did not change under the likes of deceitful personal injury attorney Mel Martinez, who succeeded Chapin, nor under lifelong political hack, Rich Crotty, who succeeded Martinez. Down at Orlando's City Hall the pattern of corruption, incompetence and waste has continued under another lifelong political hack, Democrat Buddy Dyer, who succeeded Glenda Hood as mayor.

A common hope of all these political parasites -- and their equally conniving allies in the communications media and elsewhere throughout the community -- is that Doug Guetzloe and his Ax the Tax movement finally will be knocked out of action, removed as resolute foes of dirty schemes to grab -- and misuse -- more and more of citizens' money.

As state attorney Lawson Lamar also is a "gatekeeper" of sorts. With control of his agency's budget -- coupled with the awesome power of prosecutorial discretion and control of the grand jury system -- Lamar is strategically placed within the establishment to preside over an all-out attack on Doug Guetzloe.

He now is doing so. It doesn't have anything to do with justice.

It has everything to do with protecting the prevailing establishment and with trying to stop Doug Guetzloe from being an effective player at this time in such matters as the struggle to rip off the public with a new arena for the greedy billionaire/millionaires of the Orlando Magic basketball team...to make senseless expenditures at Orlando's Citrus Bowl stadium...to use public funds to build a performing arts center in downtown Orlando...and...to shove down our throats the ongoing, utterly-indefensible scheme to waste hundreds of millions of dollars on an idiotic, largely-useless, fixed-rail commuter line -- a bottomless money drain that would serve virtually none of the American taxpayers who would be robbed in perpetuity to pay for it.

In a piddling, misdemeanor, election-law pamphleteering case -- filed recently by Lawson Lamar before the Orange County Court in Orlando -- Doug Guetzloe has pleaded no contest in order to speed an appeal. At the appellate level there is a likelihood the case will be thrown out under the free speech protection of the U.S. Constitution.

In the handling of Guetzloe's case County Court Judge C. Jeffery Arnold pandered sickeningly to the political establishment, especially in his unconscionable, astonishing imposition of a 60-day jail term that now is being held in abeyance during the appeal.

For the benefit of newcomers to the Orlando area it is worth noting that the lengthy roster of Ninth Circuit judges has no shortage of losers. After all, it is this crowd that has kept Belvin Perry Jr. on as its chief judge after he refused to resign upon being exposed as a pathetic philanderer who had disgraced the judiciary, his wife and family -- the entire community -- by getting caught up with a female employee in a filthy 1998 sex scandal.

The various costs to the taxpayers to dispose of the matter included a lump-sum payout of \$65,000. So much for Belvin Perry Jr. and his sleazy pals within the Ninth Judicial Circuit. Before becoming a judge, incidentally, Perry worked alongside Lawson Lamar as an assistant state attorney. As a matter of fact, several of the Ninth Circuit judges are former Lamar associates at the state attorney's office.

On March 28 Lawson Lamar announced that a grand jury panel now has been persuaded to indict Guetzloe on two felony counts involving alleged perjury. Lamar believes Guetzloe lied during sworn testimony given to the Florida Elections Commission.

Guetzloe is free under \$10,000 bond pending action in these new cases. The 52-year-old husband and father remains upbeat despite the ceaseless legal attacks and health problems that have included a battle with cancer. As to the perjury charges Guetzloe responded, "I would never lie, commit perjury."

For decades Doug Guetzloe has fought many, many battles against greedy, lying and conniving establishment wrongdoers. Thus far, he has managed to withstand them all -- even fending off efforts made against him some years ago by organized crime.

In his rough and tumble style that ruffles many feathers, Doug Guetzloe has -- with great courage -- gone head to head, toe to toe, with countless wrongdoers in his efforts to block governmental crookedness and waste. Doug Guetzloe -- and brave activists among his Ax the Tax ranks -- have been men and women who are actually willing these days to stand up and fight openly in the public arena on behalf of the taxpayers -- not just sit around in private settings whining and complaining.

Just now, Lawson Lamar and the establishment seem to hold a win-win advantage. If Lamar and his henchmen can make good on the cases they've brought against Guetzloe they very likely will have succeeded in shoving him out of the arena.

Even if Guetzloe wins Lamar still will have carried much favor with his establishment cronies for having dragged Guetzloe and Ax the Tax repeatedly through the mud -- and, especially -- for keeping Guetzloe and his allies preoccupied with legal battles and, thus, crippling their fight against the ongoing corruption and waste.

It seems to me that all decent, frugal people of whatever race, creed or political affiliation should hope Doug Guetzloe soon will be able to prove his innocence and win exoneration. If not, the taxpayers and their families can expect in the days to come to find themselves much worse off for having lost a formidable champion.