



CHRISTA COLLINS
SEE PAGE 6

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IN THIS ISSUE:

LAW

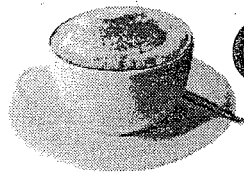
Lawyers go after
national insurer / 6

LAW

Attorney loses license
- a second time / 7

75 cents

September 9-15, 2005



COFFEE TALK

The politics of strange bedfellows

Tampa trial lawyer **Tom Scarritt** apparently endeared himself to colleagues during the first year of his two-year term on the **Florida Ethics Commission**. They elected him chairman a week or so ago.

It's a bit of a surprise for some political observers. Some expected **John Grant**, the commission's vice chairman and a former state senator from Tampa, to take over as commission chairman for the 2005-06 term. Only Gov. **Jeb Bush** didn't reappoint Grant, a Republican, to a second term.

While no one is talking publicly, it appears Bush acceded to Senate President **Tom Lee**. The Brandon Republican has opposed lobbyists serving on a commission that regulates the ethics of public officials. Grant represents a number of public and private organizations as a registered lobbyist.

The decision not to reappoint Grant apparently had nothing to do with his performance on the ethics commission. Some say he deliberated fairly and adhered to the rule of law.

Now Scarritt's appointment last year and elevation to chair this year only proves the old saying that politics is all about strange bedfellows.

Not only is Scarritt a trial lawyer, a profession that Bush loves to berate, but he also is an ardent Democrat. Not long ago, for instance, sources say he sponsored a successful fund-raiser at his South Tampa home for U.S. Rep. **Jim Davis**, a Democratic gubernatorial candidate.

Johnnie Byrd, the former state House speaker from Plant City, originally appointed Scarritt to the ethics commission. The Republican Byrd made that appointment partly on a recommendation from trial lawyer Steve Burton, a Byrd ally and managing partner in the Tampa office of Broad & Cassel.

In addition to Scarritt's election, the bipartisan commission also elected Pensacola physician **Kurt Jones**, another Democrat, as vice chairman.