

opinion

NEWS
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A VERSE FOR TODAY
We, according to His promise, look for
new heavens and a new earth in which
righteousness dwells.
2 Peter 3:13

Council should correct city's bad move

From the start, the opposition to allowing disabled veterans into a 12-unit apartment complex in Springfield has been extreme.

And now that City Council is considering a \$2 million settlement over a discrimination lawsuit, the opponents have shown they still don't get it. Take for example, the admission of Springfield resident Jack Meeks last year in a deposition that he had spent over \$100,000 fighting the complex. He's not done. And now elite zoning lawyer Paul Harden has turned up to advocate for the Springfield residents. This isn't normal.

Or the curious statement of City Councilman Reggie Gaffney at a public meeting of Springfield Preservation regarding At-Large City Council Member Anna Lopez Brosche.

"We went to lunch today and we talked strictly about this," Gaffney said at the meeting.

If true, talking about a City Council matter outside of a noticed meeting would be a violation of Florida's Government in the Sunshine Law.

Brosche told the Times-Union she never had that lunch with Gaffney. Gaffney admitted to the Times-Union that he misspoke. Wow. That was a confabulation of epic proportions. But then nothing about this zoning case has been normal.

Ability Housing simply proposed taking a 12-unit apartment complex, fixing it up and placing homeless people there, mostly veterans.

The respected nonprofit has had success providing affordable housing elsewhere in Jacksonville so the demonization of this project was unjustified.

But the fact that residents would be disabled set off a firestorm in Springfield. Every possible dysfunction was projected on these residents. They might be out-of-control alcoholics or even a threat to elementary students, the opponents contended.

However, Ability Housing has Disability Rights

Florida, the U.S. Justice Department and the Americans with Disabilities Act. The Mayor's Office and Office of the General Counsel have approved the settlement.

The settlement, besides paying some of the legal bills of the plaintiffs, would basically commit the city to building about 12 housing units for the disabled in Duval County, not necessarily in Springfield. Ability Housing would be able to compete for this contract.

Of course, Springfield residents have every right to defend their property values. But federal law does not give them the right to discriminate against protected groups like racial minorities, women, the elderly and disabled people.

NIMBYISM ON STEROIDS

At a meeting of the City Council's Land Use and Zoning Committee Tuesday evening, the same tired arguments were made by residents.

We like disabled people, we respect Ability Housing, but we already have enough of these facilities in our neighborhood, opponents said.

People today wouldn't say that they have enough blacks, women or elderly in their neighborhood. Of course not. Those are protected classes.

In fact, that would be against the law.

And that is why the city and the plaintiffs — Ability Housing, Disability Rights Florida and the U.S. Justice Department — entered into a settlement of a lawsuit.

There is a feeling among some Springfield advocates that city lawyers are incapable or unwilling to fight the federal government. But fighting this is a lost cause.

But shouldn't disabled veterans be placed near easy transportation distance of the VA Clinic, near the city's public hospital (UF Health Jacksonville) and near job training of the FSCJ Downtown Campus? Of course.

The city is getting off cheaply by promising to build about 12 housing units. New Orleans in a similar case had to add 350 housing units on top of making good on 40 units that were first denied.

A few Springfield advocates warn that this settlement would affect the rest of the Duval County and the rest

of the country. News flash: The rest of the country is already covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Several formerly homeless people, now residents of Ability Housing projects, spoke in favor of the nonprofit. Their testimony made it clear that this specialized housing was the vital first step in changing their lives.

The "housing first" strategy has been shown to work as a powerful incentive for the homeless and disabled to straighten out their lives.

Some of the Springfield neighbors say that their historic district is only 1 square mile. True, which means there are not that many opportunities to place the sort of housing units there that they dislike.

The fact is the settlement would not destroy the zoning overlay for the historic district. Housing developments still would be covered by all the usual restrictions, such as height and intensity.

The only restriction is that disabled people can't be discriminated against. They have the right, protected by federal law, to live in any neighborhood in Jacksonville.

City Councilman Bill Gulliford said at the Rules Committee earlier this week that he understands the issue. He was one of the 5-0 votes for the settlement in committee, but he dislikes the federal government telling the city what to do.

Well, when it involves discrimination, unfortunately, there is a long history in this country of the federal government having to get involved.

City Councilman Danny Becton, chairman of the Land Use and Zoning Committee, said that he plans to call a noticed meeting in which he will go over the proposed settlement line by line.

That's a rare move but fine as a matter of public transparency. But right and wrong cannot be compromised.

Bottom line: Federal law prohibits discrimination of disabled people.

Springfield has come a long way in recent years. The neighborhood deserves support and protection on many fronts but not if it involves discrimination.

So much time and money was been wasted fighting this worthy cause, housing for homeless veterans.

Defending Trump

Answers to criticism of president

The letter from the reader titled "Facts on Trump" presumably relies on the notion that something truly exists or happens (facts) and those facts are not contested (undisputed) regarding President Donald Trump.

Let's take a look at the reader's statements about Trump:

- Donald Trump received fewer popular votes than Hillary Clinton.

True. The fact is 528 electors actually elect the president and vice president not the popular vote. Move on!

- Trump's inauguration was smaller than Obama's.

True. However, the fact is the size of an inauguration crowd rarely portends the relative popularity or success of any one incoming administration. Move on!

- Millions of illegal immigrants did not vote.

True. However, the fact is illegal immigrants (non-citizens) are prohibited from voting in federal elections. The more vexing issue is over 90 million eligible voters did not vote in the 2016 election.

- Michael Flynn was fired as the national security adviser.

True. The fact is, high-profile public officials are subject to an extraordinary vetting process where the bright light of day exposes an area that requires correction. It was corrected, he's gone. Move on!

- Trump's proposed health care bill throws millions off health care.

Maybe. However, the fact is many insurance companies are abandoning the Affordable Care Act, leaving millions of customers with only one provider option, which will leave millions of Americans without any affordable coverage.

- There is no proof Obama wire-tapped Trump.

Maybe. Asserting "no proof" is analogous to "never say never." The fact is those assertions have an uncanny way of sneaking up on you when you least expect it.

- Obama was born in the U.S.

True. Again, move on please!

- Russia interfered with our election.

Maybe. The letter writer's access to indisputable facts is indeed impressive. What was the source? Edward Snowden or Julian Assange, maybe?

- Trump's budget promotes food insecurity, ending Meals on Wheels.

Maybe. However, the fact is Trump's budget has not been approved. The adage, "focusing on the ant when the elephant is about to step on you" comes to mind.

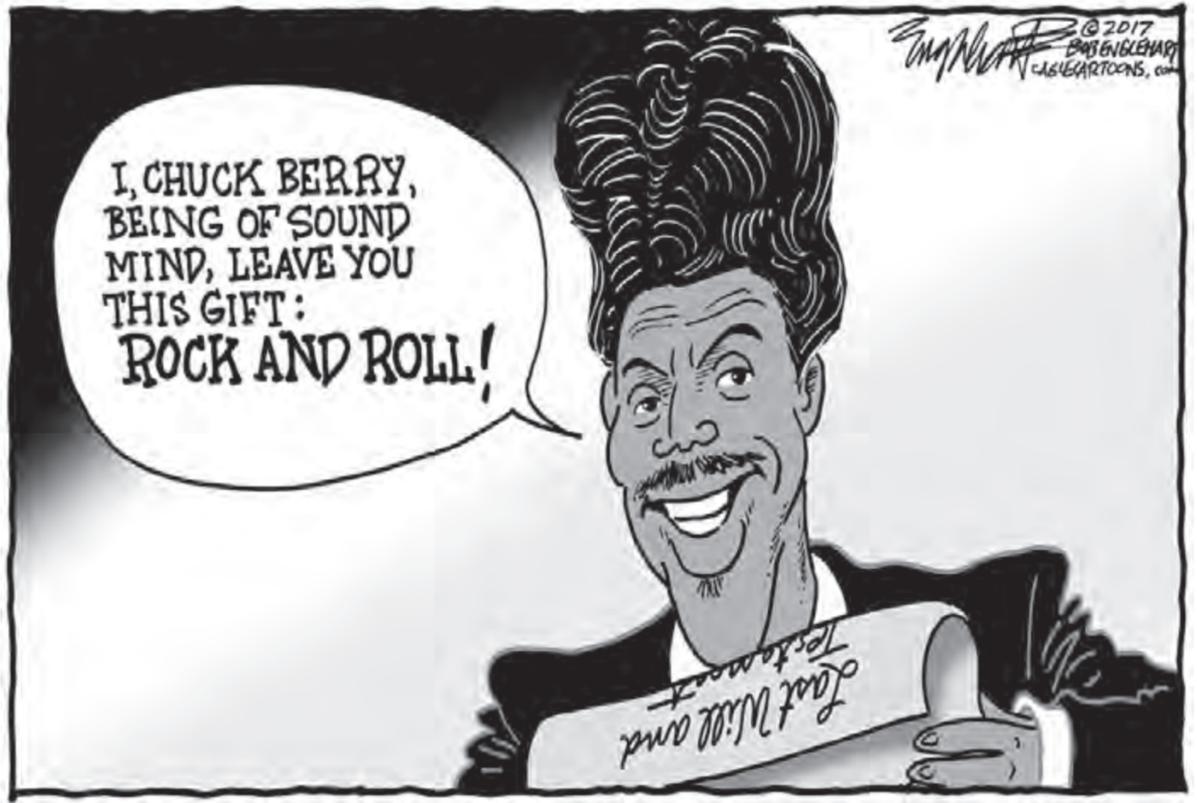
The "elephant" in this case is the poverty rate, which has ranged from 11 percent and 15 percent since 1964, and in 2015 was 13.5 percent.

Poverty knows no political affiliation and is a huge problem that requires the immediate attention of serious-minded citizens.

- Finally, facts are the facts.

True. Let's all stick to the facts.
D. L. Rausch, Atlantic Beach

Another view: Bob Englehart Cagle Cartoons



Letters from Readers

CONSTITUTION

JUST AMEND IT

This is the greatest nation that has ever existed on the face of the Earth.

There are several reasons for this, but one is that we are governed by a system of laws and principles.

These laws and principles are based on the Constitution.

There are people who say that the Constitution is a living, breathing document. On the surface that sounds reasonable because we live in a world two centuries removed from the world in which that document was created.

The challenge with that kind of thinking, however, is that our laws would be based on quicksand. There would be no solid foundation. The law would be based on nothing more than how some judge felt that day.

The geniuses who created our Constitution also created the amendment process to make it relevant to today's world. This document is revered, not just here but around the world.

Without it freedom would only be a distant memory.
Charles Bickerstaff, Orange Park

MEDIA AND TRUMP

TIRED OF MEDIA'S WAR

For the last two days, every negative adjective and adverb possible have permeated every news story pertaining to our president.

Scare tactics for the evolving health bill, huge costs for the elderly and the lower income citizens in the offing.

The final version has not been completed, but the press has declared the untenable choice will be food or health care for groups of people.

Huge subsidies will be lost by some but no mention of who pays those subsidies or how long they will last. What then?

Has The Associated Press done an analysis of the number of people receiving subsidies and the cost to the govern-

ment (you who pay the taxes) each year? Is this sustainable?

AP reporters should stop being Democrats and start being Americans.

Give those who voted our president into office a fair opportunity to be heard.

Janet Rigby, Atlantic Beach

ENTITLEMENTS

TOO MANY OF THEM

The bottom line with Obamacare is that millions of hardworking Americans are paying for other Americans' free stuff.

If you're getting \$1,500 in subsidies from the government (paid for by workers) for health insurance, it's just another entitlement like welfare, food stamps and housing.

I'm 53. I've never seen so many Americans taking advantage of the system in my entire life.

And the Democratic Party is the party of the millions voting for free handouts. That's why so many people voted for Hillary Clinton despite her corruption.

It's getting worse. Trump needs to cut it all off!

Nobody said life was easy; maybe you have to get an extra job to make ends

meet. My father had to do that.

Let's go back to the health insurance we had prior to Obama. That would be a great start. Then we go from there.

I'm self-employed, had great insurance prior to Obamacare, had lower deductibles and paid \$600 per month.

When Obama took over with this disastrous health insurance, my premiums went up to \$1,800 per month and my deductibles tripled.

Robin Springer, Yulee

MEDIA AND TRUMP

OBAMA TREATED DIFFERENTLY

Dean Baquet, executive editor of The New York Times, said on CNN that the mission of news organizations is clearer — to hold President Donald Trump and others accountable.

Where has Baquet been the last eight years?

Michael Pelt, Jacksonville

NONPROFITS

FUNDRAISING ISSUES

Motivated by the spirit of Christmas in 2009, I responded to a fundraising letter and sent a check to a Clay County nonprofit. Soon thereafter, I decided to change banks.

I moved my balance to my new bank and patiently waited for the check to clear. Late in the summer of 2010, I was about to close the account and let the recipient deal with the bounced check when the check was finally cashed.

From that experience, I concluded that the nonprofit was doing just fine and didn't need any more money from me. I did not respond to its next letter.

I was not forced by economic hardship in the 2009 recession to stop my giving; I was stopped by the evident lack of urgent need by that nonprofit.

I recommend that nonprofits promptly cash checks to avoid the impression that one gave me.

Tom Armistead, Orange Park

LETTER POLICY

Letters of about 200 words are preferred. Letters are edited for space, clarity and newspaper style. Include a name, address, occupation and telephone number. Only the name, city and occupation (when relevant) are published. Letters with a clear, concise message have the best chance of being published.

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