

# viewpoint

## OPINIONS PAGE BLOG

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# Corps deserves little trust on impact of dredging



**ron littlepage**  
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If you're more concerned about the negative impact on the health of the St. Johns River caused by dredging the shipping channel ever deeper than are the Jacksonville Port Authority board members who are gung-ho on the idea, there are good reasons you are nervous.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which has approved the project, has a dismal record of devastating Florida's fragile natural areas at the urging of business interests who care more about making money than protecting the state's unique environment.

Take the Kissimmee River, for example. As it was created, the river twisted and turned for 103 miles from Lake Kissimmee to Lake Okeechobee.

To grasp how much the river meandered through its flood plain, the actual distance between the two lakes was not even half of the river's length — less than 50 miles.

The river and its floodplain created an

ecosystem that thrived with wildlife — herons, egrets, wood storks, waterfowl and eagles.

As floodplains are designed to do, heavy rains flooded them as a part of the ecosystem's cycle of life.

A strong hurricane in 1947 produced heavier rain and more flooding than usual. Floods don't sit well with developers and agricultural interests.

Enter the Army Corps of Engineers.

The Corps' answer was to turn the Kissimmee into a drainage ditch. In the 1960s, its 103-mile length was shortened to 56 miles.

Scientists warned that this was not a good idea. The Corps proceeded anyway. The scientists were right.

The floodplain dried up, and with it went the ecosystem that had flourished there.

There was also environmental damage to Lake Okeechobee as the now straight ditch flushed more and more algae-causing nitrates into the lake.

As often happens when the Corps damages the environment, the Corps gets hired to try to fix its mistake.

The restoration project for the Kissim-

me, at a cost of \$1 billion, began in the 1990s.

Returning the river to its winding path has already restored 60,000 acres of wetlands and brought back the wildlife.

The goal is to finish the restoration by 2020.

An article written by the Corps called the Kissimmee River Restoration Project contains a section titled: "Lesson Learned — Natural Systems Serve a Purpose."

Duh, you think?

It would seem the Corps would have learned that lesson with what we now call the Cross Florida Barge Canal.

What the Corps envisioned in the 1930s was a 30-foot-deep ship channel that would cut across North Florida for 200 miles from the Atlantic Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico.

It would start in Jacksonville, and Jacksonville business interests were among those urging the project on.

Just imagine the environmental damage that would have been done to the St. Johns, the Ocklawaha and the Withlacoochee rivers if the project hadn't been halted after opposition arose.

But the idea came back, this time as a

shallower barge canal, and work began in 1964.

Environmental activists, led by Marjorie Carr, finally put an end to it when construction was halted in 1971.

But we are left with a major scar created by the work of the Corps — the once free-flowing Ocklawaha, considered one of the most beautiful rivers in Florida, remains interrupted by the Rodman dam and a reservoir that serves no purpose other than as a reminder of another misguided project by the Corps.

The Corps and the JaxPort board members try mightily to assure us that dredging the St. Johns shipping channel from its current 40-foot depth to 47 feet, blasting through tons of bedrock to get there, won't harm the river's health.

The Kissimmee River. The barge canal. The coral reefs in Biscayne Bay. The Everglades.

The record of the Corps doesn't inspire confidence, and JaxPort officials have never been able to say where the money will come from to hire the Corps again to mitigate the damage if they are wrong.

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## Broke Puerto Rico, strapped Illinois may be bad omens



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Illinois could be the first state to see its debt plunge into junk-bond status.

Puerto Rico, which owes \$74 billion to creditors who hold its tax-exempt bonds, and \$40 billion in unfunded pension liabilities, has already entered bankruptcy.

The island's imaginative 38-year-old governor, Ricardo Rossello, however, has a solution. Call Uncle Sam.

Rossello held a plebiscite, with a 23 percent turnout, that voted 97 percent to make Puerto Rico our 51st state.

"(T)he federal government will no longer be able to ignore the voice of the majority of the American citizens in Puerto Rico," said Rossello.

Had the governor been talking about the island's right to become free and independent, he would have had a point. But statehood inside the USA is something Uncle Sam decides.

Puerto Rico's defaults on its debts may soon be our problem. Many bond funds in which Americans have invested their savings and retirement money are full of Puerto Rican bonds.

According to The New York Times, the U.S. Virgin Islands, the Northern Marianas and Guam are in the same boat.

With 100,000 people, the Virgin Islands owe \$6.5 billion to pensioners and creditors.

Then there is Connecticut, a state that has long ranked in the top tier in per capita income and wealth.

Connecticut, too, appears wobbly. Rising pension benefits, the cost of servicing the state debt and falling tax revenue due to fleeing residents and companies like Aetna and General Electric have dropped Connecticut to near the national bottom in growth prospects.

As its example of a welfare state going belly up, the EU offers us Greece. And questions arise from all of these examples. Has the old New Deal formula of "tax and tax, spend and spend, and elect and elect" finally run its course?

Across the West, social welfare states are threatened by falling revenues, taxpayer flight, rising debt as a share of GDP, sinking bond ratings and proliferating defaults.

Record high social welfare spending is among the reasons that Western nations skimp on defense. Even the Americans, who spent 9 percent of GDP on defense under President John F. Kennedy and 6 percent under President Ronald Reagan, are now well below that, though U.S. security commitments are as great as they were in the Cold War.

Some Democrats are discovering there are limits to how much the government can consume of the nation's wealth without adversely affecting their own fortunes.

And in the Obamacare debate this week, Republicans are running head-on into the reality that clawing back social welfare benefits already voted may be political suicide. Has democratic socialism passed its peak?

The cost of pensions and health care for the elderly is inexorably going up. Immigration into the West, almost entirely from the Third World, is bringing in peoples who, on balance, take more in social welfare than they pay in taxes.

Deficits and national debts as a share of GDP are rising. And the infrastructure of the West — roads, bridges, tunnels, ports, airports, subways, train tracks — continues to crumble for lack of investment.

Are Puerto Rico and Illinois the harbingers of what is to come?

## Another view: Tom Janssen The Netherlands



## Another view: Andy Marlette Creators Syndicate



## Jacksonville is a city of second chances

A remarkable thing has been happening in Jacksonville.

Our governmental, philanthropic, business, criminal justice and nonprofit sectors have joined forces to address a corrosive societal problem that has affected our city for too long.

More than 700,000 inmates released annually from federal and state prisons in the U.S. face a maze of obstacles.

The most difficult obstacle is the entrenched barrier to employment. Without a job and other re-entry assistance, nearly two-thirds of ex-offenders are re-arrested within three years of their release.

But the situation isn't hopeless, thanks to an amazing Jacksonville program.

I'm referring to the Ready4Work program offered by Operation New Hope Inc., a nonprofit founded in Jacksonville in 1999 by Kevin Gay.

Operation New Hope is dedicated to helping ex-offenders and, more recently, judicially diverted offenders realize their second chances to become productive members of society.

The Ready4Work program, which has been recognized by three U.S. presidents, George W. Bush, Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, provides its clients essential life and job skills to help ex-offenders obtain sustainable employment, and continues to guide and support them for a year.

Since the program's inception in 2003, Ready4Work has assisted more than 4,200 ex-offenders. The great success of this program is shown by a three-year recidivism rate of only 29 percent for those who become employed. That's less than half the comparable Florida rate!

But Operation New Hope hasn't done this alone! This past month, Gov. Rick Scott recognized Jacksonville's Ready4Work program, along with its replicated programs in Tampa and Tallahassee.

Champions of Operation New Hope

in the Legislature are Sens. Rob Bradley, Aaron Bean and Audrey Gibson, along with Rep. Travis Cummings.

Our governor and legislators recognize that the Ready4Work program is compassionate and produces a substantial return in public safety and in tax savings.

The 2013 cohort of Ready4Work graduates saved the state approximately \$8.8 million by moving them into productive roles as citizens.

The city of Jacksonville also has been a great partner and supporter of the Ready4Work program over the past 10 years by committing millions of dollars of Jacksonville Journey program funding.

Funding for infrastructure and employees have come from partners like the Neviasser, Weaver, Chartrand and Petway foundations.

Operation New Hope could not be more grateful for their generous support!

Of course, the Ready4Work program needs the hundreds of local employers who have shown not only a willingness, but an eagerness, to hire the highly-vetted graduates of that program.

It is worth mentioning the Jacksonville Chamber of Commerce's recent initiative, Project Open Door, to promote "Ban the Box" on its members' employment applications that eliminates automatic rejection of those with criminal records. Incidentally, the City of Jacksonville was the first in the nation to Ban the Box on its employment applications.

Finally, I would like to recognize the cooperative alignment of our State Attorney Melissa Nelson and Public Defender Charlie Cofer along with our local judiciary. They are pursuing a new diversion program for young offenders.

Operation New Hope is blessed to be so greatly supported by this caring community. Jacksonville clearly is a City of Second Chances!

L. Kinder Cannon III is board chairman of Operation New Hope in Jacksonville.

## Frederick Douglass is good role model for optimism today



**clarence page**  
tribune media services

President Donald Trump has reminded me of another side to the Fourth of July.

It occurred earlier this year when he seemed to many ears to be raising Frederick Douglass from the dead.

While praising the new National Museum of African-American History and Culture in a meeting with black professionals, the president said, "Frederick Douglass is an example of somebody who's done an amazing job and is getting recognized more and more, I notice."

Douglass is one of my favorite role models.

He escaped slavery, read voraciously and became the nation's most influential African-American abolitionist, orator, journalist, social reformer and statesman in the 19th century.

His often quoted Fourth of July speech (actually delivered on July 5, 1852) to the women of the Rochester Anti-Slavery Sewing Society, offers a bracing counterpoint to the unbridled flag-waving in most Independence Day speeches.

Less than a decade before the Civil War that was approaching like an oncoming train, Douglass described in sobering detail the horrors endured by a class of Americans for whom liberty was still only a dream.

"What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July?" Douglass asks. "I answer; a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim."

"To him, your celebration is a sham," he continued; "Your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciation of tyrants, brass fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade and solemnity, are, to him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy — a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. There is not a nation on the Earth guilty of practices more shocking and bloody than are the people of the United States, at this very hour."

Yet, Douglass ended on an upbeat tone. "Notwithstanding the dark picture I have this day presented, of the state of the nation," he said. "I do not despair of this country."

Instead, Douglass said he saw "forces in operation which must inevitably work the downfall of slavery."

Some people read Douglass' words and hear only his anger. As an aspiring black student journalist, I heard his relentless optimism.

If a self-educated, former slave could make it in mainstream America, his words told me, so could I.

Douglass hated America's tolerance for slavery, but he appreciated its potential for improvement. That's why he urged President Abraham Lincoln and others to reject the "recolonization" movement that pushed to deport slaves back to Africa. Black Americans fought and worked hard for this country, too, Douglass insisted, and they were not about to give up on it.

Douglass died at age 78 of a heart attack after attending a convention for women's suffrage with his friend Susan B. Anthony. When a young black man asked him for career advice, Douglass answered, "Agitate, agitate, agitate."

That's America's promise. Even in today's more enlightened post-Obama America, Douglass still would find a lot to agitate about.

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