

opinion

Mark Nusbaum, President
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Editorial board: Those at left, Bobby Martin,
editorial writers Roger Brown and Paula Horvath.
A new group of citizen members will join soon.

A VERSE FOR TODAY

If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.
Romans 12:18

State primary elections

Don't shut out voters

There is something anti-democratic about the way Florida shuts voters out of primaries.

That's democratic, small "D," because both parties tend to play favorites.

While an increasing number of Floridians are declaring themselves independents, they often are shut out of deciding who will represent them.

Here's the deal: When every candidate comes from one party, the primary becomes open, serving as the general election, meaning everyone can vote.

But if there is a write-in candidate, the primary closes.

That means in the general election, voters will see one name and a line to write in a candidate.

It's a sham that voters are shut out from the real election.

And it's a shame that during the 21st century, these dirty tricks are actually part of the official election system.

In the 2014 election, seven House seats were decided by Republican primary voters. All seven had only write-in or minor party opposition in the general election, reports the Times-Herald Tallahassee Bureau.

INDEPENDENTS ARE GROWING IN NUMBER

This is occurring despite the fact that NPA voters (No Party Affiliation) represent the fastest growing segment of the electorate, a "sleeping giant" that includes many young and Hispanic voters.

Many of these NPA voters don't vote — and it's no wonder. The system is set up to disenfranchise them.

Consider these numbers in the last 20 years:

- Registered Democrats have dropped from 47 percent to 38 percent.

- Registered Republicans have dropped from 41 percent to 35 percent.

When NPA voters are combined with minor party voters, they actually outnumber Republicans in the Democratic strongholds of Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties.

In Miami-Dade, there are three state House districts where both Democrats and Republicans are outnumbered by NPA and minor party voters.

And these independent voters outnumber Democrats in seven counties, including St. Johns and Clay.

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT NEEDED

So it's no wonder that election results in presidential years are so different — many more voters are engaged, in part because the system is not discriminating against them.

Given this preface, it's no wonder that there is a movement to amend the state Constitution to open the election process.

This is a good reason for a citizen-led constitutional amendment because neither political party would want to give up its advantages.

Called Florida Fair and Open Primaries, the amendment would allow the top two vote getters to advance to the general election regardless of party affiliation. If a state office candidate obtains a majority of the votes in the primary, that person would be elected. Candidates could still have party affiliation indicated on the ballot.

We already know this process can work: It's the one we use in Jacksonville for city elections.

And it wouldn't affect races like presidential primaries, which would still be held the same way.

California and Washington have this open primary system. Louisiana and Nebraska, meanwhile, have modified open primary systems.

California once had one of the nation's most partisan environments. But now that state has more voter access, a more functional legislature and more competitive elections.

That's exactly why we need a similar system in effect all across Florida — one that's much more inclusive than our current process.

Opening elections to more voters is the right thing to do.

Plans, passions, dreams

Do a checkup on your future life

The dawning of a new year often marks a period of reflection on where people have been and where they'd like to be going.

For many people, the comparison results in a number of New Year's resolutions to address problematic or ignored portions of their lives.

Usually these resolutions revolve around spending more time with family, losing weight, getting in shape, quitting smoking or drinking, getting organized and helping others.

With the spirit of a new beginning clearly in mind, AARP has launched a 2016 campaign to get people to reflect on what they really want out of their lives and how to achieve it.

Did you set aside your passions during your early adult years to focus on work and family?

Are the things you once held as important still pertinent?

Are you who you want to be moving forward?

Called "A Life Reimagined," the program serves as kind of an annual checkup, particularly for people going through or looking forward to life transitions, such as retirements and empty nests.

"It's a time for people to take a deep breath, reflect back and think, 'OK, what can I do differently,'" says Nancy Stanton, the Jacksonville-based associated state director for AARP.

The program revolves around two-hour workshops held by AARP in which participants will look at what's relevant in their lives, passions they've set aside and dreams for the future.

The bottom line is that people need to consciously plan for their futures as far as community, relationships, work and recreation. As Stanton says, "You'd better be making these years count because this is it."

Although the January workshops can be especially helpful for people in their 50s and 60s, they're open to anyone.

Interested people can register by going to the local AARP website at: bit.ly/1n2uYau.

Make a resolution now to reimagine your life.

Another view: Michael Ramirez Creators Syndicate



Lead letter

A 401(k) for police, fire won't work

Mayor Lenny Curry's work in addressing Jacksonville's unfunded pension liability is heartening.

The members of the previous Pension Task Force spent a great deal of time putting together a plan to reduce future costs to create a sustainable system for Jacksonville's Police and Fire Pension fund.

The task force urged the city to find a solution for funding the liability, and Curry has taken on that challenge.

I am concerned, however, that the mayor's plan calls for a 401(k)-type system (defined contribution plan) rather than the current defined benefit plan.

The task force reviewed a 401(k) alternative, and we concluded that it was neither necessary nor beneficial.

Revisions made to the defined benefit plan for new benefits have brought costs to the same funding level that would likely be paid under a 401(k) type plan, so implementing the mayor's proposed plan is not likely to save any money.

In fact, abandoning the defined

Traditional pensions are a deterrent to misconduct: employees who commit certain offenses must forfeit their pensions.

benefit plan will add substantial costs in the future and will reduce the quality of our police and fire departments.

Defined benefit plans provide benefits at the back end of a public servant's career, but if the employee leaves early, he or she forfeits all or most of the benefit.

The 401(k) plans permit the employee to leave with the full value of the retirement benefit, so employees don't face the disincentive against early departure.

While turnover has become routine in most of the business world, it is destructive to public safety systems.

Traditional pensions, in fact, serve as a deterrent to misconduct: Employees who commit certain offenses must forfeit their

pensions.

Public safety training has become so rigorous that we now invest over \$100,000 to train a single officer.

Creating long-term employment is necessary to make the upper ranks hard-earned prizes that are filled by experienced and accomplished professionals.

Further, the wisdom that accompanies age helps to create a competent and capable command structure.

Creating a short-term public safety system by eliminating the defined benefit plan runs counter to these important goals for public safety agencies.

Abandoning the defined benefit plan will create higher compensation costs. A 401(k) plan will not keep officers on the job for long, and eventually the city will be forced to increase pay to stem the turnover.

I urge city officials and legislators considering this plan to take a look at the cost in the first few years and the substantial effects that will result in the future.

Tad Delegal, lawyer, Jacksonville

Letters from Readers

MAYOR'S PENSION PLAN Referendum needed

The mayor's pension proposal has some good points and some not so good.

It lacks details, but it does show that the mayor is a good politician and sees more opportunity to spend our tax dollars.

This is not an extension of the Better Jacksonville Plan tax that is scheduled to end in 2030.

Please do not give the City Council the authority to vote on a tax increase. Is the mayor afraid the citizens will vote it down? Probably for a good reason since it has been City Council that has gone along with the pension plan provisions that are now causing us a problem.

It does make sense to combine oversight of all Jacksonville pension plans.

Look what our existing approach at oversight has produced. Almost all businesses have converted to a 401(k). That clearly is the direction we need to go though I am not sure it should only apply to new employees.

We are clearly on the way to Detroit. Some of the impact is being mitigated by our growing population and economy, but that is the track we are on.

John Tomke, Jacksonville

LOOKING AT FUTURE

Youth want quality of life

The future is crystal clear:

The 18 to 35 crowd is poised to take over control of this country.

And if you have been caught off guard by the young Bernie Sanders supporters, you have not been paying attention.

His supporters are the youth of America. And they want a better world with a more equal distribution of wealth.

They do not care about material things. More and more of them are moving back to the urban cores of our big cities. They view cars as simply modes of transportation — and a house in the suburbs as yesterday's news.

And they have no problem with the mixing of the races. Biracial marriage is today's norm.

Take a look at the Silicon Valley entrepreneurs. They want clean water, clean air and safe environ-

ment to raise their children.

They are quietly as antiwar as the '60s generation.

This generation will not work 60-hour weeks — they would rather earn less money to spend more time with their families.

Rick Mansfield, Ponte Vedra Beach

PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN Media are letting us down

Media coverage of this current presidential campaign is nothing short of a farce and a shameful attempt to lure readers and viewers to things that have no bearing on America's future or actual pertinent information on which candidate would best serve the country's well-being.

The coverage of Donald Trump comes to mind. How many more times will the media focus on some inane comment of his regarding either Jeb Bush's or Hillary Clinton's low-energy levels? Or Trump's comment about Bill Clinton? Or his other comments belittling fellow candidates?

How does this inform the American public other than to draw viewers or readers?

Trump seems to focus on these comments because he knows little about foreign policy, economics, health care, education, the environment, defense or any other policy that requires a thoughtful plan for our future.

A number of the candidates have actually worked hard to pre-

pare definitive policies on foreign policy, immigration, health care, the budget, education issues, the environment and economics.

These are either given scant attention or none at all when these are the issues that matter to the American people.

Or at least they should.

It takes a responsible media to enlighten the American public on the substantive issues of the day and the candidates' stances on them. That is what will matter most in the future, not silly comments on someone's appearance or something that happened 20 years before.

It is incumbent upon the media to report on the issues in a fair and unbiased manner so that Americans know where each candidate stands, enabling voters to make the most important decision for the country.

The whole world is watching!

Terri Quint, St. Augustine

SPYING ON ISRAEL?

Disturbing news

You may have heard a blurb on the news about the U.S. spying on Israel.

Then nothing.

Then the Washington Post comes out with alarming information that the NSA (National Security Administration) did not just spy on Israel but Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu himself!

With that said, the NSA now has info on Congress, private companies and anyone who may have talked to Netanyahu about who knows what.

The most troubling thing is that now the administration, including the president, also knows what was said to the prime minister and how every one of the president's political enemies feel and how they will most likely vote or act on the Israel situation.

Let me remind everyone that so far this is just a story. There have been no charges filed.

But if proven, how much more can our nation stand from this administration?

The Constitution has been trampled by this administration. And I for one am sick and tired of it.

May God bless America!

Ron Haley, Middleburg

LETTER POLICY

- Letters of about 200 words are preferred.

- All letters should include a name, address, occupation and telephone number.

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