

# viewpoint

## City's infrastructure also on a fiscal cliff



**Ron Littlepage**  
Times-Union  
columnist

During the next two months, whether you want to or not, you will hear a lot about Mayor Lenny Curry's sales tax plan.

That's a safe prediction considering those pushing the idea will have more than \$1 mil-

lion to spend in private donations from the usual big donors.

There's one thing, however, that you won't see in what's likely to be an onslaught of television ads.

If voters approve the half-cent sales tax on Aug. 30, it will kill any chance of using a sales tax to fund major infrastructure projects for at least 14 years.

And Jacksonville's basic infrastructure, which impacts the city's quality of life, is in desperate need of attention now.

City Councilwoman Lori Boyer told the Times-Union editorial board recently that there is a backlog of more than \$700 million in infrastructure work that needs to be addressed, including roadway resurfacing, sidewalk repairs, new sidewalks, drainage work and cleaning contaminated ash sites.

Much of those needs are in parts of the old core city, neighborhoods that were promised improved infrastructure when the city and county governments were consolidated almost five decades ago, promises that have gone unfulfilled.

Because of a series of tight budgets, the city has only been able to chip away at that backlog.

That's likely to be the same for the next budget that goes into effect Oct. 1, which Curry has said will be austere.

As more infrastructure ages, the backlog will continue to grow.

The local option sales tax has been the traditional way local governments have funded major infrastructure improvements.

In 1989, Jacksonville voters approved a half-cent sales tax to replace tolls collected at the city's main bridges and fund transportation projects.

In 2000, voters also approved a half-cent sales tax to pay for the Better Jacksonville Plan.

Normally another half cent for capital projects would be available in Jacksonville if voters approved, but that changes

if Curry's plan passes.

That sales tax would not go into effect until 2030 when the BJP sales tax ends.

The revenue from the new tax would be used to pay down the \$2.7 billion debt owed to the city's public employee pension plans, which Curry says is essential to get Jacksonville's fiscal house back in order.

The bill the Legislature approved giving the go-ahead to Curry's plan stipulates Jacksonville will lose the option of another half-cent sales tax for capital projects until the BJP tax ends.

Some of the backlog listed by Boyer can't wait.

About \$50 million in projects to comply with Americans with Disabilities Act requirements for sidewalks, handicap ramps and access to public buildings come with a 2018 deadline.

There is a \$21 million backlog for cleaning up ash sites and another \$36 million backlog to comply with environmental regulations.

Beyond basic infrastructure, a future mayor who wanted to have a major capital program like BJP and who had the support of the citizens wouldn't be able to fund it through a sales tax until at least 2030.

That could include finally making good use of the riverfront Shipyards property, building a new convention center, reworking The Jacksonville Landing or actually doing something with McCoys Creek, Hogans Creek and the Emerald Necklace around downtown instead of just talking about it.

I'm not advocating this is a reason to vote against Curry's sales tax.

But voters should be aware of this consequence.

Curry insists Jacksonville is on a "fiscal cliff" because of pension debt.

That debt has to be paid and has to be solved.

Pay attention during the two months ahead to decide if Curry's plan will get the job done.

If the city is indeed tottering on a fiscal cliff as Curry says, keep in mind that Jacksonville also can't afford to be frozen in time for 14 years.

Dealing with that should be part of the discussion.

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# reason midweek

## Leftists and Islamists are linked

**point of view**

philip wemhoff

Even before the bodies were cleared in Orlando, the political left began to divert attention away from Islam.

Leftist leaders want us to believe that this was an LGBT "hate crime," not Islamic terror.

And local Islamic missionary Parvez Ahmed steers the public away from the anti-gay tenets of Islam in a Times-Union column, focusing instead on extra LGBT rights as a cure-all even though Orlando's well-known special LGBT rights ordinance offered no protection whatsoever.

The FBI affirms that in 2013 the killer "admitted making the statements" sympathetic to terror groups and that the FBI is now "highly confident this killer was radicalized ... in some part through the Internet."

But that doesn't matter to the left, which blames guns, "homophobia" and conservatism — anything but Islam.

Currently, the assassin's motivation appears mixed, yet there is an indisputable Islamic component. And anti-gay violence has a home in Islam.

The Quran and the Hadith require that sodomy be punished by torture and death, and Cairo's Al-Azhar University, the "modern" seat of Islamic learning, agrees. That's why, as Ahmed points out, "LGBT Muslims are shunned at local mosques [which pressure them] to convert away from homosexuality."

The Orlando butcher's hero, the Islamic State, methodically stalks and slays all gays within its extensive territories. And homosexuals are savagely executed in 10 Islamic countries.

This has current relevance: Entities from several killer nations contributed \$21 million to \$61 million to leftist Hillary Clinton's foundation and paid Bill Clinton \$2 million for speeches — a way to conceal influence.

Judicial Watch lawsuits uncovered the payments, discovering also that Clinton's state department nullified ethics concerns: "Memos approving Mr. Clinton's speeches were routinely copied to ... Hillary Clinton's ... chief of staff." It's the left's accommodation with violent Islam.

Europe is the window into America's future. In its major cities, Muslims regularly assault gays and expel Jews using violent attacks and Shariah

patrols — intensified wherever Islamic populations burgeon as in London, Brussels, Oslo, Rotterdam, Hague and Amsterdam where "Muhammad" is a newborn's most frequent name.

The seeds of anti-gay hostility are growing here.

A 2011 Pew survey found that 8 percent to 13 percent of American Muslims endorse violence against civilians to defend Islam. That's 169,000 to 274,000 adult Muslims sympathetic to violence, using 2016 Pew population estimates.

And the migrant residency program of President Barack Obama, the most leftist president in history, has been Islam-dominant, importing to date 1.1 million Muslims committed to ancient religious commands exemplified by a U.S. epidemic of female genital mutilation.

The felony is so widespread among Muslims that the FBI issued an unprecedented 2016 law enforcement alert: 513,000 children are potential crime victims.

Leftism endangers lives. Former New York FBI Director James Kallstrom warns that Muslim-appealing "rules of engagement," imposed by this leftist president on U.S. security services, add barriers to preventing Orlando-type atrocities.

U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham notes that the FBI unwisely closed the murderer's file in 2014 "because the Obama administration treats radical Islamic threats as common crimes," adding: "If we kept the file open ... I think we could have stopped it."

The left, in its unspoken alliance with Islam, energetically hides an underlying component of such massacres, the teachings of Islam, and thereby reveals that the left's hierarchy of rights places Muslim appeasement above LGBT safety.

Outraged by the left's coverup of jihad gay-hatred, Muslim reformer Ejder Memis declares: "The LGBT community is being sold out to Islamofascists right before our eyes."

Gays thought that their enemy was conservative Christianity, but the vicious awakening of Orlando reveals that their real enemies are observant Islam and its ally leftism, the monkey that opened the tiger's cage.

Philip Wemhoff, a longtime Jacksonville resident, is a physicist and energy design consultant.

## Readers sound off on mental illness

**in reply**

frank denton  
column

Readers responded to Editor Frank Denton's column Sunday in the Reason section on the difficulty two parents experienced in finding treatment for a mentally ill son.

### JOIN A SUPPORT GROUP

Great column. Wish it could have been on the front page. To know the end of the story, attend a meeting with Survivors of Suicide (SOS). (See this website for contacts: tinyurl.com/jlrms3r).

Judy Davis

### MENTAL ILLNESS IS UNFAIRLY TREATED

Again, a mentally ill young man goes on a rampage.

Again, we hear the drumbeat about gun laws and background checks.

Again, grieving families cry for help.

Aren't we all tired of absolutely nothing being done to stop the slaughter?

How about treating mental illness before it comes to this? Surely, if this man and thousands like him had access to prompt, proper and ongoing treatment, fewer lives would be lost.

As of now, many who have a mental illness are forced to allow the illness to progress until they become "a danger to self or others" and then maybe they can obtain treatment. But only if one is lucky enough to have rare insurance or money to pay out of pocket.

When someone comes to an emergency room with a heart attack, staff acts immediately to treat the patient with skill, understanding, caring and follow-up. In contrast, many times when someone in crisis with mental illness shows up, they are either put in isolation until they calm down and/or given a prescription (which they usually cannot afford) and told not to come back until they become a "danger to self or others".

Mental illness is treatable. The brain is an organ no less than the heart. Until we change the way we understand and treat mental illness, we will continue to have these tragedies.

Politicians posture and argue over gun control while they callously and routinely cut funding for treatment of mental illness. Until we as a society demand that mental illness be properly treated, all of us will continue to pay the price.

Pattie Hunt, St. Augustine

### HELP IS NEEDED

I want to thank Frank Denton for his column and Richard and Kathleen Marquis for their courage in sharing the story of their son and the battles to find appropriate care for mental illness.

My grandfather committed suicide many years ago. Because he was Catholic, his body could not be buried in the family's plot in a Catholic cemetery. To this day, we don't know where he is buried; his suicide was so shameful that no one would discuss it. Alcoholism is rampant in my family on both my mother's and my

father's sides.

I am certain that it was depression that led to the alcoholism. Alcohol deadens the pain while it destroys the body.

I could go on about my own struggles and of the struggles of those I love, but it wouldn't solve anything. I want to find a way to help all those who continue to suffer and who feel stigmatized by their illness.

What can I do to help?

Victoria McGlone, Jacksonville

### WHERE ARE OUR LEADERS?

A powerful and vivid column. I grew up in Florida under great leaders — Leroy Collins, Reubin Askew, Bob Graham.

We had Sunniland centers and other facilities and programs to care for people with mental illness and other needs.

And then we changed. It's all about leadership.

And you are constantly pointing out to us that we, the people, need to become leaders and to care for each other.

Buddy Schulz, Jacksonville

### AN EXAMPLE FOR ALL OF US

I'm writing elected representatives to express dissatisfaction and frustration with my state's inability to provide proper support for mental health services.

After reading about a local St. Johns County family and their struggle to help their seriously mentally ill son, I feel compelled to share my thoughts.

■ Florida's spending on mental health services ranks 49th of the 50 states.

■ Florida has the third highest percentage of mentally ill and uninsured people in the country.

■ Florida also has one of the largest populations of mentally ill and drug addicted individuals in its prisons.

■ Florida is just about rock bottom on all per capita spending at No. 49.

Though Florida's top expenditures are for health care, education and pensions, this is rather a "smoke and mirrors" appropriation if one considers that our per capita spending is just about rock bottom. The fact that the state of Florida's spending remains "level" with very limited increases is troubling.

And using the state's health and prison system as de facto mental jail facilities is appalling but not surprising as the prison-industrial complex in the state appears to serve the vast and powerful legal lobby rather than our citizens.

Though this letter may seem long on criticisms, my concern is genuine. I, too, have a young adult son who struggles with bipolar disorder, and very soon he will no longer be covered by our health insurance.

As it is, most services out there for him are very expensive and difficult to navigate.

So I worry, too.

My question is: What can you do to really help our mentally ill citizens?

Cathy Mullan, Jacksonville

## Photo of the Clintons looks suspicious

A photo has been recirculating, purporting to show Bill and Hillary Clinton in costume many years ago with Bill dressed as a hillbilly and Hillary in blackface.

The facts: In January 2016, the photograph started circulating again on the internet, Snopes.com reports, after first being posted in November 2015 by Twitter user @Brian\_Tourville.

He was responding to a "Throwback Thursday" tweet from the Huffington Post in which the Post published a photo of Hillary Clinton in a Dolly Parton costume.

Tourville's response with the blackface photo was, "I raise you one."

First of all, Snopes.com found in its investigation of the photo, Hillary Clinton's eyes are blue, not brown, as are the eyes of the woman in the photo.

Further, if the image really does show Bill and Hillary Clinton at a



**FACT CHECK**

Want something checked out?

If you see or hear about something that needs a Fact Check, email [carole.fader@jacksonville.com](mailto:carole.fader@jacksonville.com)

college party, why did it take nearly 45 years to surface?

Bill and Hillary Clinton met at Yale in the early 1970s, and while they both have led high-profile political lives, this photograph — which would have caused a huge stir at any stage in their careers — didn't surface until 2015, Snopes.com notes.

While no date has been attached to the image, it looks as if the people in the photograph were in their 20s.

A photo of Bill and Hillary Clinton around the same age published by Snopes.com shows a slight resemblance be-

tween the two "Bills," but the real Bill Clinton has a fuller face than his costumed counterpart. The real Hillary Clinton's face also appears more slender than the woman wearing blackface.

Snopes.com notes that the blackface photograph is frequently shared with Clinton's campaign logo. This makes it appear that the photograph has been verified and endorsed by Clinton.

In our internet search, we could find no evidence that the photo was part of the Clintons' early history.

Because the blackface photo is such a potentially career-destroying image, it does seem strange that it never came out before 2015, considering the Clintons have been in the public eye for so long. As Snopes.com surmises, it certainly appears that the image is being spread around in a deliberate attempt to smear the presidential candidate.

## Clinton, Trump after the same voters

**point of view**

andrew malcolm

A Gallup Poll analysis of Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton speeches found the contents not only strikingly similar in

ideas but, not by accident, also targeted to the ears of voters, a record 94 million of whom are out of the job market.

Clinton: "My mission as president will be to help create more good-paying jobs so we can get incomes rising for hardworking families across America."

Trump: "We can come back bigger and better and stronger than ever before. Jobs, jobs, jobs! Everywhere I look, I see the possibilities of what our country could be. But we can't solve any of these problems by relying on the politicians who created them."

Did you notice, by the way, Clinton has had nothing to say on camera about Britain's vote to exit the European Union?

Here's what else she does to distract: She spent about two-thirds of a recent 5,400-word speech criticizing Trump.

While repeating his lavish reform promises, Trump, of course, also criticized Clinton.

He said she "has perfected the politics of personal profit and theft. She ran the State Department like her own personal hedge fund, doing favors for oppressive regimes and many others in exchange for cash."

"Then, when she left, she made \$21.6 million giving speeches to Wall Street banks and other special interests — in less than two years — secret speeches that she does not want revealed to the public."

"Together, she and Bill made \$153 million giving speeches to lobbyists, CEOs and foreign governments in the years since 2001. They totally own her, and that will never change."

But Trump and Clinton do agree on one thing: Neither thinks the other has the temperament to be president.

"Every day," Clinton adds, "we see how reckless and careless Trump is."

Clinton, Trump says, is "a world-class liar" who "may be the most corrupt person ever to seek the presidency."

Only a few months to go.

Andrew Malcolm is an author and veteran national and foreign correspondent covering the political scene since the 1960s.