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14-year-old pleads guilty to killing homeless man



Bob.Self@jacksonville.com

Sharron "Tommy" Townsend talks with his attorney S. Nicole Jamieson as he enters the courtroom of Duval County Judge Jack Schemer Tuesday, where he pleaded guilty to second-degree murder in the killing of a homeless man.

Defendant was 12 at time of shooting and now faces up to 40 years

By Larry Hannan
larry.hannan@jacksonville.com

A Jacksonville teen admitted Tuesday he is guilty of murdering a homeless man, exactly two years after the killing occurred. But it's still unclear why Sharron "Tommy" Townsend, who was 12 at the time, chose to shoot 54-year-old Thomas Zona Trent in the head.



Trent

Townsend, who is now 14, shot Trent June 28, 2014, in the parking lot of a shopping center on 103rd Street.

As part of the plea deal reached Tuesday, Townsend pleaded guilty to second-degree murder and the office of State Attorney Angela Corey waived the 25-year minimum mandatory sentence.

Circuit Judge Jack Schemer will have the authority to sentence Townsend to anywhere from 10 to 40 years in prison. His sentencing will occur the week of Aug. 22.

Defense attorney S. Nicole Jamieson said during the hearing she had hoped



JUDGE JACK M. SCHEMER

Judge Jack Schemer shows Sharron "Tommy" Townsend the signed plea agreement that could get him 10 to 40 years in prison for murder.

to get Townsend sentenced as a juvenile, which would have allowed him to avoid adult prison, but Corey personally vetoed that request and insisted he be convicted as an adult.

This is the second juvenile killer Schemer had to deal with in June. He also sentenced Jeremiah Elijah Hill, now 14, to 40 years in prison after he pleaded guilty to the first-degree murder

of 25-year-old Tony Vernon Johnson among other charges involved in a gun-deal shooting almost a year ago.

The Jacksonville area has generated national attention due to the number of juveniles charged with murder.

Perhaps the most famous one is Cristian Fernandez, who was facing

TOWNSEND continues on A-4

Longer pension payoff analyzed

Long-term costs might exceed short-term savings

By David Bauerlein
david.bauerlein@jacksonville.com

A report released Tuesday by Mayor Lenny Curry's office shows how the city could reduce its annual pension costs by \$57 million in 2019 and keep benefiting from reduced costs every year through 2034 by spreading the pay-down period of the city's massive pension debt over a longer period of time than it currently does.



Curry

While that approach would help the city's finances through 2034, the picture after 2034 shows the city would be paying substantially more in pension costs through 2049 compared to the status quo.

The contribution amounts would be particularly high at the tail end of the payment period. In 2048, the city's annual pension costs would be \$381 million higher than they would be if the city stuck to the current schedule for paying down the \$2.85 billion of pension debt.

But a half-cent sales tax backed by Curry, which voters will decide on in the Aug. 30 election, would kick in around 2031 and

PENSION continues on A-4

Florida baby born with Zika-related microcephaly

Haitian mother contracted disease outside country, but delivered in U.S.

By Dan Scanlan
dan.scanlan@jacksonville.com

The state Department of Health confirmed Tuesday the first Zika-related case of microcephaly in a child born in Florida.

State officials said the child's mother, a citizen of Haiti, had a travel-related case of Zika and came to Florida to deliver her baby. Officials did not release the name of the city or county where the child was born, stating they are "unable to share those details."

ZIKA INFO

Florida has a Zika Virus Information Hotline at (855) 622-6735, while more information is at floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/zika-virus.

The birth comes less than two weeks after the Florida Department of Health reported Duval County's first case of the Zika virus, which can cause grave birth defects and is transmitted by mosquitoes and sexual contact. Duval County now has two reported cases.

The birth announcement also comes the same day as four new travel-related cases were reported in Florida — two each in Miami-Dade and Osceola counties.

That brings the total number of travel-

ZIKA continues on A-4

36 killed in suicide bombings at Istanbul airport

Officials expect death toll to rise as 147 were wounded; ISIS suspected to be responsible

By Zeynep Bilginsoy, Suzan Fraser & Dominique Soguel
Associated Press

ISTANBUL | Three suspected Islamic State group suicide bombers targeted the international terminal of Istanbul's Ataturk Airport Tuesday, killing at least 36 people and wounding many others, Turkish officials said.

Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim said 36 were dead as well as the three suicide bombers. Justice Minister Bekir Bozdogan said 147 were wounded. Another senior government official told The Associated Press the death toll could climb much higher.

The senior official, who spoke on condition of anonymity in line with government protocol, at first said close to 50 people had already died, but later said that the figure was expected to rise to close to 50.

Yildirim said three suicide



Emrah Gurel Associated Press

Passengers evacuated after the bombing embrace outside Istanbul's Ataturk airport.

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ISTANBUL

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bombers were responsible for the attack and all initial indications suggest the Islamic State group was behind it.

“The findings of our security forces point at the Daesh organization as the perpetrators of this terror attack,” Yildirim told reporters at the airport, using the Arabic name for IS. “Even though the indications suggest Daesh, our investigations are continuing.”

Yildirim said the attackers arrived at the airport in a taxi and blew themselves up after opening fire. Asked whether a fourth attacker might have escaped, he said authorities have no such assessment but are considering every possibility.

The victims included some foreigners, he said, adding that many of the wounded have minor injuries but others are more badly hurt.

Another Turkish official said two of the attackers detonated explosives at the entrance of the international arrivals terminal after police fired at them, while the third blew himself up in the parking lot.



Turkish rescue services gather outside Istanbul's Ataturk airport. Officials said the attackers detonated the explosives at the entrance of the international terminal before entering the X-ray security check.

The official, who also spoke on condition of anonymity in line with government regulations and cited interior ministry information, said none of the attackers managed to get past security checks at the terminal's entrance.

Turkish airports have security checks at both the entrance of terminal build-

ings and then later before entry to departure gates.

Roads around the airport were sealed off for regular traffic after the attack and several ambulances could be seen driving back and forth. Hundreds of passengers were flooding out of the airport and others were sitting on the grass.

Hevin Zini, 12, had just

arrived from Duesseldorf, Germany, with her family and was in shock.

“There was blood on the ground,” she told The Associated Press. “Everything was blown up to bits. ... If we had arrived two minutes earlier, it could have been us.”

South African Judy Favish, who spent two days

in Istanbul as a layover on her way home from Dublin, had just checked in when she heard an explosion followed by gunfire and a loud bang.

Favish says passengers were ushered to a cafeteria at the basement level where they were kept for more than an hour before being allowed outside.

Yildirim said air traffic at the airport, which was suspended after the attack, had resumed to normal.

The prime minister called for national unity and “global cooperation” in combating terrorism.

“This [attack] has shown once again that terrorism is a global threat,” Yildirim said. “This is a heinous planned attack that targeted innocent people.”

He suggested that the attack was linked to what he said was Turkey's success against Kurdish rebels as well as steps Ankara took on Monday toward mending strained ties with Israel and Russia.

“It is meaningful that this heinous attack came at a time when we have become successful in the fight against separatist terrorism ... and at a time when we started a process of normalizing ties with our neighbors,” Yildirim said.

Yildirim insisted there was no security lapse at the airport but said the fact that the attackers were carrying weapons “increased the severity” of the attack.

Istanbul's Ataturk Airport was the 11th busiest airport in the world last year, with 61.8 million passengers, according to Airports Council International.

TOWNSEND

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life in prison without parole when he was charged as an adult with the first-degree murder of his 2-year-old half brother.

Fernandez, now 17, eventually pleaded guilty as a juvenile to manslaughter. He is set to be released on probation when he turns 19 in January 2018.

Edgar Robles, who was 16 when he shot two teenage girls on a school bus, also recently pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 30 years in prison. Robles' sentence includes a 25-year minimum mandatory.

The case of Henry Lee Hayes is still pending. Hayes was 16 when prosecutors and police say he shot and killed 22-month-old Aiden McClendon with the intended target in a yard nearby. Hayes has a pretrial hearing in his case Thursday.

Renata Hannans, a case manager and youth advocate with Communities In Schools who also runs the nonprofit P.S. Never Give Up Hope Inc., met with

Townsend weekly since he was arrested. She said she hopes Schemer agrees to put him in a Department of Juvenile Justice facility until he's an adult and doesn't immediately send him to adult prison.

“The state is using his behavior at the jail as a determinant in his sentencing outcome,” Hannans said. “An adult jail is not conducive to positive behavior for a child locked in a cage.”

At the time of his arrest, police said Townsend probably didn't know Trent, who used a walker and was among the homeless who stuck around the strip of shops and abandoned businesses where he was killed.

Assistant State Attorney Alan Mizrahi told Schemer there was enough evidence to convict Townsend of murder. He is seen on video fleeing the scene and Mizrahi said Townsend told multiple people on Facebook he did it.

Police also had provided surveillance images to the media showing two youths at the scene that early morning, and a 16-year-old friend confirmed for police that it

was him and Townsend. Police and prosecutors chose not to charge that teen because he cooperated with police and they did not believe he was an accomplice to the killing.

Schemer asked Mizrahi if Townsend had said why he committed the murder, and the prosecutor said he has never explained his motivation.

The teen told the judge he was pleading guilty because he is guilty but didn't explain why he did it. That explanation will likely come when Townsend is sentenced.

Townsend said he spoke with his lawyer and mother about his decision to accept the plea deal. When Schemer asked whether his mother agreed, a voice from the back of the courtroom could be heard saying “hell no.”

Bailiffs chastised her and another woman for the outburst. Afterward the woman who appeared to be Townsend's mother went into the courtroom hallway and burst into tears. Both women declined to talk with the Times-Union.

Hannans said she

hoped people understood Townsend is a child.

“His behavior is that of a child,” she said. “He acts like a child, he thinks like a child, he has hopes and dreams like a child.”

Hannans said she also worries that Townsend doesn't really understand the concept of time or grasp what being locked up for 40 years might mean.

“The only thing you see in the media is a child in a jumpsuit or jail suit with a headline that says ‘child murderer,’” Hannans said. “But he is a child I've seen humanity in.”

He has experienced hardships and feels for other people and has empathy for the feelings and sufferings of others, Hannans said.

Townsend will benefit from recent U.S. Supreme Court rulings that found it was unconstitutional to mandate juveniles get life in prison without a chance of parole. If he gets more than 25 years in prison, a judge will review his sentence at the 25-year mark to consider whether Townsend should get out.

Larry Hannan: (904) 359-4470

PENSION

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generate money that would help the city pay a large portion of pension costs from that point forward.

A city summary of the report, which was done by the Milliman firm, says the analysis demonstrates the city would have a “sustainable and affordable pension cost structure over time” if the payments are spread out and voters approve the half-cent sales tax.

The Milliman report marks the first time the city has put all three pension plans — police and fire, general employees and corrections officers — into a single analysis that examines future pension costs under the status quo and compares them to what the city's cost would be, taking into account changes tied to the half-cent sales tax.

The biggest difference is that in the status quo, the city would pay down the pension debt over a 24-year period, but if voters approve the half-cent sales tax, the payment period would be lengthened to 30 years according to the city.

If nothing changes, the total pension contributions for the three plans will continue to rise sharply in the coming years, the report shows.

For instance, the combined cost would hit \$350 million in the 2018-19 fiscal year. But by spreading the costs over a longer period of time and factoring in some other changes, such as higher paycheck contributions by employees, the city's contribution amount that year would be \$293 million, which would be \$57 million less.

The \$293 million in pension plan contributions in 2018-19 still would be higher than this year's amount of \$260 million and next year's projection of \$280 million. But it would avert an otherwise rapid rise in pension contributions and stabilize the year-over-year increases, based on Milliman's analysis.

Paying off the city's pension debt over a longer period of time is similar to a homeowner refinancing a mortgage. The homeowner can benefit from the refinancing because the annual mortgage payments will be less, but because the mortgage payments continue for more years, the overall cost is higher.

Milliman makes a similar point in the notes to its report, saying paying down pension debt for a period of longer than 25 years is not in line with best practices in the pension field.

A paydown period lasting longer than 25 years reduces contributions in the short term, but “this should not be considered

a savings, but rather a deferral of contributions. Funding a pension plan is a ‘pay now or pay more later’ proposition,” Milliman's report says.

The city says in its summary of the report that going to a 30-year paydown period is required by the state law that allows Jacksonville to have the sales tax referendum.

In the case of the city's pension contributions, the projected cost through 2049 for the three pension plans — police and fire, general employees and corrections officers — would total \$9.77 billion for that 33-year period based on the current schedule and requirements.

The city's proposed shifting of the pension costs outlined in the Milliman study would push back a chunk of that expense to the end of that period. The total cost of pension contributions in that scenario would be \$11.28 billion, or about \$1.5 billion more through 2049.

The city's summary of the Milliman report says that by shifting pension contributions to the period after 2031, the city would be able to use proceeds from the proposed half-cent sales tax to help pay down pension costs.

If the city's sales tax collections grow at a 4 percent rate, the half-cent sales tax would collect about \$152 million in 2031 and that would increase each year to hit \$307 million in 2049, according to projection city staff have done.

If the city's sales tax collections grow at 2 percent rate, the city would collect about \$111 million in 2031 and that would rise each year to hit about \$159 million in 2049.

While the biggest factor in the city's annual pension costs would be extending the paydown period for retiring the city's pension debt, the city also would get some financial relief if employees were to pay 10 percent of their paychecks toward their pensions, up from 8 percent now.

The city would seek agreement from unions in collective bargaining for the higher contribution amounts. The state law authorizing Jacksonville to put the half-cent sales tax on that ballot says that even if voters approve the tax, it cannot happen unless paycheck contributions rise to at least 10 percent.

Milliman's analysis also examines the impact of closing the existing pension plans to new hires and having all those new employees go into 401(k)-style retirement plans. That also could only happen through collective bargaining.

David Bauerlein: (904) 359-4581

ZIKA

Continued from A-1

related cases involving pregnant women in Florida this year to 40, with total cases reported at 187, according to Health Department officials.

Microcephaly is a birth defect that causes abnormally small heads and incomplete brain development in babies.

Florida has been monitoring pregnant women with evidence of Zika regardless of symptoms since January.

Of the cases confirmed in Florida, 15 are still exhibiting symptoms, state officials said. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, symptoms associated with the Zika virus last seven to 10 days. Nationwide three babies with Zika-linked birth defects have been born in the United States as of mid-June, with the birth defects also seen in three other pregnancies that ended.

Last week Florida Gov. Rick Scott ordered the state to spend up to \$26.2 million in an effort to stop the potential spread of Zika after saying he was “profoundly disappointed” with the ongoing federal stalemate over the virus. The governor declared a state of emergency in 24 counties, including Duval, St. Johns and Clay, which authorizes everything from killing mosquitoes, training mosquito technicians and purchasing Zika prevention kits.

The order came after his repeated requests to the federal government to pay for a Zika fight failed. Actions on Capitol Hill on Tuesday appear to have put any additional federal Zika funding on hold.

The U.S. House had approved a \$1.1 billion measure last week to fight the virus, but the president threatened to veto it, say-



Gov. Rick Scott visited Jacksonville on Tuesday to urge officials to help reduce the spread of mosquitoes that carry the Zika virus, which can cause birth defects.

ing that it provides too little money and contains too many partisan provisions. Then on the heels of Tuesday's announcement of the first Zika-related case of microcephaly in Florida, the U.S. Senate voted down the \$1.1 billion funding bill on a vote of 52-48.

Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Fla., the lead sponsor of a measure that would have provided the full \$1.9 billion the president requested, voted against the bill. Prior to the vote, he complained that the House voted on its version of the bill “in the dark of the middle of the night” with no opportunity for debate.

“Why can't we grow up and get to the point that we don't want to play partisan politics?” Nelson said. “We need to stop playing these political games. It's time to treat this as a real emergency and it's time to pass the appropriations bill without all of this political

agenda added to it.” Meanwhile, the CDC is recommending again that women who are pregnant or thinking of becoming pregnant postpone travel to Zika-affected areas. Providers should consider testing all pregnant women with a history of travel to a Zika-affected area for the virus.

Scott and Celeste Philip, surgeon general and secretary of the Florida Department of Health, visited Jacksonville on Tuesday to spread the word that the best way to prevent the spread of the Zika virus is to prevent the birth of mosquitoes by eliminating standing water and to wear protective clothing and insect repellent when in areas where mosquitoes are common.

Meeting with Mayor Lenny Curry and city, port, airport and county health department officials, Scott warned that with Florida entering hurricane season and thousands of people

traveling to the Olympics in Brazil, where Zika-carrying mosquitoes are widespread, the situation is serious. A state of emergency has been declared in more than 20 Florida counties.

Scott added many people could have the virus but show no symptoms.

John Shellhorn, division chief for the city's mosquito control board, said JEA will insert 360,000 fliers into bills to educate the public about steps to prevent and protect.

Insecticide can be used to spray where Zika-bearing mosquitoes are identified but it has to be targeted spraying, Shellhorn said. Aerial spraying is ineffective against the mosquito that carries the virus.

Scott delivered the same message in West Palm Beach on Tuesday morning before coming to Jacksonville.

Dan Scanlan: (904) 359-4549