

viewpoint

Curry shows his colors, greets Trump



Ron Littlepage
in times-union
columnist

Mousing around the news of the day ... *click.*
According to a Times-Union report, Mayor Lenny Curry plans to attend the Donald Trump rally in Jacksonville Wednesday evening.

So much for his promise of “One City, One Jacksonville.” Unless you are from Mexico or of Mexican descent.
Unless you are a Muslim, especially if you are a Muslim member of a Gold Star family speaking about the sacrifice of a son.
Unless you are a former prisoner of war who was captured instead of killed.
Unless you are a woman with “blood coming out of her wherever.”
Unless you are disabled.
Whom a person associates with says a lot about that person. Curry is casting his lot with Trump.

Click.
Another Republican stalwart is refusing to take that path.
Sally Bradshaw, a top political strategist in Florida, has left the Republican Party and has told CNN she will vote for Hillary Clinton if the race in Florida is close.
Her words cut straight to the core.
“As much as I don’t want another four years of [President Barack] Obama’s policies, I can’t look my children in the eye and tell them I voted for Donald Trump,” Bradshaw told CNN.
“I can’t tell them to love their neighbor and treat others the way they want to be treated, and then vote for Donald Trump. I won’t do it.”
She called Trump a “total narcissist — a misogynist — a bigot.”
“This is a time when country has to take priority over political parties,” Bradshaw said.
Curry, a former Republican party state boss, plans to go to Trump’s rally.
Click.
During a meeting with the Times-Union editorial board to talk about his sales tax plan, Curry described himself as being nonpartisan.
I couldn’t help but chuckle then. I’m laughing now.
Click.
When Obama came to Jacksonville in February to tour the Saft battery plant, one of our better economic development projects, our “nonpartisan” mayor didn’t greet the president of the United States. He went fishing instead.

But when Trump comes to town, he plans on being there.
Click.
This hasn’t exactly been a banner year for Florida’s tourism, a mainstay of our economy.
First, there were the nasty outbreaks of algae that slimed the state’s beaches, rivers, lakes and estuaries — not exactly an enticement to lure visitors to the Sunshine State.
Now comes the Zika virus and all the health repercussions that means.
What’s next — locusts? Do cicadas count?
Click.
A major part of the algae problem in the Indian River Lagoon is caused by polluted storm water runoff that makes its way to the lagoon.
The St. Johns River Water Management District, whose namesake river has its own algae problems, offered late last month to help out its friends in South Florida.

The district will begin diverting 9 million gallons a day of dirty runoff from agricultural fields and development to what’s known as the Stick Marsh.
From there, the water will eventually flow into the St. Johns, theoretically “cleaner” than when it entered the marsh.
It will be interesting to see how this magnanimous gesture on the part of the water management district works out.
Click.
Bad metaphor alert:
Congresswoman Corrine Brown keeps saying she is the victim of a “witch hunt” that led to federal fraud charges against her.
Doesn’t that mean she’s calling herself a witch?
Click.
Now go back with me to yesteryear when in 2003 Gov. Jeb Bush gave \$310 million to the Scripps Research Institute with the idea of making Florida a national leader in biomedicine research.
That was going to boost the state’s economy by creating 50,000 private-sector jobs in 15 years that would justify the huge investment of taxpayer dollars.
The Palm Beach Post reports that by this spring — 13 years later — Scripps Florida, according to its website, employs “more than 600,” and there are 3,000 biotech jobs in Palm Beach County, Scripps Florida’s home base.
Oh, well.
Click.

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A property tax increase paired with pension sales tax is best way forward



Michael Hallett
michael.hallett

I was an invited member of the Sheriff Mike Williams’ “Resources Committee.”
I found its members to be tough-minded and well-informed. The committee indeed recommend pairing the proposed new sales tax with a millage increase, forming a two-pronged attack on Duval’s massive debt, for the purpose of lowering costs to taxpayers and providing immediate added resources to JSO. A millage increase now saves taxpayer money by reducing legacy costs of the new sales tax caused by its massive added borrowing.

While promoters of the new sales tax plan wish to frame it as “refinancing a mortgage” — more accurately they are requesting taxpayer approval for a \$1.5 billion finance charge on deferring payment on Duval’s debt even longer.
Buyers refinance mortgages to save money on their house; this new sales tax dramatically raises the cost of the loan. The sales tax plan actually effectuates a decrease in payments on the debt, costing taxpayers more in the long run.
Most problematically, while the pitch for this new sales tax commits to “competitive” benefits for employees after “up to three” unfunded plans are closed (we’ll see), it leaves in place the very millage rate that put Duval into debt in the first place.
Renegotiated plans won’t necessarily be cheaper. Even according to their own analysis, massive balloon payments built into the sales tax projections will saddle future leaders. “Solving it” will require additional resources.
Last, having only one police department for a jurisdiction of Duval’s size and complexity dramatically underserves the community.
Jacksonville crime data speak for themselves, as do the staffing and alarming turnover data in our report. JSO corrections relies extensively on overtime due to understaffing. I designed JSO’s Pre-Trial Services Unit 15 years ago. It faced the same problems then. Overtime is very expensive for taxpayers and increases danger in the jail.
A second set of concerns is more basic and longstanding. Duval has long carried debt on its employee pensions and not just for police and fire employees.
As the 2009 JCCI study of Duval’s fiscal crisis points out: “The first study in JCCI’s history was of Local Government Finance in 1977. The volunteers found Jacksonville’s financial position “to be basically sound with the exception of the under funding of its pension plans.”

You cannot argue Duval is on a “fiscal cliff” with a millage rate only half that required to declare bankruptcy.

This is due to Duval’s chronic irresponsibly low millage rate — always far lower than peer cities in Florida.
In reviewing emails from our year-long work, members expected some blowback from our report but explicitly persisted due to the overwhelming evidence that the millage rate is also a problem.
I resent being called an “elitist” by Mayor Lenny Curry for serving on this Task Force, upon which the Sheriff’s Office asked me to serve.
If you don’t want the news media to report on your data, do not post the public report on the city of Jacksonville’s website. Earlier committee reports were posted and reported upon as well. And a millage increase is, in fact, not the “easy” solution, it is obviously the harder one; just ask former Mayor John Peyton.

But frankly there is a difference between pitching a proposal and fully vetting one.
The new sales tax’s privately financed promotion team, funded in part by stakeholders who will personally benefit from its passage, renders much information about the new tax proprietary.
Polling data showing weak support for aspects of the proposal, for example, can remain hidden while aspects seemingly more favorable can be crafted and directed through City Hall and selectively made available to the public.
So you’ll hear a lot about the “half-penny,” but not at all about the \$1.5 billion the “extended” half-penny is going to cost taxpayers.
As in this new tax has been cross-examined in the Times-Union, however, its sales pitch has morphed considerably. There are still many unanswered questions about the proposed new tax.
As pointed out by others, you cannot argue Duval is on a “fiscal cliff” with a millage rate only half that required to declare bankruptcy.
And spare me the notion that people leave Duval for fear of rising millage rates. They leave because of failing public services, high crime and collapsing streets.
I was proud to serve on the committee.

Michael Hallett is professor of criminology at the University of North Florida.

reason midweek

Seismic testing threatens Florida



point of view
john a. miller

As a retired Navy sonar expert and mayor of Fernandina Beach, I feel compelled to respond to a recent piece about offshore oil and gas exploration.

In the column, Ellen Wald stated the environmental impact of offshore drilling along the East Coast would be “relatively minimal.”
If there is no harm in offshore exploration, then why has it sparked such an outpouring of opposition? It’s quite simple. Seismic airgun blasting, the process used to locate oil and gas deposits underneath the sea floor — and the drilling it could lead to — would be a threat to marine life, ocean ecosystems and coastal economies along the entire Atlantic coast.
Communities from Fernandina Beach to Miami Beach oppose offshore oil and gas exploration activities in the Atlantic, with 30 Florida cities formally opposed in all. Jacksonville’s own Rep. Ander Crenshaw has 23 members of Congress — 85 percent of Florida’s entire delegation — on record opposing oil exploration offshore Florida.
Every major port city in the Southeast except Jacksonville passed a resolution opposing offshore oil development in the Atlantic. A total of 113 municipalities, over 1,000 elected officials and 1,100 business interests oppose seismic airgun blasting or offshore drilling off the East Coast.
Seismic airguns create one of the loudest manmade sounds in the ocean. These blasts disturb vital behaviors and can injure and kill dolphins, whales, sea turtles, fish and other marine life.
I spent my career in the Navy using sound to locate and identify submarines. It is unacceptable that we would consider subjecting marine life, including our beloved dolphins and the critically endangered North Atlantic Right Whale, to dynamite-like blasts just to support our dependence on fossil fuels.
Even Gov. Rick Scott’s Department of Environmental Protection sent a letter to the federal government stating that Florida is concerned about seismic airgun blasting.
Each year, Florida benefits from ap-

It makes no sense to jump on board with Big Oil and put our marine resources at risk.

proximately 281,000 jobs and nearly \$37 billion in gross domestic product, from our booming fishing, tourism and ocean recreation industries. Towns along the First Coast that rely on Florida’s remarkable marine resources to prosper, like Fernandina Beach, Atlantic Beach, Neptune Beach and Jacksonville Beach, all passed resolutions opposing seismic airgun blasting.
These towns don’t want to take such a gamble — they understand how quickly onshore infrastructure and development would destroy their picturesque coastlines. They realize how irrevocably a single drop of oil on their sandy beaches would jeopardize their status as tourist destinations.
It makes no sense to jump on board with Big Oil and put our marine resources at risk when we already have thriving tourism and recreation jobs and economies built upon healthy coastal ecosystems. The jobs promised by oil companies just don’t exist. Even if they were created, these jobs won’t be going to locals — the vast majority would be outsourced.
By the federal government’s own estimates, production from an oil and gas lease sale in the Atlantic would only increase U.S. oil production by 0.01 percent.
Jacksonville’s own economy benefits from nearby ocean resources immensely: vacationers, sports fans, eco-tourists and fishermen all travel through Jacksonville to get to the coast, boosting the city’s revenue along the way.
Jacksonville needs to protect Florida’s marine life and economy, and join its coastal neighbors and fellow Southeastern port cities by passing a strong resolution opposing oil and gas exploration in the Atlantic.
Without Jacksonville’s support, the rest of us may be forced to suffer the consequences.

John A. Miller is mayor of Fernandina Beach.

Beer historian at Smithsonian? True

It’s circulating on social media that the Smithsonian Institution is hiring a beer historian.

FACT CHECK

Want something checked out? If you see or hear about something that needs a Fact Check, email carole.fader@jacksonville.com

The facts: The Washington City Paper reported on July 25 that the Smithsonian National Museum of American History is seeking a “beer historian” for a three-year appointment.
This has been reported by other news outlets and verified by urban legend researcher Snopes.com.

The annual salary is reported to be \$64,650. Curator Paula Johnson told the paper that “the museum is seeking someone who can ‘focus and dedicate efforts toward research, documentation and collecting American brewing history.’”
The project is being funded by the Brewers’ Association, a national trade group that represents craft beer makers. Johnson told The Huffington Post that the funding won’t affect the outcome of the research: “There are no strings attached, and the

museum alone has full control over the content, the position, research and related programming,” she said. “This is the same standard the Smithsonian upholds with all of our donors, be they private, corporate and association donors.
The first-time project, Johnson said, aims to document the history and cultural role of beer in the United States post-World War II.
Johnson told the Washington City Paper, “We have collected food history for many years, so when we were doing the research for the exhibition, which is all about big changes in the post-WW II era in how and

what we eat, one thing we were curious about is the craft beer movement. We were looking at wine, coffee, cheese, artisanal bread and farmers markets. Well, this movement with small-scale, local regional beer is part of the ethos.”

The position requires beer skills.
The job description reads in part, “The successful candidate will have proven experience in scholarly research, organizing and conducting oral history interviews, writing for both scholarly and general audiences and knowledge of material culture and archival materials.”
Candidates with an advanced degree in American business, brewing, food, cultural, or similar specialization within history are encouraged.
The deadline for applications for this real position is Wednesday, Aug. 10.
To check out the application, go to this website: tinyurl.com/grm8fbg.

Hillary Clinton is no agent of change



letters in brief

After the Democratic

Convention’s “reintroduction” of Hillary Clinton, we can only conclude the following: Democrats want you to believe their own narrative over three days rather than her 30-year-long record of deceit, lies and evasions. The best indication of future performance is past performance. With Clinton we will get no change, just more of the same.
Jay Haug, Ponte Vedra Beach

BENGHAZI QUESTION

I believe a Times-Union editorial failed to mention an unanswered question.
Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta gave the order to deploy to Benghazi.
Why was the order not carried out and who ignored the order?
Ken Gorman, Ponte Vedra Beach

TRUMP’S SACRIFICES

Hiring people to build and operate his hotels and casinos is not a sacrifice. It is a cost of doing business. If Donald Trump does not know the difference, he should never be president.
Ralph Harding, Orange Park

ST. JOHNS COUNTY AND GAMBLING ISSUE

Cognitive dissonance: That is when St. Johns County decides it doesn’t want gambling in their area but yet will vote for the “Gambling Czar of America,” Donald Trump for president.
Michael Cross, St. Augustine

travel the world, but it cannot be used to vote in Florida.
I tried it and was turned away.
Why, because our men and women in Tallahassee were not aware that there is no signature on the U.S. Passport Card when they wrote the law designed to restrict voting rights. But our men and women in Tallahassee will let you vote in Florida using your Concealed Weapon ID. And why is there no attempt to stop voter fraud with respect to voting with absentee ballots?
Shirley Myers, Neptune Beach

REPLY TO VOTING

Error on my part. I see the supervisor of elections no longer lists the passport card as one of the acceptable forms of ID, but I believe they did in prior years.
Chris Shea, Jacksonville