

opinion

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Tala Reynolds, J.R. Ross and Ron Salem.

A VERSE FOR TODAY

A good name is better than a precious ointment ...
Ecclesiastes 7:1

Sex traffickers

Great work by the JSO

Cheers to Detectives Mike Davis and Richard Trew of the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office for rescuing a teen from the horrors of this city's sex trafficking network.

Davis and Trew are members of the JSO's Integrity/Special Investigations Unit, which works closely with the FBI Task Force on Child Exploitation.

Recently, the unit was informed by Atlanta authorities that a runaway teen in that city had apparently been in a restaurant when she was coaxed to leave with a man.

It was suspected that the man was a Jacksonville sex trafficker and that he had brought the girl to our city.

Through painstaking work, Davis and Trew discovered those fears were accurate: The teen girl was indeed in Jacksonville, and the human trafficker had posted an online ad offering her for sexual services.

Using that information, Davis and Trew took the lead in an operation to meet the girl, assure her they were there to help and remove her from the seedy location.

The girl told the detectives that once she arrived in Jacksonville, she was repeatedly beaten by the man she had traveled with — whom she had no idea was a sex trafficker — and quickly forced into prostitution.

After her rescue, the girl was provided with assistance from Florida's Department of Children and Families. She is now back safely in Georgia.

"When we're able to do something like this to get a young girl out of this life, it's very rewarding," Davis told a Times-Union editorial board member.

"We don't treat or look at these girls as criminals. They are victims. Our focus is to find and prosecute the people who are the criminals — the ones who are victimizing and exploiting these poor girls."

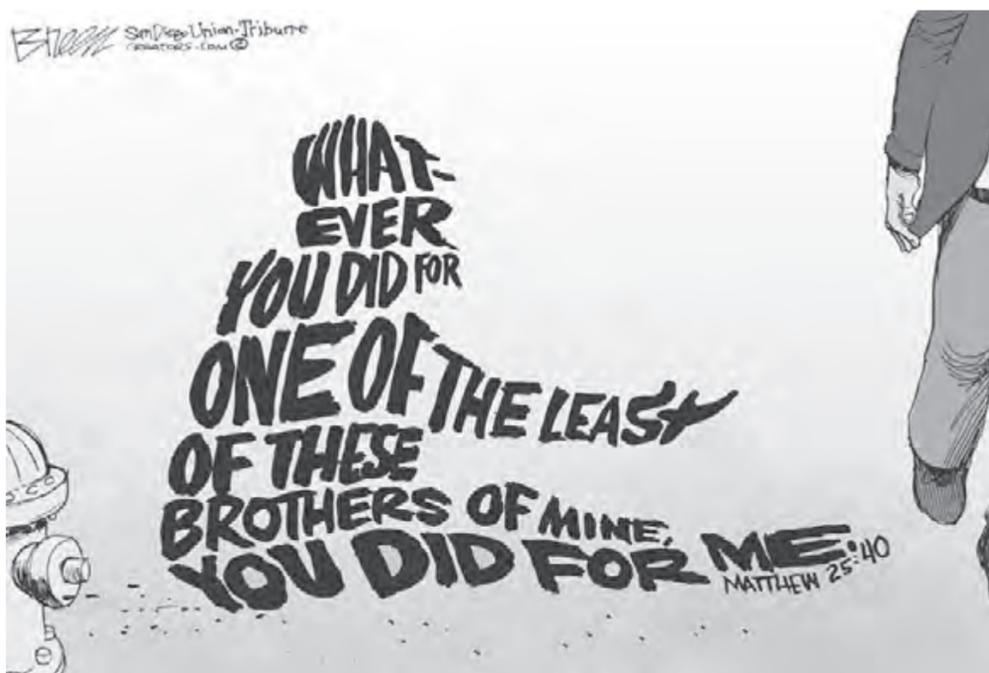
Davis said citizens can do their part to help save vulnerable girls trapped in Jacksonville's sex-trafficking trade.

"If you see a girl who looks distressed or under duress — or if something just doesn't seem right about seeing her in that place at that time — call us," Davis said. "Let us talk to her. Then maybe we can start the process to get them out of that horrible life. And save them."

To contact the Integrity/Special Investigations Unit, call (904) 306-2100.

And let us again applaud the tremendous and brave work being done by Davis, Trew and the other members of JSO's Integrity/Special Investigations Unit.

Another view: Steve Breen San Diego Union-Tribune



Prescription drug abuse

Duval rises to combat an epidemic

Prescription drug and opioid abuse and misuse has become an increasing concern in the U.S.

Overdoses can happen to anyone, not just chronic users. For example, the number of overdose deaths in Florida increased by 4.8 percent from 2013-2014.

And, until recently, there have not been enough opioid reversal agents, such as Naloxone, readily available in emergency situations. Naloxone blocks or reverses the effects of opioids in overdoses.

The Clinton Health Matters Initiative is working with community leaders in Jacksonville to decrease the number of deaths caused by prescription drug overdose through affordable access to Naloxone for first responders.

When someone is suffering from an opioid overdose, seconds count. By giving this drug to first

When someone is suffering from an opioid overdose, seconds count. Reversal agents save lives.

responders in Northeast Florida, we will save more lives.

Through the Clinton Health Matters Initiative's partnership with Adapt Pharma, one of the leading pharmaceutical companies in producing Naloxone, it will distribute 5,000 cartons (10,000 doses) of NARCAN® Nasal Spray to its community partners, including those in Jacksonville.

Health, educational or law enforcement groups interested in applying for a donation can submit their qualifications to this website:

wjcf.co/2aoDQnc.

Programs like this are an important step in increasing awareness and adoption of life-saving Naloxone and treating drug overdose as a public health issue.

Still, there is much work to be done in addressing the opioid epidemic, and everyone can play a role in stemming its destruction in our community and across the country.

After experiencing issues related to drugs and alcohol close to home, Drug Free Duval was founded in 2008.

The community coalition now has nearly 1,000 community members and more than 30 partner organizations who are dedicated to freedom from substance abuse and addiction for all.

Susan Pitman, executive director,
Drug Free Duval

Opinion column

Why we must vote yes on pension tax

point
of view

matt
brockelman

Imagine you had to forfeit a quarter of every post-tax dollar you earn and got nothing new in return. Rather, all those quarters just corrode at the bottom of a wishing well. Doesn't sound appealing, does it?

That's basically what we're doing as a city. Just seven years ago, 9 percent of our city's operating budget went to pension costs. That figure now sits at more than 25 percent, with a large portion comprising catch-up costs since our pensions are so overpromised and underfunded.

That's hundreds of millions of dollars skimmed off the top instead of going to proper city investments — public safety, neighborhoods, infrastructure, public-private partnerships. It's why our city government still operates as if we're in a recession.

But Mayor Lenny Curry has a plan.

Since 2000, we've had an extra half-cent sales tax on goods purchased here. Called the "Better Jacksonville Plan," it's paid for large infrastructure projects completed in the past 15 years and is set to expire in 2030. Curry proposes a new tax to kick in after 2030 and use the revenue to pay down the \$2.7 billion unfunded portion of our public pension obligations. This will provide a dedicated revenue source for that unfunded portion, which will help stabilize our city's operating budget.

His proposal includes taxpayer protections. State law requires reform before the revenue can be used. Current employees will be required to increase payroll contributions to their existing pensions.

Unions will be required to collectively bargain with the city every three years, something that hasn't happened for some time and is critical to ensuring future retirement plans remain consistent with economic realities.

Lastly, the revenue from this half-cent sales tax could legally only go to this cause. Unlike a property tax increase, the funds could not be diverted elsewhere by future elected officials.

THE ISSUES IN BRIEF

We must understand this issue before voting on Aug. 30.

So let's review:

■ Jacksonville has \$2.7 billion of pension benefits it promised employees in the past and must pay for in the future. Because of this, what should be roughly \$75 million in annual pension costs has become close to \$300 million.

■ Our local sales tax rate is currently 7 percent. If we do nothing, it will drop to 6.5 percent in 2030. The mayor proposes to keep it at 7 percent beyond 2030, with the additional 0.5 percent being used solely to pay for the \$2.7 billion obligation described above. This additional half-cent tax will disappear once the pension obligation is fully funded or in 2060, whichever happens first.

■ Having a dedicated funding source for that \$2.7 billion obligation will mean less strain on Jacksonville's operating budget. Our city can once again invest in public safety, roads, neighborhoods and other tangible areas.

■ The reality is we cannot wave a magic wand and make this \$2.7 billion obligation disappear. The only question is how to pay for it. This is the least painful option available.

What sort of future do we want for Jacksonville?

I'm with Mayor Curry. I'll be voting yes for Jacksonville on County Referendum 1 on Aug. 30. I hope you'll join me.

Matt Brockelman is a partner at Southern Strategy Group, a lobbying group in Jacksonville.

Letters from Readers

COURTESIES

Not forgotten

In today's world of chaos, distrust and mayhem, often the polite courtesies have been forgotten.

But last week I experienced a renewal of these courtesies.

Exiting the library, a young man offered to carry my bag of books.

At a local restaurant the door was opened for me, and I was gestured to enter.

In a parking lot, another young man guided and directed me as I backed up my car.

And last but not least, my doctor's secretary hand-delivered a prescription to my pharmacy.

Could all of this be precipitated by my graying hair and cane?

Perhaps, but I will continue to think that there are caring, kind and thoughtful people among us.

Nelda Young, Jacksonville

CUMMER MUSEUM

An inspiring exhibit

To Adonnica Toler and Hope McMath, thank you for curating the profoundly moving "LIFT" exhibit at the Cummer Museum.

To those who haven't seen it, go. "LIFT" is necessary to understanding Jacksonville, seen through the eyes of its artists.

As a Duval County native who spent many childhood hours at the Cummer, I am delighted to see its programs grow.

They exemplify the critical value of arts education to lifelong learning while exposing marginalized histories. The lecture on Jacksonville's ties to the Harlem Renaissance was illuminating, and it made me ache to see more Augusta Savage, to hear more John Rosamond Johnson.

For some, "LIFT" may feel unfamiliar, featuring genres of art that are new to the Cummer's galleries. That's the point. McMath has been intentional in guiding the Cum-

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mer as a fine arts institution to be claimed by all Jacksonvillians, one that reflects the rich experiences of the city's many communities through art.

After seeing the Cummer exhibit, visit the Ritz, a vital cultural resource that deserves wider attention and acclaim than it's historically received. Take in the "Through Our Eyes" exhibit. The last day is Saturday. Experience the narratives referenced in LIFT. Engage with your city and its art, and let yourself be lifted.

Catherine Freeman, Jacksonville

ELVIS PRESLEY

Meeting remembered

An article on Elvis Presley reminded me of meeting him during his appearance at the Florida Theatre. I was on duty as the booking department in the Florida Theatre building in case one of our theaterers had a problem with film.

Much to my surprise, Elvis came by my office with one of the company officials.

It turns out that there was a meeting to discuss what the judge had complained about in his performance.

He was introduced to me and was very polite, even calling me Mister Sawyer!

None of the normal office staff was there, so when Monday morn-

ing came and the female employees found out that Elvis had been there, they were all envious of me and wanted to know if I shook his hand. When I said yes, some of them held my hand!

Tom Sawyer, Atlantic Beach

IMPORTANCE OF TIME

An extra second

National Geographic released an article called "2016 Will Be One Second Longer Than Expected."

It's all tediously scientific, but atomic clocks are out of sync with the Earth's rotation, making everyday clocks inaccurate. To remedy the problem, 2016 will have one extra second added to the last day of the year. This exciting news proposes the question, what should we do with this glorious abundance of time?

When I first heard about this extra second, I had a proverbial onslaught of ideas.

"I could join the gym."

"I could eat a Slim Jim."

"I could start a club called 15Nerds, but I would need 15 friends first."

I could join a scavenger hunt.

At this point, I realized I had already wasted my extra second plus several more.

So I will spend my extra second doing exactly something.

I will waste no more time strategizing how to use my second because I waste too much of my life planning and not enough living.

Let's all make our extra one second count, and use every second we have.

Stop planning, and start doing.

You can imagine the whole wide world, but nothing trumps being there, with wind beating against your face and the grass between your toes, knowing that you're making every second count whether it's an extra one, or not.

Kaitlin Applegate, student,
Gainesville

QUOTES ON A FREE PRESS, POLLUTION AT RIO OLYMPICS AND THE PRESIDENCY

■ "Most of the world's population live in countries where if you criticize the leader, you can go to jail. We live in the oldest and greatest democracy in the world with the strongest free speech protections in the world. And it's something, I think we are rightly proud of. It's critical that we be able to critically examine our leaders."
— **Jeff Bezos**, owner of The Washington Post, in New York magazine.

■ "Seeing that level of human pathogenic virus is pretty much unheard of in surface waters in the U.S. You would never, ever see these levels because we treat our wastewater."
— **Valerie Harwood**, chair of the Department of Integrative Biology at the University of South Florida, after an AP study found the waterways of Rio de Janeiro are as filthy as ever, just days before the Summer Games.

■ "The old idea that presidents can't do much on their own is outdated. As Obama has shown, they have plenty of unilateral control on domestic issues. ... The power of the president is greater than ever. The choice of a president matters more than ever, too."
— **James Surowiecki** column in The New Yorker.