

viewpoint

OPINIONS PAGE BLOG

You will find comments from editorial board members and columnists, videos of newsmakers, longer pieces and extra content from readers.
jacksonville.com/opinion

Vote no – and just raise property taxes

point of view

Lad Hawkins

ends in 2030.

This new tax will then be collected for a maximum of 30 years until 2060, 44 years from now, or when the unfunded debt is paid (whichever is earlier).

We would be passing this new tax on to our children and grandchildren.

We need to start paying off our debt now rather than putting it off.

The net result of this pay-later scheme is that the taxpayers will be paying \$1.5 billion in additional interest!

One responsible thing is for us to man and woman up and figure how to pay what we owe with a simple increase in property taxes.

We now pay 11.4419 mills.

The state allows a cap of 20 mills.

In Jacksonville we pay a lower millage rate than almost every city and county in the state. If we ever want to become that oft-mentioned first-tier city we need to act like one, and that comes at a cost.

A 1-mill tax increase would produce about \$47.6 million.

This small increase would provide funds now and would go a long way toward setting our financial house in order.

On a property valued at \$150,000, 1 mill would be about \$100 per year.

And the millage rate could be adjusted to reflect the changing economy.

Here is some perspective:

In 1980, we paid 12.6629 mills.

From 1995 to 2007 — 13 years — our millage rate was lowered each year. By 2007, our millage rate was down to 8.4841.

The responsible way to address the pension debt is to increase property taxes. We shouldn't put off paying what we owe.

TAX ASSESSMENTS

In 1995, the Save Our Homes Amendment went into effect limiting the amount the assessed value of a home could increase to 3 percent a year.

In 2008, we doubled our homestead exemption from \$25,000 to \$50,000. Then we added portability to the Save Our Homes Amendment.

In 2015, the median assessed value of a residence was \$99,892 but the median taxable value was only \$64,994. The Save Our Homes and portability amendments alone removed \$4.88 billion of taxable value in 2015.

SALES TAX IS REGRESSIVE

Florida places the second-highest tax burden on the poor in the entire country. A sales tax is regressive because the bottom 20 percent on the economic ladder pay 13 percent of their income in state and local taxes while the middle income payers pay only 8.3 percent and the top 1 percent pay only 2 percent of their income.

When someone tells you there is only one way to do something — and that you must rush into making a decision before you know all the details — you should be very wary.

Vote no!

Lad Hawkins lives in the Arlington area.

Vote yes for a better present and future

point of view

Jimmy Midyette

Interest in County Referendum 1 is high. Intertwined with the policy discussion have been personality clashes, party politics and a mistrust that reflects the fault lines just below the surface of our civic landscape.

It is best to leave aside these distractions and focus instead on the policy.

We collectively owe \$2.85 billion in pension benefits to our public servants and first responders.

The median age of a Jacksonville resident is 35. The systemic problems that created this situation began before most residents were born. A 35-year-old will outlive the pension obligation.

The only question is this:

How best to solve the problem?

Residents should vote yes on the pension ballot question. Our history shows that we need a dedicated funding stream. We need money that can't be redirected by future leaders. Extending an existing tax is preferable to adding to the tax burden of residents.

I support this plan, proposed by Mayor Lenny Curry's administration and unanimously approved by a bipartisan City Council, for many reasons.

They include:

LONG HISTORY

Our pension troubles began before millennials were born; they date back to decisions made in the consolidation era.

Paying off the pension liability will happen in millennials' lifetime under this bipartisan plan.

As it is, we're paying the half-cent sales tax for Better Jacksonville Plan expenses through 2030. Under the proposed plan, we begin to realize budget savings next year.

Payments to the pension fund account for \$260 million this year. Next year that bumps up to \$293 million. This is unsustainable, especially since we should pay only \$80 million per year for pension costs.

Recently, the city saved \$1.5 billion in future costs through benefit changes. The pension plan puts that \$1.5 billion back in, but now it will be paid, like the \$2.85 billion unfunded liability itself, from sales tax revenue.

It negates the "savings," but does so at

It would be easy to do nothing. But that is not the option that citizens should choose. We must approve the referendum.

the great benefit of solving the problem for good.

Many options have been considered over the years. A proposal offered last year would have included an increase in the JEA franchise fee, ultimately causing a rise in electric and other utility rates.

Of the options available, a yes vote is the one that's politically feasible. It's why the pension referendum has been supported by every Democrat and Republican on the City Council.

Public sector and private sector unions support the yes vote. Police haven't had a pay raise in 10 years. Unions have agreed to this plan because they know sacrifices must be made by both employees and taxpayers to fix the system.

Curry and the City Council passed a balanced budget last year and are expected to do the same this year.

REVENUE SQUEEZE

Our quality of life is diminished as more of our general revenue is spent to fund the pension shortfall.

Returning millions annually to the City Council for needed city services is why we must pass County Referendum 1.

The bottom line is simple:

We, the people of Jacksonville, collectively owe \$2.85 billion in benefits to retirees. There's no getting out of that debt number.

Without a dedicated funding stream, current payments will take a bigger and bigger bite out of our annual budget.

Millage rate increases can't be dedicated for this purpose; future leaders could raid that revenue for any purpose, which is part of what got us into this situation.

It would be easy to do nothing. But it would hurt Jacksonville in the long run.

The right thing to do is to vote yes on County Referendum 1.

Jimmy Midyette is a Jacksonville attorney.

QUOTES ON SOCIAL MEDIA PANIC, SMART PHONES AND NAACP

"People immediately started looking at social media where they saw reports that there was an active shooter."

— **Corey Rosenbusch**, a flight passenger at Los Angeles International Airport during a layover, after false reports of a gunman at the airport that caused a panicked evacuation.

"Hook it up to a smart phone. Boom. Take off and you're in business."

— **Ian Smith** of DroneDeploy, a San Francisco-based industry leader in drone software development, on drones used for irrigation systems to help farmers save money on water usage.

"You don't get to the White House unless you travel through the doors of the NAACP. More importantly, you don't get to the White House without addressing the nation's civil rights agenda."

— NAACP President **Cornell William Brooks** discussing Donald Trump during a C-SPAN interview.

CALL NOW & SAVE UP TO 85% ON YOUR NEXT PRESCRIPTION

Drug Name	Qty (pills)	Price*	Drug Name	Qty (pills)	Price*
Abilify 10mg	100	\$ 104	Seroquel XR 200mg	100	\$ 170
Advair Diskus 250/50	180ds	\$ 178	Spiriva 18mcg	90	\$ 161
Alphagan P 0.15%	15ml	\$ 75	Strattera 40mg	100	\$ 103
Avodart 0.5mg	100	\$ 106	Symbicort 200/6mcg	360	\$ 185
Benicar 40mg	90	\$ 84	Toprol-XL 50mg	100	\$ 39
BenicarHCT 40/12.5mg	90	\$ 81	Tradjenta 5mg	90	\$ 418
Bystolic 5mg	84	\$ 114	Travatan 0.4%	15ml	\$ 102
Celebrex 200mg	100	\$ 111	Truvada 200/300mg	90	\$ 570
Chantix 1mg	84	\$ 191	Ventolin HFA 100mcg	600ds	\$ 51
Cialis 20mg	16	\$ 65	Vesicare 10mg	90	\$ 81
Combigan 0.2%/0.5%	15ml	\$ 66	Viagra 100mg	16	\$ 61
Combivent Res.20/100mcg	600ds	\$ 104	Vytorin 10/40mg	90	\$ 356
Crestor 20mg	90	\$ 133	Wellbutrin XL 300mg	90	\$ 129
Cymbalta 60mg	90	\$ 162	Xarelto 20mg	84	\$ 423
Diovan 160mg	90	\$ 62	Xenical 120mg	90	\$ 90
Evista 60mg	90	\$ 115	Zetia 10mg	100	\$ 104
Exforge 5mg/160mg	84	\$ 166			
Femara 2.5mg	100	\$ 70			
Flovent HFA 50mcg	120ds	\$ 34			
Janumet 50/1000mg	90	\$ 158			
Januvia 100mg	84	\$ 276			
Levitra 20mg	30	\$ 71			
Lumigan 0.01%	9ml	\$ 90			
Namenda 10mg	100	\$ 55			
Nasonex 50mcg	100ds	\$ 16			
Nexium 40mg	90	\$ 104			
Onglyza 5mg	84	\$ 276			
Pataday 0.2 %	15ml	\$ 68			
Pradaxa 150mg	120	\$ 291			
Premarin 0.625mg	84	\$ 63			
Premarin Vag. 0.625mg	42g	\$ 64			
Pristiq 50mg	100	\$ 128			
Propecia 1mg	100	\$ 66			
Proscar 5mg	84	\$ 25			
Ranexa 500mg	100	\$ 76			
Revatio 20mg	90	\$ 64			

RxRightCard.com
Big Savings from Nice People

- ✓ Over 1,000 Medications
- ✓ Price Match Guarantee
- ✓ Call for FREE Price Quote
- ✓ Donut Hole "Friendly"
- ✓ Prescription Required
- ✓ Lic. International Pharmacy

Toll Free Phone
1-800-828-4889

Toll Free Fax
1-800-416-8019

FREE SHIPPING!

Shop: www.RxRightCard.com
or Call Now! **1-800-828-4889**

All pricing subject to change without notice. *Prices shown are for generic equivalent if available.



WIN TICKETS!

October 5 - 9

Jacksonville Veterans Memorial Arena

Visit jacksonville.com/contests

The Florida Times-Union
jacksonville.com