

viewpoint

In support of Trump's refugee ban

point of view
augusta chronicle

Note to readers: This piece was published by The Augusta Chronicle editorial board.

“Our immigration system has been broken for decades, and the president is doing his job to address the problems that he can with his executive authority.”

That's from the White House. But it's not from this past weekend. It's from November 2014, from a summary released ahead of President Barack Obama's address to the nation about immigration.

So before you start (or continue) fuming over the sequence of events surrounding President Donald Trump's executive order Friday on refugees, remember: Using executive authority to address immigration issues is nothing new. Every president since Eisenhower has done it.

Hyperventilating media seem more concerned with describing Trump's order as spurring “global confusion,” to borrow an overreaching phrase from Monday's New York Times.

But the intent is not confusing. Here's what the executive order calls for:

- Citizens of Iraq, Iran, Syria, Somalia, Sudan, Libya and Yemen cannot enter the U.S. for 90 days. These countries were named in a 2015 law — enthusiastically passed by Democrats — aimed at scrutinizing people emigrating from nations teeming with jihadist violence.
- Refugees from any country cannot enter the U.S. for 120 days.
- Refugees from Syria cannot enter the U.S. indefinitely.
- No more than 50,000 refugees can be admitted into the U.S. this year.

That's it. It's completely legal for the president to do this. Obama knew that, too, when he barred Iraqi refugees from entering the U.S. in 2011. That ban lasted six months. The media outcry over that ban lasted zero months.

But now — because the White House is following the will of the people by trying to make it more difficult for terrorists to enter the United States — liberals are beside themselves.

Leftists are trying to rebut the executive order by invoking the poem at the base at the Statue of Liberty — as if the poem is one our country's founding documents.

They would have you believe that Trump's directive somehow revokes a sacred promise of freedom.

These are the same leftists who can't be troubled with respecting the enduring, immutable strength of our Constitution. Wouldn't it be refreshing if they embraced our real founding documents with the same passion as the poem?

That poem, The New Colossus, by Emma Lazarus, includes the now-familiar lines, “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free ...”

It truly is a beautiful sentiment — aimed originally at industrious immigrants of the 1880s. But we have a drastically different brand of immigrant now compared to what we greeted onto our shores then. What Emma Lazarus really lifting her lamp “beside the golden door” to usher in terrorists who wanted to destroy America?

Since when has a poem been our official immigration policy?

U.S. Rep. Trey Gowdy of South Carolina framed the issue superbly:

“The world we find ourselves in is dangerous and becoming increasingly so. Since national security and public safety are the preeminent functions of government, there is a fundamental duty to ensure the necessary background investigations can be done to stop anyone intent on doing harm from exploiting Americans' generosity and taking more innocent lives.”

In the wake of the president's executive order, the main thing to bear in mind is this: America deserves better border security. Our immigration system has been — as the Obama White House reminded us at the beginning of this editorial — “broken for decades.”

And fixing something that has been so broken for so long will be very, very messy and will take some time.

The country has a rough road ahead to take us to a smoother destination.

City's change order process is wasteful

point of view
jack ensch

As a taxpayer, I would like to comment on what appears to be a dysfunctional City Hall bureaucracy where various departments seem to have trouble communicating.

How is it that the city planning department, the architect, the procurement department, legal department and the Historic Preservation Commission could have planned and approved a City Hall renovation project that purportedly doesn't meet proper standards for renovating a historic building?

And then, only after the project is completed, do the recriminations begin. This appears to be dysfunctional.

In perusing the city's website, I have learned that all change orders to construction projects in the city (no matter how small the cost) require 11 approval signatures all the way up the chain of command for a final signature in the Mayor's Office!

This inbox-to-inbox approval process labyrinth can take months before a contractor receives the funds for costs incurred for the changes being made. This is the epitome of micromanagement and bureaucratic inefficiency.

With requirements like that it's a wonder any project in the city could ever be completed on time and on budget. There are obstacles to contractors for timely project completion that costs taxpayers more money.

I wonder if Mayor Lenny Curry — who appears to now have his entire focus on the pension problem — is even aware of the inefficiency that exists in the current city procurement change order policy. This policy is operating due to an Executive Order (No. 2013-05) signed in 2013 by his Mayor Alvin Brown.

What a negative impact this approval requirement must have on the cost of doing business for small contractors doing city work, the very same small businesses that the city's website says it supports.

Large contracting firms can afford to absorb the added costs against their cash flow while awaiting payment.

However, many qualified smaller contractors are probably discouraged from

even trying to do business with the city with this policy in place.

I could understand setting a ceiling and requiring a higher level of approval for the more costly, major change orders. But not for every “nickel/dime” change order that inevitably occur on most projects.

If the city leadership won't delegate, or doesn't trust the procurement department officials to make lower cost approvals, then there's something wrong and maybe the system needs to be revised to be more efficient and user-friendly.

Every organization (public or private) can benefit from a periodic, honest review of how it is functioning.

To that end, I would suggest that the city's Inspector General (whose city website motto is “Enhancing Public Trust in Government”) conduct a complete, independent review of the city's entire procurement process and make recommendations on how it can be made more efficient and timely.

That would foster more transparency and enhance taxpayers' trust that their tax dollars are being properly utilized as well as be more encouraging for businesses to do work with the city.

Such a review would also be in keeping with the website's stated mission of both the city's Office of Ethics Compliance, and Oversight (“Jacksonville has a very strong commitment to ethics in city government.”) and the ombudsman (“To promote contractual fairness, equity and administrative accountability through communication, documentation and, if necessary, mediation.”)

These should not be just empty words. Jacksonville has a lot going for it. It's a great city, that can become even greater with good leadership and good business practices. However, to achieve that, all city employees — from the mayor on down — must keep in mind that they are “public servants” working for the taxpayers who fund their salaries.

They owe allegiance to the citizens — not the other way around. This fact is too often lost sight of in big bureaucracies at every level of government.

Jack Ensch is a retired Navy captain who lives in Jacksonville.

Another view: Marian Kamensky Slovakia



reason midweek

Curry should release pension figures



ron littlepage
times-union columnist

There is a lot we don't know about the cost of the pension plans Mayor Lenny Curry is offering the police and firefighters unions.

That's because Curry and his administration aren't talking, arguing that the cost to the taxpayers

who will foot the bill can be kept secret while negotiations are ongoing.

So let's start with what we do know. The normal cost is what the city has to put into a pension plan after an actuarial study determines what is required. That's separate from the payments that go toward the unfunded liability.

In 2014, the city's treasurer, Joey Greive, said the normal cost for the police and fire pension plans at that time was 29 percent.

Under the pension reform legislation passed by the City Council in 2015, which among other things reduced benefits for new employees, the normal cost would drop to 10 percent for new employees.

If Curry is successful in getting rid of the current defined benefit plans, he would put new employees into a 401(k) with a 25 percent city match.

That, in effect, would become the city's new normal cost, which obviously is considerably higher than the 10 percent in the 2015 agreement.

It's difficult to predict how long it would take for all the employees in the departments to be covered by the 401(k) plans.

But according to a draft report on the Police and Fire Pension Fund released last Oct. 1, the payroll for employees eligible for the fund was \$136 million.

Obviously the covered payroll will grow over time, but for this calculation, let's say it doesn't.

At 10 percent, the normal cost would be \$13.6 million a year. At 25 percent, the match would be \$34 million a year.

That \$20 million jump over the 2015 agreement is real money.

But Curry's plan gets even more expensive.

Curry is offering a 3 percent bump after the unions agree to his proposals and an additional 20 percent in raises over three years.

Without figuring in compounding, that alone would cost taxpayers \$31.2 million.

As a comparison, the entire budget for the Public Library this year is \$31 million.

The budgeted salaries for all of JSO this year is \$195 million. For firefighters, it's \$94.6 million.

If equal raises were given to all of the employees, the cost would be \$66 million.

Again for comparison, the budget for the Parks Department this year is \$42 million. The Public Works budget is slightly over \$42 million.

Curry's plan would also add away with the 2015 agreement, which had been projected to save taxpayers \$1.8 billion over 35 years.

Curry would reinstate the 3 percent COLA and the 8.4 percent guaranteed return on DROP accounts, two cost drivers that contributed to the fund's huge unfunded liability, for employees hired at reduced benefits after the 2015 agreement was put in place.

Doing away with that agreement could also put an end to the \$95 million in so-called “chapter” money that the unions had agreed would go toward paying down the unfunded liability.

As I said, the Curry administration is keeping a lid on what the proposals will cost taxpayers.

But clearly it's going to be expensive. I'm certain Curry will disagree with my calculations. Then show us his.

Add in the offer Curry made to the unions to keep the 25 percent match for at least seven years, with a possible exception of bad times, and it's reminiscent of the previous 30-year agreement that got us into trouble before.

Ending the 2015 agreement could also undo the changes in governance of the fund that were put in place to prevent that trouble from reoccurring.

Jacksonville citizens have a right to know more before these deals are done. They are the ones who will pay.

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John Wayne racial comments resurface

A meme stating that actor John Wayne believed in white supremacy has circulated on the Internet for several years, but has resurfaced.



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: But Wayne's quote is real;

it originally appeared in a May 1971 interview with Playboy magazine in which Wayne was responding to a question about whether Angela Davis, a counter-culture activist, communist and professor, was discriminated against by those who wanted to revoke her teaching credentials:

Wayne responded: “With a lot of blacks, there's quite a bit of resentment along with their dissent, and possibly rightfully so. But we can't all of a sudden get down on our knees and turn everything over to the leadership of the blacks. I believe in white supremacy until the blacks are educated to a point of responsibility. I don't believe in giving authority and positions of leadership and judg-

ment to irresponsible people.”

When asked about his own hiring practices, Wayne said that while he did not discriminate against black actors or crew members, he didn't seek them out either: “I've directed two pictures, and I gave the blacks their proper position. I had a black slave in The Alamo, and I had a correct number of blacks in The Green Berets. If it's supposed to be a black character, naturally I use a black actor. But I don't go so far as hunting for positions for them. I think the Hollywood studios are carrying their tokenism a little too far ...”

The Playboy interview contained one other quote that is frequently

shared in meme form, Snopes.com reports. The quote was in response to Playboy's question of whether Wayne felt any empathy for Native American for subordinate roles in Westerns:

“I don't feel we did wrong in taking this great country away from them, if that's what you're asking. Our so-called stealing of this country from them was just a matter of survival. There were great numbers of people who needed new land, and the Indians were selfishly trying to keep it for themselves.”

These feelings and other publicized statements came back to prevent Wayne from being recognized by the state of California. In April of last year, Republican state assemblyman Matthew Harper of Huntington Beach wanted to declare May 26 as John Wayne Day to mark the day the actor was born. But other legislators mentioned Wayne's views. The proposal fell by a 35-20 vote.

Brief letters: Stop the uncivil discourse

REFUGEE BAN

Lady Liberty is crying. The ACLU is right, the U.S. Constitution forbids religious favoritism.

God-fearing Muslims have as much right to immigrate or take refuge as Christians do. This is another play for the evangelical right-wing.

Rick Mansfield, Ponte Vedra Beach

TRUMP: SPORTS ANALOGY

America has hired a new coach, a president with no previous experience. At least, the new coach (president) has successfully operated a business. More important, he has not been part of the D.C. political machine. He should be given a chance to succeed. Like it or not, we are the team.

Mike Dallas, Jacksonville

THE IMPACT OF BUILDING A WALL

The American people build the wall. Mexico boycotts American goods. America boycotts Mexican drugs.

Mark Adams, Jacksonville

TRUMP VS. OBAMA

It is my opinion that Donald Trump has done more in a week to destroy the good will of the United States than Barack Obama did in eight years.

Louise Hill, Jacksonville

Democrat or Republican or Independent or other, we all hate extreme, senseless violence.

We all value our basic human rights and freedoms. We all love our country, the United States of America.

We all desperately need to return to lively debate that identifies and addresses issues and concerns, that uses active listening and keeps our divisive rhetoric and emotional reactions in check.

We all need to engage in our democracy through learning and participation.

Sondie Frus, Jacksonville

FEDERAL HIRING FREEZE

I read that a bunch of senior State Department officials resigned. Perhaps President Donald Trump should not have ordered the freeze on hiring federal workers.

Deborah Cearnal, Orange Park

PAYING FOR THE WALL

If President Donald Trump wants to build the wall so bad, he should be willing to fund the construction from his own accounts.

When the wall is completed, Congress can vote to repay him.

Richard Stritter, St. Johns