

# The Florida Times-Union

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Sports, C-1



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Life, D-1

# A 23-year-wait

Detective's questions on 1994 killing finally answered



Calvin Fenner, 68, was the original detective for the Columbia County Sheriff's Office assigned to the case of the headless body, later determined to be 16-year-old Fred Laster, discarded here behind what was a Lake City gas station near the off-ramp from Interstate 10 to U.S. 441 in June 1994. On Friday March 10, Fenner visited the site at what is now a tire store, a site he said he has returned too many times since the incident. (Bob Mack/Florida Times-Union)

By Eileen Kelley & Garrett Pelican  
The Times-Union

He was sleeping when the sound of sniper fire broke the silence of the foggy September air. Then came the call: "Medic!" Calvin Fenner instinctively grabbed his aid bag, ran across an open fire base and dove behind the bunker from where the call had come.

A body lay on top of the bunker. He pulled the man he knew as Parker toward him. In the light of the flares, he could see Parker's glassy eyes and he felt the man's labored breaths leave his body. Parker was the first to die in Fenner's arms, but he wouldn't be the last.

That night, in the midst of the hellish landscape that was Vietnam in 1968, the fresh-faced 19-year-old Fenner learned how to blunt the pain. Fellow soldiers were no longer brothers-in-arms. Instead, they were machines to be fixed, sometimes dozens at once, and sent back into the fray. Fenner

put up a wall — an imaginary but impenetrable barrier — to shield himself from the war's horrible images and deaths.

He brought the wall home with him.

Fenner spent nearly three decades as a cop wading through crime scenes, stepping over bodies and avoiding puddles of blood. The wall helped him cope as he investigated horrific crimes including the death of his best friend's wife. The wall kept at bay the thoughts that, left unchecked, might drive a man mad.

Nothing braced Fenner for the grisly discovery behind a gas station off Interstate 10 in Columbia County the morning of June 5, 1994, when a woman walking her dog stumbled upon what she so desperately wanted to be a mannequin.

ANSWERS continues on A-4



Laster



Holding a copy of a crime scene photo provided by the FBI of the site where the body of Fred Laster was dumped in 1994, Calvin Fenner described how investigators presume the victim was dumped. Calvin Fenner, 68, was the original detective for the Columbia County Sheriff's Office assigned to the case of the headless body, later determined to be 16-year-old Fred Laster.

*"Those cases, even though you retire or whatever, they're still on your mind."*

Calvin Fenner



Mayor Lenny Curry is running the numbers using growth rate projections.

## Sales tax revenue growth is needed

Robust gains would help city succeed in bringing down pension debt

By David Bauerlein  
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Mayor Lenny Curry's pension reform plan anticipates sales tax revenue will grow at a much faster rate than what the city has experienced since 2001.

The forecast for the pace of sales tax growth will be a big factor in determining how the city uses its new approach to paying down a \$2.85 billion pension debt by tapping a half-cent sales tax that will start around 2031. Voters approved the tax in an August election, and Curry is working to fulfill requirements such as closing the city's pension plans to new hires so the tax will kick in after the Better Jacksonville Plan ends.

If the sales tax for pension costs gets activated, the city would shift a large chunk of its pension costs into the future when the sales tax kicks in, which in turn would allow reduced pension payments until then, freeing up money for other needs.

That approach of pay less now, pay more later hinges on the future sales tax revenue being robust enough to cover the deferred pension costs that will hit the budget in 13 years.

Curry is running the numbers using growth rate projections of 3.75 percent per year and 4.25 percent annually. Both forecasts are faster than the 3.2 percent annual average increase in sales tax revenue that the Better Jacksonville Plan has racked up since it started in 2001.

Jacksonville attorney Tad Delegal, who served on a pension reform task force in 2013 and has questioned whether various aspects of Curry's plan are fi-

PENSION continues on A-4

Weather  
Rain  
Forecast on A-2

66 Today's high

55 Monday morning's low



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94 PAGES



March 18  
11am-7pm  
in Hemming Park

TASTE WHAT THE FIRST COAST HAS TO OFFER!



## ANSWERS

Continued from A-1

Fenner saw the young man's body — minus the head, the hands, the legs — a torso discarded beside a dumpster. It was cut methodically, scrubbed clean of blood and unlike any victim he'd ever seen.

"It was kind of a surreal sight," Fenner recalled. "It wasn't really like seeing a body laid out. I've had bodies in all kinds of configurations and missing different parts. This was so meticulously done. It [the torso] was almost like rubber or plastic."

Believing the victim was killed elsewhere, Fenner and two other Columbia County detectives — Mike Hodges and Russ Williams — fanned out to find clues, remaining body parts and the killer. Their search took them to rest stops, to motels and to gas stations as far north as Valdosta and as far south as Ocala. They ping-ponged along Interstate 10 between Pensacola and Jacksonville, diving into dumpsters and foraging across Florida's palmetto-dappled landscape.

Without hands, there were no fingerprints. Without a head, they couldn't put a name to a face or search dental records. All they had was a nameless torso. Perhaps neighboring law enforcement agencies could fill in the blanks.

Fenner said detectives were in regular contact with several agencies, including the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, as they tried to link the torso to someone who may have been reported missing. Those attempts were futile.

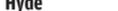
Fenner, now retired, was fraught with emotion Tuesday when officials from Columbia and Duval counties announced that Ronnie



Calvin Fenner, stands on what was the location of a dumpster and describes how the body of 16-year-old Fred Laster was dumped in 1994. Fenner, 68, was the original detective for the Columbia County Sheriff's Office assigned to the case of the headless body, later determined to be the 16-year-old Laster, discarded behind a Lake City gas station near the off-ramp from Interstate 10 to US 441 in June 1994. On Friday March 10, 2017, Fenner visited the site at what is now a tire store, a site he said he has returned too many times since the incident. (Bob Mack/Florida Times-Union)

Hyde, 60, of Jacksonville Beach killed and mutilated 16-year-old Fred Paul Laster of Yulee and discarded his torso behind the gas station 23 years ago.

Hyde



"I was really relieved that the family had some closure," he said. "I just couldn't imagine what that family felt. It's one thing having a missing family member but when you're confronted with the manner of death and what that family must have gone through, it's mind-boggling. ... It would just be overwhelming."

Even in retirement, since

2011, or when he took a five-year leave of absence to care for his ailing father, Fenner always called back to Columbia County to see how the case was coming along. Even though it had stalled and grown cold over the years, he never gave up hope. He never stopped brooding.

"Those cases, even though you retire or whatever, they're still on your mind," he said. "They're active thoughts that go through your mind: What could I have done? Did I miss something? Could we try this or try that? What new processes are available now?"

Columbia County Sheriff Mark Hunter credited solid police work by deputies, in-

creased exposure and the advancement of technology with cracking this case.

But Hyde's arrest warrant and interviews with law enforcement and agencies dedicated to locating missing children paint an unflattering portrait of the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office's handling of the case. The Times-Union has learned the Sheriff's Office never alerted the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, the agency credited along with Fenner and others for helping to identify Laster. In an email, the Sheriff's Office said its policy is to notify the National Crime Information Center, a database used by law enforcement.

Further, Laster's family

claimed they went to the Sheriff's Office in July 1994, to report his disappearance weeks after the teen was last seen, according to the warrant. No record of that visit exists. There's also no record of his sister's attempt to file a similar report with the Nassau County Sheriff's Office.

The first official document shows Laster's sister filed a missing person report in Jacksonville Feb. 17, 1995. Police following up on that report spoke with Laster's sister, who said her brother was last seen with Hyde and frequented Jacksonville Beach where Hyde lived. "There is no record indicating any law enforcement contact with Hyde regarding Fred Laster or his

disappearance," the warrant said.

The Sheriff's Office last week refused to answer questions about the case. But others are willing to speak up.

Columbia County Sgt. Murray Smith said he hopes this case sparks changes in police policy related to missing-person cases. While Murray didn't assign blame to the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, he acknowledged there's room for improvement.

Fenner also did not want to speculate about what other agencies could have done differently. "Things happen. Not everything's perfect. And I don't know the reason, but I don't want to blame anyone," he said.

State Attorney Melissa Nelson, who presides over the Fourth Circuit, praised Fenner for his painstaking police work in the case. But Fenner, who spent a lifetime since Vietnam trying hard not to remember, said he could never forget cops like Hodges or Williams. Or the volunteers who worked tirelessly beside them, two of whom are now dead and a third afflicted with Alzheimer's.

Retirement has chipped away at Fenner's once-impenetrable wall. He's 68 and looks at life differently now than he did in the throes of Vietnam or on the job as a homicide detective. And oddly, he's OK with this.

"I started looking at the cases that I had done and you let yourself think about the victims in a whole different way," he said. "And a lot of those emotions are overwhelming. I couldn't talk about this case for quite some time."

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## PENSION

Continued from A-1

nancially sustainable, said he thinks projections for the sales tax growth rate should be based on conservative assumptions.

"The problem is if we base everything on the best-case scenario, when something goes wrong, we find ourselves in big financial trouble," he said.

He said if the city is going to put future hires into 401(k) style accounts so the city reduces its risk

from an economic downturn damaging the financial health of the pension plans, the city should take the same approach to assuming there will be downturns that negatively affect sales tax collections.

"Frankly, if the argument against a (pension plan) is we need to guard against market downturns, then I think we need to use the same budgeting logic in planning for future growth of the sales tax," he said.

The mayor's office said by email that Curry's proposal would be set up in a

way to make adjustments in the city's pension contribution amounts if actual sales tax growth falls short of forecasts.

The email said that without making any changes, the total cost of pension contributions will be \$350 million in the 2016-17 budget.

"This is simply not sustainable," the email said. "Regardless of the growth rate of the half-cent sales tax, this is a dedicated revenue stream that is critically needed to help pay down our pension debt.

Should the growth rate happen slower than projections, our annual actuarial contributions will reflect that change and the city's annual contributions will reflect that."

The mayor's office did not elaborate on how that change would work.

Forecasting long-range sales tax growth is dicey because sales tax collections can swing widely from year to year.

The Better Jacksonville Plan's half-cent sales tax, for instance, has gained from increases as high as

15 percent percent per year and suffered drops of almost 10 percent per year.

In recent years, the trend has shown improvement with a three-year average of 5.64 percent annual increases, a five-year average of 4.85 percent increases, and a seven-year average of 4.49 percent, according to figures from the mayor's office.

Projections for sales tax collections also will come into play if Curry and City Council decide to count future revenue as a present-day asset in

the pension plans for accounting purposes. That maneuver would reduce the city's contributions to the pension plans because on paper, the plans would appear to be financially stronger.

Other ways to reduce the city's contribution are to stretch the pension debt payoff over a longer period of time and stop making extra payments called for by a 2015 agreement between the city and Police and Fire Pension Fund.

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## U.S. attorney says he was fired after not resigning

By Larry Neumeister  
Associated Press

NEW YORK | An outspoken Manhattan federal prosecutor known for crusading against public corruption announced he was fired Saturday after he refused a request a day earlier to resign.

Preet Bharara, 48, made the announcement on his personal Twitter account after it became widely known hours earlier that he did not intend to step down in response to Attorney General Jeff Sessions' request that left-over appointees of former President Barack Obama quit.

"I did not resign. Moments ago I was fired," Bharara said in the tweet. "Being the US Attorney in SDNY will forever be the greatest honor of my professional life."

Just over three months ago, then-President-elect Donald Trump asked Bharara to remain as U.S. attorney in Manhattan and Bharara told reporters after the Trump Tower meeting that he had agreed to do so.

Bharara was appointed by former President Barack Obama in 2009. In frequent public appearances, Bharara has decied public corruption after successfully prosecuting over a dozen state lawmakers, Democrats and Republicans alike.

Sessions' decision to include Bharara's name on the list of 46 resignations of holdovers from the Obama administration surprised Manhattan prosecutors.

While it is customary for a new president to replace virtually all of the 93 U.S. attorneys, it often occurs at a slower pace. Sessions lost his position as U.S. attorney for the Southern District of Alabama in a similar sweep by then-Attorney General Janet Reno in



U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara speaks during a news conference in New York in 2015. The outspoken Manhattan federal prosecutor known for crusading against public corruption said on Saturday that he was fired after refusing to resign. (AP Photo/Kathy Willens)

1993. New York Sen. Charles Schumer, a Democrat, said in a statement Friday that he was "troubled to learn" of the resignation demands, particularly of Bharara, since Trump called him in November and assured him that he wanted Bharara to remain Manhattan's top federal prosecutor.

After Bharara met Trump on Nov. 30, he emerged from the meeting to say Trump had asked him to remain in the job he has held since his appointment in the summer of 2009 and he had agreed.

Schumer said that by requesting immediate resignations, Trump was "interrupting ongoing cases and investigations and hindering the administration of justice."

Bharara, who was once lauded on the cover of Time magazine as the man who is "busting Wall Street" after successfully prosecuting dozens of insider traders, has in the past few years set his sights on prosecuting over a dozen state officeholders — Democrats and Republicans — including New York's two most powerful lawmakers.

It also recently was revealed that Bharara's office is investigating the financial terms of settlements of sexual-harassment claims against Fox News by its

employees.

The request from Sessions came as Bharara's office is prosecuting former associates of Democratic Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo in a bribery case. Also, prosecutors recently interviewed New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio as part of a probe into his fundraising. The mayor's press secretary has said the mayor is cooperating and that he and his staff had acted appropriately.

The request for resignations came just days after Trump last weekend claimed that Obama tapped his telephones during last year's election. FBI Director James Comey privately asked the Justice Department to dispute the claim because he believed the allegations were false. Bharara worked for Comey when he was U.S. attorney in Manhattan under President George W. Bush.

Last week, the quick-witted Bharara initiated a new personal Twitter feed with one of his first tweets perhaps intentionally delivering multiple messages.

In it, he linked to an AP video of a Senate hearing focusing on whether federal prosecutors were fired for political reasons.

"This Senate hearing on political interference DOJ was 10 yrs ago today," Bharara wrote. "Is that me in the background? Boy I've aged."

## Trump praises arrest of 'troubled person' at White House

By Darlene Superville  
Associated Press

POTOMAC FALLS, VA. | President Donald Trump said Saturday that the U.S. Secret Service did a "phenomenal job" apprehending a "troubled person" who got onto the White House grounds after climbing a fence on the east side of the property while Trump was inside the executive mansion.

It was the first known security breach at the White House since Trump took office nearly two months ago.

The Secret Service said in a statement that the individual, whom it did not identify, was arrested on the south grounds without further incident after climbing an outer perimeter fence near the Treasury Department and East Executive Avenue at about 11:38 p.m. Friday.

No hazardous materials were found during a search of a backpack the individual carried over the fence, the agency said.

"Secret Service did a fantastic job last night," Trump said Saturday from his golf club in Northern Virginia. Trump described the intruder as a "troubled person" and "very sad." He was briefed on the matter Friday night.

Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly also was briefed on the incident, the Secret Service said. Kelly was among several Cabinet secretaries and senior White House staff members who attended a working lunch with the president at the Trump National Golf Club.

The Secret Service also said a search of the north and south White House grounds found "nothing of concern to security operations."

The agency didn't provide an

update Saturday on the individual's status. Standard practice is to turn intruders over to the local police department.

The intrusion, the first under Trump, follows a series of security lapses during the eight years that Barack Obama was president.

An especially embarrassing breach came in September 2014 when an Army veteran with mental health issues scaled a fence on the Pennsylvania Avenue side of the White House and made it as far into the building as the East Room before the Secret Service could apprehend him.

The Obamas were not at home at the time. The incident was one of several breakdowns by the Secret Service that ultimately led to the resignation of the agency's then-director, Julia Pierson, the following month.

Trump said he brought the Cabinet secretaries, White House staff and some of their spouses to the club for a working lunch to discuss the military, the economy, health care and other issues.

Besides Kelly, joining Trump were Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin, Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin, Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross, White House chief of staff Reince Priebus, chief strategist Steve Bannon and press secretary Sean Spicer.

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis was notably absent.

"We're having some great discussions," Trump said. "The economy is doing very, very well. Generally speaking we're doing very well." He talked about inheriting "a mess" when he took office, but said everything would be straightened out.

"It's going to be straightened out fast," Trump said.