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**COURIERS:  
 WHAT'S DRIVING  
 NUCLEAR ARMS  
 TRANSPORT**  
 Reason, E-1

**SENATE, HOUSE  
 DIFFER ON BUDGET,  
 PRIORITIES**  
 Metro, B-1



**GONZAGA  
 WINS**  
 to reach national  
 championship  
 Sports, C-1



**FLORIDA THEATRE CELEBRATING  
 ITS 90TH ANNIVERSARY**  
 Life, D-1

# SET TO SERVE

In move toward equality, enlisted women will serve on submarines



The Ohio-class guided-missile submarine USS Florida (SSGN 728), gold crew, arrives in Souda harbor. Florida is homeported in Kings Bay, Ga. (U.S. Navy)

**By Joe Daraskevich**  
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A U.S. Navy submarine crew is like a family where each member is required to know everything about the vessel in case catastrophe strikes and lives are in jeopardy.

For years the close families in even closer quarters consisted entirely of men. But the submarine culture is changing, and women are now welcome to join the club.

Southeast Georgia's Kings Bay Naval Submarine Base is set to become the testing ground this year for the Navy's latest move toward gender equality.

The women preparing to live and work underwater alongside their male counterparts won't have to deal with media scrutiny or a spotlight following them through their assignments because the Navy is shielding

them from news interviews and unnecessary fanfare so they can mesh with their shipmates as easily as possible.

"I wouldn't say the Navy is forcing them or the Navy is requiring them to stay anonymous," said Cmdr. Tommy Crosby, the public affairs officer for Submarine Forces Atlantic. "That is not the case. It is strictly based on feedback received from the initial set of women who integrated into the submarine force."

Female officers started serving on submarines in 2011, and last year the first enlisted women joined the crew of the USS Michigan in Bangor, Wash.

"It is a consistent drum beat from them that they want to just do their job to the best of their ability and integrate with their new crews, and be a member of the team. We honor that

**SUBMARINE** continues on A-7



The international symbol for women and men are on alternate sides of a sign, held by Velcro, on an officer's washroom. (Florida Times-Union)

*"It is a consistent drum beat from them that they want to just do their job to the best of their ability and integrate with their new crews, and be a member of the team. We honor that commitment and desire."*

**- Cmdr. Tommy Crosby**

## Pension bailout cost full of blanks

Curry's kept a tight grip on details as legislation heads to council

**By David Bauerlein, Nate Monroe & Christopher Hong**  
 The Times-Union

Despite Mayor Lenny Curry's refusal to provide key data or substantive answers for more than a year, the Jacksonville City Council could take a final vote in just a matter of weeks on a pension-reform proposal that would amount to one of the largest financial transactions in City Hall history.

Curry's office filed fill-in-the-blank legislation last week outlining a complex proposal seeking to overhaul city pensions and provide an avenue to pay down its associated \$2.85 billion debt by enacting a half-cent sales tax for pension costs that voters approved last August. But the mayor has still not yet presented information crucial to understanding how his plans would impact the city's future. Blank spaces are in the legislation where financial information should be.

Curry's plans would break ground in a number of ways.

The proposal would abandon major tenets of a hard-won 2015 pension-reform law. It would put into place an unprecedented and generous 401(k)-style plan for future employees, and offer millions of dollars worth of raises and retirement benefits to current employees.

The plan also would extend the length of time the city has to pay off its pension debt — a move that would shift a big portion of pension costs until after the sales tax starts around 2031, but tax cost taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars in additional payments down the road. And it would also use an untested accounting process that could reduce the city's pension payments in the short term.

The city has released little information on the costs or financial impact of

**PENSION** continues on A-7

**Weather**  
 Warm Sunshine  
 Forecast on A-2

86 Today's high

68 Monday morning's low



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Classified	F-6	Legals	B-3
Comics	D-4	Life	D
Crosswords	D-4	Money	F
Editorials	E-5	Obituaries	B-7

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# SUBMARINE

Continued from A-1

commitment and desire,” Crosby said.

The adjustment hasn't been as smooth as the Navy would like and the service suffered national embarrassment when sailors videotaped female submarine officers undressing and the tapes were bartered for energy drinks and other items.

Multiple sailors at Kings Bay were convicted in 2015 for their roles in the videotaping.

This year the movement to integrate the submarine force is coming back to the East Coast after a group of 38 enlisted women were selected in May for submarine school. The sailors who make it all the way through will either be assigned to the Blue or Gold crew on the USS Florida at Kings Bay — which means they will alternate between shore duty and serving aboard the submarine.

According to the Navy, each crew on the 560-foot Ohio-class ballistic missile submarine consists of 15 officers and 150 enlisted sailors.

“The idea is to have every crew ultimately be 20 percent female,” said Lt. Lily Hinz, the public affairs officer for Submarine Group 10 at Kings Bay.

Hinz said the Navy will not update the number of women going through the pipeline until the process is complete.

Crosby said training is gender neutral because crew members have to be able to rely on each submariner equally.

At any moment while the vessel is deep under the water's surface, an alarm could mean flooding, fire, a poison gas leak or any other unexpected calamity requiring the attention of everyone on board.

The alarm might mean waking up from a slumber, leaping from a cramped bunk in the berthing area, and getting dressed as sailors run through tight passageways to address the problem.

## LAYOUT CHANGES UNDERWAY

Privacy has never been a major concern for male submarine crews, so layout changes needed to be made to make both the men and women feel comfortable, Hinz said.

The Florida is currently in dry dock for maintenance and is expected to be back underway about the time the enlisted women arrive in Georgia this summer, she said.

Hinz said part of the work being done on the Ohio-class guided-missile submarine is routine maintenance, but a large portion of the makeover is to ensure sufficient privacy standards are met for mixed-gender crews.

When the Michigan went through habitability modifications, the cost was projected at \$8 mil-



With a tug saluting with water cannons in the basin, the USS Florida crew gather on the hull of the ship at the conclusion of the return to service ceremony for the nuclear submarine at Naval Station Mayport in 2006. (Florida Times-Union)

## MILITARY MILESTONES FOR WOMEN

- The significant changes in the submarine force would never have been possible without trailblazing women who broke previous barriers in military history: March 21 marked the 100th anniversary of the first woman who officially enlisted for military service, when Loretta Perfectus Walsh joined the U.S. Naval Reserve as a chief yeoman in 1917.

- According to the Department of Defense, there weren't enough men enlisting in the armed forces at the time, as the United States realized its upcoming involvement in World War I. The thought was if a woman was allowed to join, it would inspire men to follow her lead.

- The plan worked, and on top of droves of men signing up to serve the country, more than 12,000 women served during the war.

- Women were limited to serving the country in a nursing capacity before Walsh enlisted. That started when the U.S. Congress established the Navy Nurse Corps in 1908.

- Another major milestone for women was in 1942, when the Navy's women reserve program was created due to World War II. Then in 1948, the Women's Armed Services Integration Act allowed women permanent status in the military.

- In 1976, the first women were admitted to the Army, Navy and Air Force service academies, and in 1978 women in the Navy and the Marines were allowed to serve on non-combat ships as technicians, nurses and officers.

- Congress authorized women to serve on combat ships in 1993, and the next year the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS Dwight D. Eisenhower accepted its first wave of female sailors.

lion, Hinz said. She said that number does not reflect the final cost and the projected figure for future modifications would most likely vary.

Those modifications include a dedicated living space with a nine-person berthing area and a bathroom facility for E-6 women and below. The gender-specific modifications also include a toilet and shower facilities in the chief petty officer quarters.

“They're making modifications to ensure we give our sailors the privacy they deserve,” Crosby said.

## HISTORY IN THE MAKING

The latest window for female applicants hoping to serve on submarines closed Saturday, with the selection process set to start in May, according to the Navy.

Hinz said a panel of experienced submariners will look over each candidate's résumé with a careful eye to determine which ones are cut out for serving in the confined quarters of a submerged vessel.

Life underwater can be more of a mental strain than physical, she said, so every trait a sailor has is considered. The Navy will continue to cycle women through the system until the submarine integration

is complete, Hinz said.

Rear Adm. Mary Jackson served at Jacksonville Naval Air Station as the commander of Navy Region Southeast for the last 2½ years before relinquishing command to another woman, Rear Adm. Babette “Bette” Bolivar, in February.

Jackson received a major promotion Friday when she jumped from a one-star rear admiral to a three-star vice admiral, replacing Vice Adm. Dixon Smith as commander of Navy Installations Command in Washington, D.C.

In January, she talked about the fact enlisted women would soon be arriving at Kings Bay to serve in integrated crews.

“I couldn't be more pleased that we've taken this step,” Jackson said. “We've had female officers serving on the subs for some time, and now we are opening it up to enlisted women. Having enlisted women there is really important, just like it was having women officers, because it deepens the talent pool, and that's critical. And they are succeeding.”

Jackson climbed the ranks to get where she is today by serving on surface ships. She said she realizes that wouldn't have been possible without pioneers

who came before her.

“During my entire career I have been at critical places and times where laws and policies have been changed with regards to women, and that is what allowed me to serve as commanding officer of a destroyer,” she said.

## Issues along the way

Gender integration in the submarine force and in the military in general has been problematic at times.

Multiple sailors from Kings Bay were convicted in 2015 for secretly recording female officers assigned to the USS Wyoming, resulting in prison time and discharges from the Navy. Prosecutors said four female officers were videotaped undressing, and sailors traded the videos for energy drinks and other items.

The female submariners said at the time their careers were either ruined or severely tarnished by the videos.

The most recent issue surfaced this year when former and current female Marines reported photographs of them and women in other branches of the military had been posted on social media pages without their consent. Investigators are also looking into comments Marines wrote on websites containing the images.

All branches of the armed forces are discussing alterations in social media policies as the investigation continues.

## CHANGE IS INEVITABLE

American Legion Post 316 in Atlantic Beach holds a meeting for area submarine veterans on the third Saturday of every month. Opinions on women serving on submarines vary depending on who you ask. David Rifkin served as the commanding officer on the USS Billfish from 1993 to 1995 and now attends the veteran meetings when he can.

He said his only issue with women serving on submarines is the cost to modify the boats to accommodate the mixed crew. Rifkin floated the idea of an all-women crew serving together, because that wouldn't require such a lofty price tag.

“It's not as physically demanding as other jobs in the Navy,” Rifkin said of serving on submarines. “There's really nothing geared toward men that women can't do.”

W.G. “Doc” Sweeney served on the USS Ethan Allen from 1968 to 1972 and he's another member of the group who doesn't have a problem with women serving in the submarine force. He said enlisted women have been serving underwater in the Australian navy for years without many issues.

“The biggest problem with women in the Navy going to sea is they get pregnant,” Sweeney said. He suggested the Navy should require all women on submarines to be on birth control to alleviate that problem.

Sweeney pointed out a pregnant woman on a submarine is different than a pregnant woman serving on a surface ship. A replacement can arrive without any problems on a ship in a matter of days to fill the spot of a pregnant woman who has to leave for shore, he said.

Removing a woman from a submarine is like removing a member of a family. Sweeney said it can take up to a year before someone is comfortable on a submarine crew, and an unexpected pregnancy would rock the boat significantly.

Dave Schlessinger served on submarines for most of his Navy career from 1976 to 1996. He said the government implemented the “don't ask, don't tell” policy at the tail end of his career, adding an extra element to life on a submarine.

He said he doesn't know if he served with any homosexual sailors while he was underway. But he said it wasn't a matter of sexual preference, but a matter of knowing what was right from wrong.

“If someone did something inappropriate, he was gone,” Schlessinger said.

He said the same thing will happen if something happens when enlisted women start joining crews. “The Navy doesn't tolerate that kind of stuff,” he said.

Rifkin acknowledged the submarine force will be entirely integrated sooner

rather than later, but the issues will be there. He served on aircraft carriers in the 1990s when women were first allowed to serve on board. He said they were fully capable, but that wasn't the only variable.

“What I saw was something that added a distraction to the job at hand,” Rifkin said.

Katherine Diaz works at the VA Outpatient Clinic in Jacksonville, but she spent time serving with men on surface ships during her eight-year Navy career starting in 2000. She was on the USS Gunston Hall for three years and said the sexual harassment she experienced was no different than what she experienced on shore.

“You don't necessarily have more sexual harassment on a ship as you do on shore, but you experience it in both places,” she said.

She said she enjoyed her time serving on a ship, but the environment was like high school, where cliques stuck together no matter the situation.

“I did encounter sexual harassment when I first got there, and when I reported it, people laughed at me,” Diaz said.

She said a male sailor locked himself in an office with her despite the fact she was married. She told a supervisor and he told her the sailor was probably just playing around.

“I didn't feel like I had a support system,” Diaz said. “I felt isolated because he (the superior) was pretty much friends with him.”

Kristen Fulford didn't experience anything along those lines when she went on the first gender-integrated cruise on the aircraft carrier USS Constellation in the 1990s. She said she was so busy learning the ins and outs of the ship that the fact she was serving alongside men became secondary.

She said the only issue she noticed was a young sailor who insisted on calling all the women “babe” or “hon” until he was called to captain's mess for sexual harassment after he was told repeatedly those comments were unappreciated.

“Every workplace now has required sexual harassment training, and that time was that of the forefront of that,” Fulford said.

It's been more than 20 years since Fulford sailed around the tip of South America on the Constellation.

Crosby said the Navy has changed a lot in that time. “For the current generation of sailors and the officers, women have been a part of our Navy for years, so there's not much of a culture shock,” he said.

He said the Navy doesn't have a single instance where a male submariner refused to serve on a mixed-gender crew.

The Navy is ready for enlisted women to get underway with men on submarines, he said.

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# PENSION

Continued from A-1

these sweeping changes, which have been in the works for more than a year.

The City Council is the last place where the mayor's plan may have to withstand substantial vetting.

Tad Delegal, a Jacksonville attorney who served in 2013 on a pension reform task force whose recommendations shaped the 2015 changes, said the council's decision will have long-term financial consequences.

“It's hard for a council member to stand up there and say ‘you know what, I know in the short term this is going to be real beneficial and everyone loves this, but down the road this looks like it's a problem and I'm not going to support it,’” Delegal said in a speech recently to the Rotary Club of West Jacksonville.

He said he fears the council will only give a cursory review to Curry's plan and end up repeating past mistakes “based on political considerations rather than economic and financial considerations.”

“We inherited a mess,” Delegal said. “Now what we're doing, it seems to me, is sort of half-blind going into another plan that's being adopted for political rather than economic considerations. I have some real concerns with that.”

Curry's office did not respond to a request to interview him or his top administrators. His office



Mayor Lenny Curry's plan to pay down the city's staggering pension debt centers around revenue from a half-cent sales tax voters approved last summer. (Florida Times-Union, Bruce Lipsky)

also declined to provide any financial information.

“In the coming days, the mayor and his team will present related pension actuary models and information to the members of City Council for their review,” said Tia Ford, a mayoral spokeswoman, in an email. “This information will be made available to the media at that time.”

She said the release of that information will include figures missing from the legislation.

## PUBLIC VETTING

The public reticence from the

mayor's office is a marked change from the last time city officials pursued pension reform.

The 2015 pension reform law was the result of nearly two years of public discussions and voluminous records produced by a high-profile task force set up by former Mayor Alvin Brown.

Getting there wasn't easy — the newspaper filed a lawsuit earlier in Brown's term over a reform agreement illegally hammered out in closed meetings. But legal and community pressure opened up the process.

Curry has kept a tight grip on information.

When City Council agreed a year ago to put the half-cent sales tax on the ballot, city finance director Mike Weinstein deflected questions from council members about how the plan would work, saying a discussion could confuse voters and cause them to reject the sales tax.

City Council President Lori Boyer said the council will fully vet the legislation filed last week by Curry.

Asked about Delegal's concern the council will just give a cursory review, Boyer said, “I doubt that.”

She said a public workshop Thursday is scheduled to last four hours. “A four-hour initial meeting is not cursory, and then we have another four-hour meeting the next week to ask questions,” she said.

She said the vetting will look not only at the potential for immediate budget relief, but also the impact on future generations.

“If certain documents aren't ready, we're not going to take something up until we have the information we need,” she said.

Other council members already seem optimistic about Curry's plans.

“I'd be very surprised if everything didn't add up top to bottom,” said City Councilman John Crescimbeni.

City Councilman Bill Gulliford said the concept is sound. “I think the mayor's plan is certainly a positive and I'll support it unless there is something really flawed, but I don't think there is because they've worked through this thing up one side and down the other,” he said. “I think they'll be really prepared on the actual numbers.”

## LONG-TERM COSTS

The mayor's plan to pay down the city's staggering pension debt centers around the revenue generated by a half-cent sales tax voters approved last summer. That tax, however, won't start for 14 more years, so taking advantage of the revenue before then requires financial creativity.

The 2015 agreement, which Curry wants in large part to jettison, centered around the idea the city should pay off its pension debt faster by paying more each year than is legally required. Paying down debt faster is generally considered a best practice by pension experts.

Curry wants to reverse that. The sales tax for pension costs wouldn't start until the existing sales tax for the Better Jackson-

ville Plan expires around 2031. But the city could gain financial relief sooner by transferring a large portion of the pension debt to the period after the sales tax begins.

Taxpayers would likely pay significantly more down the road for that short-term relief just like if they extended the payback period on a credit card or mortgage.

“It's a policy call. Do we need that money now, can we invest that money now better?” said City Councilman Greg Anderson. “Right now, the pension costs are eating up an ever-increasing percentage of our budget. You can look around our community and see we have a lot of need.”

The Police and Fire Pension Fund board had been ready to vet Curry's plans — it was believed the agency needed to sign off before the mayor could file council legislation — but the board was sidelined when the city's top attorney determined the pension fund had no role to play in the approval process.

But the pension fund isn't completely out of the picture.

The fund hired Gapublic Solutions, a municipal advisor firm, to recommend a projection for how fast future sales tax revenue will grow.

Curry's pension legislation leaves a blank space for the assumed growth rate, which is critical to determining how much of the pension debt can be shifted to the future. Curry previously asked the pension fund to do an analysis based on 3.75 percent and 4.25 percent growth rates.