

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

Add Moody's to critics of Curry's pension plan



ron littlepage
times-union
columnist

Mousing around the news of the day ... [click](#).

Mayor Lenny Curry accused critics of his pension plan of chirping.

Last week, a bond rating agency, Moody's Investors Services, joined the chorus of chirpers.

Just as many had said during the pension debate, Moody's in effect agreed that Curry's plan was kicking the can down the road.

Moody's said Curry's "pay less now, pay more later" approach will cause the city's already staggering pension debt to grow even bigger until the half-cent sales tax Curry promoted starts in 2031.

Chirp. Chirp.

Click.
For his part, Curry says the pension issue is done, kaput, settled, fixed, finished. He points out that both the voters and the City Council approved it.

That part about the voters amounts to revisionist history.

The voters didn't know what they were voting on.

Curry and his team refused to provide any details of the plan, such as the fact the debt can was about to get another swift kick, before voters went to the polls.

In fact, at one point, Curry's chief financial officer, Mike Weinstein, told the City Council that providing details would only confuse the voters.

Perhaps Curry's team was afraid the chirping would have grown louder had voters known.

Click.
Now that the pension issue is in Curry's world "solved," his team is dropping hints that "something big" is coming soon.

It will be interesting to see where the money to pay for it will come from.

During one of the City Council's debates on Curry's plan, Council President Lori Boyer asked the administration if some of the anticipated savings in the general fund — say, about \$11 million — could be bonded.

She was told that was possible and that it would produce about \$150 million, presumably money that could be spent on capital projects.

That was all that was said, and the

debate moved onto other subjects.

But if that approach were taken, it would go against the council's usual insistence on relying on cash for projects instead of more debt.

It would also be highly risky since in the intervening weeks, the Legislature stupidly put a constitutional amendment on the 2018 ballot that would increase the homestead exemption by \$25,000 to \$75,000.

If that passes, which is likely because of voters' affinity for tax breaks for themselves, it would further drain the city's general fund and make any new debt payments difficult.

I don't think additional debt will be the route taken, but stay tuned. There are some big numbers out there, such as paying the city's portion of the foolish \$700 million dredge of the St. Johns River shipping channel that JaxPort is pushing.

Click.
During a meeting Boyer organized earlier this month to continue discussions on how to take better advantage of the St. Johns River and our other waterways, she showed pictures of riverwalks in San Antonio, Augusta, Detroit and Ontario.

The trees and beautiful landscaping were striking.

In contrast to that, another picture showed an uninviting and sterile section of our Northbank Riverwalk.

Plans are underway, Boyer said, to begin changing that, starting with improving the area known as Corkscrew Park. That's the portion of the riverwalk next to the Acosta Bridge.

Getting that done in the next few months will be a welcome visual start to the new efforts to activate our waterways — a goal that will only be accomplished if the city makes it a priority and sticks to it.

Click.
You may have noticed that in the last few weeks, candidates have been emerging to run to replace Rick Scott as governor.

Certainly more will get in the race, and 2018 is likely not on people's radar yet.

But it's not too soon to pay attention. Electing the right governor is critical to undoing the damage Scott has done to Florida in his two terms.

Click.

ron.littlepage@jacksonville.com (904) 359-4284

Rosenstein joins the posse chasing Trump



patrick buchanan
creators
syndicate

"With the stroke of a pen, Rod Rosenstein redeemed his reputation," writes Dana Milbank of The Washington Post.

Without consulting the White House, he sandbagged President Donald Trump, naming a special

counsel to take over the investigation of the Russia connection that could prove ruinous to this presidency.

Rosenstein reinvigorated a tired 10-month investigation that failed to find collusion between Trump and Russian hacking of the Democratic National Committee. Not a single indictment had come out of the FBI investigation.

Yet now a new special counsel, Robert Mueller, former FBI director, will slow-walk his way through this same terrain again, searching for clues leading to potentially impeachable offenses.

Also to be investigated is whether the president tried to curtail the FBI investigation with his phone calls and Oval Office meetings with FBI Director James Comey before abruptly firing him.

Regarded as able and honest, Mueller will be under media pressure to come up with charges.

As for Rosenstein, after being approved 94-6 by a Senate that hailed him as a principled and independent U.S. attorney, he was pilloried for preparing the document White House aides called crucial to Trump's decision to fire Comey.

It's difficult to exaggerate the damage Rosenstein has done.

Mueller's investigation seems certain to drag on for years. All that time, there will be a cloud over Trump's presidency that will drain his political authority. Republicans in Congress, looking to 2018, will have less incentive to follow Trump's lead, rather than their own instincts and interests. Party unity will fade away.

Without a united and energized Republican Party, how do you get repeal and replacement of Obamacare, tax reform or a border wall? Trump's agenda seems comatose. And was it a coincidence that the day Mueller was appointed, the markets tanked with the Dow falling 372 points?

Markets had soared on the expectation that Trump's pro-business agenda would be enacted. Will the boom born of hope become a bust?

A White House staff, said to be in disarray, and a president reportedly enraged over endless press reports of his problems and falling polls aren't going to become one big happy family again with a growing office of prosecutors and FBI agents poking around.

Allegations about Trump's taxes, investments and associates could be drawn into the maw of the special counsel's office by political and business enemies enthusiastic about seeing him brought down.

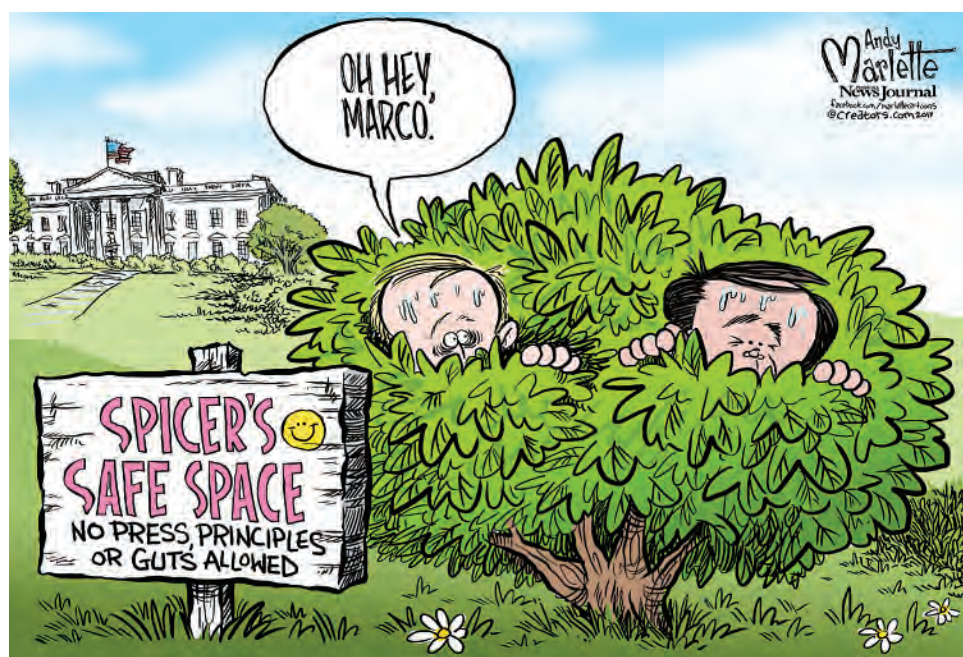
More folks in Trump's entourage will soon be lawyering up.

While it's absurd to talk of impeachment, that won't deter Democrats and the media from speculating, given what happened to Richard Nixon and Bill Clinton when special prosecutors were put on their trail.

Another consequence of naming a special counsel will be that Vice President Mike Pence will attract more press as the man of the future in the GOP. A rising profile for Pence is unlikely to strengthen his relationship with a besieged president.

A debilitating and potentially dangerous time for Trump has now begun, courtesy of his deputy attorney general.

Another view: Andy Marlette Creators Syndicate



Another view: Rick McKee The Augusta Chronicle



Help is coming for Keystone lakes

point of view

rob bradley

Lake Okeechobee, the massive water body north of the Everglades, is surrounded by a dike that was built by the

U.S. Corps of Engineers in the mid-20th century.

If such a dike is breached, lives are lost as we learned so tragically during Hurricane Katrina.

Last year, while lake levels were dramatically rising, massive toxic algae blooms formed in Lake Okeechobee.

The Corps, which still maintains the dike, was faced with a terrible decision. Risk loss of life due to a breach, or open safety valves and release toxic algae water into the coastal communities located to the east and west of the lake.

Understandably, the Corps decided to open the safety valves, and billions of gallons of a putrid, guacamole like stew was dumped on our fellow Floridians.

Gov. Rick Scott immediately declared a state of emergency, beaches and businesses closed and people literally became sick.

It's amazing that this is not the first time that the Corps has made this decision. Toxic guacamole water has been dumped on our coastal communities before, and we still haven't fixed the problem. Meanwhile, in North Florida, the lakes of Keystone Heights continue to fade away. Some lakefront property owners can no longer see water from their back porch.

As a fourth-generation resident of Clay County, I fondly recall swimming in Lake Brooklyn while attending YMCA camp.

Restaurants, boat rentals and property values thrived back in the day. Now, the area is beginning to turn into a ghost town. Again, while it's incredible that this slow decline has occurred for decades, what is really incredible is that we've

done nothing of substance to stop it.

This year, the Florida Legislature acted decisively on both issues.

Senate Bill 10, which the governor just signed, orders and finances the construction of a reservoir south of Lake Okeechobee to help hold its excess water capacity. The reservoir will accept water from the lake rather than have that water dumped to the east and west of the lake on our coastal communities. After water enters the reservoir and is cleaned, it will be sent to the Everglades, which is thirsty for freshwater to replenish its fragile ecosystem. Simply put, the southern reservoir is a win-win for the environment and our neighbors in South Florida.

The lakes of Keystone Heights were winners this year as well. The St. Johns River Water Management District has a \$41 million plan to pipe stored water from flood control facilities into the Keystone chain of lakes. The plan has been engineered and vetted by district experts. In this year's state budget, your Legislature provided financing to implement the plan. This is critical for the health and sustainability of our region's primary source of drinking water, the Floridan aquifer. The Keystone lakes basically act as a water tower for the Floridan aquifer. When the lakes dry up, the aquifer is imperiled.

This plan attacks that problem.

Floridians understand that our way of life is inextricably intertwined with the health of Lake Okeechobee, the Everglades and the lakes of Keystone Heights. 2017 will be remembered as the year that the talk ended and action began.

■ State Sen. Rob Bradley represents District 5, which includes Clay County.

■ He sponsored Senate Bill 10 and chairs the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on the Environment and Natural Resources.

Trump's fans include some motley crews



clarence page
tribune media
services

President Donald Trump isn't the only American leader with a fondness for Russian President Vladimir Putin's regime.

Consider, for example, the chant caught on TV footage as it was shouted

by several dozen torch-carrying protesters who rallied against removal of a Confederate monument in a Charlottesville, Va., park.

"Russia is our friend!" they shouted. What did Russia have to do with the Confederacy?

Not much, except in the minds of such leaders of the alt-right as Richard Spencer, who spoke and carried a torch in Charlottesville, where he once attended the University of Virginia.

Spencer seeks a whites-only state. He offers doomsday visions of "white culture" under assault by a rising tide of feminists, nonwhites and other scapegoats for all white miseries.

"What brings us together," he told the crowd at an earlier rally Saturday, "is that we are white, we are a people, we will not be replaced."

Yet Spencer also shows a clear admiration for Russia, which he has called "the sole white power in the world."

Former Ku Klux Klan grand wizard David Duke, who eagerly embraced the alt-right movement, has traveled to Russia several times to promote his book "The Ultimate Supremacism: My Awakening on the Jewish Question," according to the Anti-Defamation League.

Self-described white nationalist Matthew Heimbach also has praised Putin's Russia as "the axis for nationalists," according to an interview by Business Insider.

Leading American alt-right figures like "race realist" Jared Taylor also attended a right-wing conference in St. Petersburg, Russia, two years ago, organized by a fringe nationalist Russia group. Taylor, according to Business Insider, called the United States "the greatest enemy of tradition everywhere."

It may be only coincidental that white nationalists cheered Russia as "our friend" two days before President Donald Trump was reported to have revealed "highly classified" secrets to two high-ranking Russians in the Oval Office. But both episodes raise questions about how much Putin is actively engaged in sowing divisions in the U.S.

With his tightening despotic control over speech and Russian media, Putin promotes a return to the dominant "Mother Russia" of the czars and the Soviet Union.

The computer hackers who serve as an underground propaganda army on his behalf aim to undermine the West's faith in democracy and its institutions to promote the line that when it comes to corruption, human rights and empire-building, Western democracies are no better than Putin's Russia.

Trump curiously embraced that line in an interview with Bill O'Reilly in which the president openly suggested we were no better than Putin when it comes to being "a killer."

If nothing else, we know that Putin is delighted to see us Americans divide ourselves against one another. That's how he gained almost unquestioned control in Russia.

Dividing Americans is one thing that the alt-right is delighted to do.

We need to show them, in the words of the late Rodney King, how we can all get along.

Email: cpagetribune.com.