

opinion

NEWS
Mary Kelli Palka
Editor

Mark Nusbaum, President

EDITORIAL BOARD
Nusbaum, Denton, Clark, Bobby Martin,
Roger Brown, Paula Horvath and
citizen editorial members.

EDITORIAL
Frank M. Denton
Editor At Large
Michael P. Clark
Editorial Page Editor

A VERSE FOR TODAY
I will behave wisely in a perfect way
... I will walk within my house with a
perfect heart.
Psalms 101:2

Curry's bold budget embraces the future

The budget rolled out by Mayor Lenny Curry Monday said it all.

The future is now. We must seize it.

When the citizens approved a pension sales tax increase by impressive margins last year under Curry's leadership, that freed Jacksonville to return to investing in the future.

Curry rolled out a city budget that returns to investing in the future again rather than being tied to the past.

PROACTIVE SPENDING

Examples of Curry's proactive spending include:

- 100 new police officers to fight a stubborn murder problem. The Jacksonville Sheriff's Office will be near its level in 2011 when murder numbers dropped. In his first two budgets, Curry added 80 officers and 80 community service officers. His third-year budget adds 100 more.

As Curry said, at current low levels, there simply aren't enough officers to do true community policing. They must race from call to call.

- 43 more Fire & Rescue employees for a department slammed by an overdose crisis and \$12 million for a backup 911 communications center.

- Major funds to replace old police and fire vehicles.
- \$50 million to upgrade neighborhoods. This includes \$8.4 million for dormitories and a public field at Edward Waters College, \$12 million for roadwork through our sprawling 840-square-mile city and \$1 million to upgrade public pools for a drowning prevention program in the city. An estimated 12,000 children will take swimming lessons in future years.

- Infrastructure improvements along the Northbank and Southbank are designed to turn eyesores into destinations.

"Infrastructure is the backbone of a great city," Curry said. "You cannot be a suburb of nowhere. We must prepare Downtown for private investment."

- \$8 million to demolish the former City Hall and

county courthouse. The old City Hall was a monument to corruption, built by the old commission government, narrow, filled with elevators and stairwells and four restrooms on every floor, a vestige of segregation. Good riddance. The same can be said for a county courthouse that was so heavily used it was a dump in its final years.

- \$1 million for landscaping Downtown. Hey, how about some trees that actually produce shade rather than those useless palm trees? Let's make Downtown a real neighborhood rather than a pass-through.

- \$1.2 million for repairs to Friendship Foundation. Let's do something spectacular with it.

- \$1 million for improvements and an extension to the Southbank Riverwalk. Once it is fully connected with the Northbank Riverwalk with a pedestrian walkway on the newly expanded Fuller Warren Bridge, Jacksonville will have something special.

"While infrastructure is the backbone our people, our children, are the heartbeat of Jacksonville," Curry said.

Curry is determined to spend the \$36.4 million devoted to the Children's Commission and the Jacksonville Journey more wisely.

He believes the organizations need to be reformed with a focus on the children with the greatest needs — a new approach that will be rolled out in the future.

And in the spirit of the Journey's original mission, Curry wants reliable metrics in place to document and test the effectiveness of programs.

FINALLY, NEW MONEY

So where is the new money in this \$1.2 billion budget coming from?

There is an expected infusion of \$35 million next year in property tax revenue. Unlike his predecessors, Curry will not roll back the millage. There simply are too many needs in this city that were deferred since the Great Recession slashed revenues and the state cut them as well.

About \$100 million will be spent with borrowed money, a responsible amount given the size of the budget.

At the same time, Curry's outstanding finance team has been refinancing debt, moving more money into



Mayor Lenny Curry presents his 2018 budget to the City Council Monday at City Hall. For the first time in recent years, the budget will include additional funding for major city needs. (Will Dickey/Florida Times-Union)

reserves for pensions and other budget needs and putting the city on a strong footing.

And the bottom line: The pension sales tax gives the city more choices.

BIG ISSUES, BOLD SOLUTIONS

"Before pension reform, our future was built on a foundation of sand," Curry said in his address before City Council. "Now we have a foundation of solid rock."

Curry stubbornly told everyone the pension had to be resolved before other needs could be addressed.

And he was right. The citizens of Jacksonville are already seeing the fruits of their landslide vote on the pension sales tax last year.

Curry remains committed to his motto of "One City, One Jacksonville," investing in all neighborhoods.

Curry has an unusual mixture of a politician's heart and a CPA's mind.

And that type of leadership is allowing Jacksonville to look ahead with anticipation instead of trepidation.

It is a welcome change

Foreign affairs

Will Trump get involved in Syria?

We've seen lies, collusion and "moral" imperatives before.

We've seen the horrific photos and videos of children being the target of war before.

It's who we are. But not who we tell ourselves we are. We don't want to believe the heinous acts we visit upon each other. Yet we continue.

We know President Donald Trump is reluctant to stand up to Russian President Vladimir Putin's wishes on Syria.

We know Putin likes the economic benefits that continue to flow into his country because of its link with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad — including some very lucrative energy contracts for Russia in Syria.

We know Trump's approval rating is very low and not getting any better. Lowest ever. It's a disaster.

We know — according to U.S. sources — that Assad launched a war crime-level chemical gas attack on his own people.

We believe it is possible there are already U.S. ground troops in Syria. (MSNBC's Rachel Maddow and others think so.)

We believe it strongly looks like Trump is about to take further military action in Syria.

Here is where it gets complicated. The U.S. military action won't be against Assad but against the rebels fighting Assad. This will offer Trump the ability to pretend he's fighting ISIS in Syria but actually target the rebels instead. Doesn't matter that ISIS isn't in Syria much anymore.

Thanks Barack Obama!

The horrific images of gasping, struggling, dying children are what Trump needs to rally American and world support to get troops into Syria.

Putin via Assad obliged, giving Trump a "moral" imperative to have his war, pretend to fight ISIS and have Trump's approval ratings rise. It doesn't even matter that the rebels are the best hope of getting rid of the brutal Assad.

I don't want to believe we've come to this again, so quickly, but there is plenty of presidential precedence.

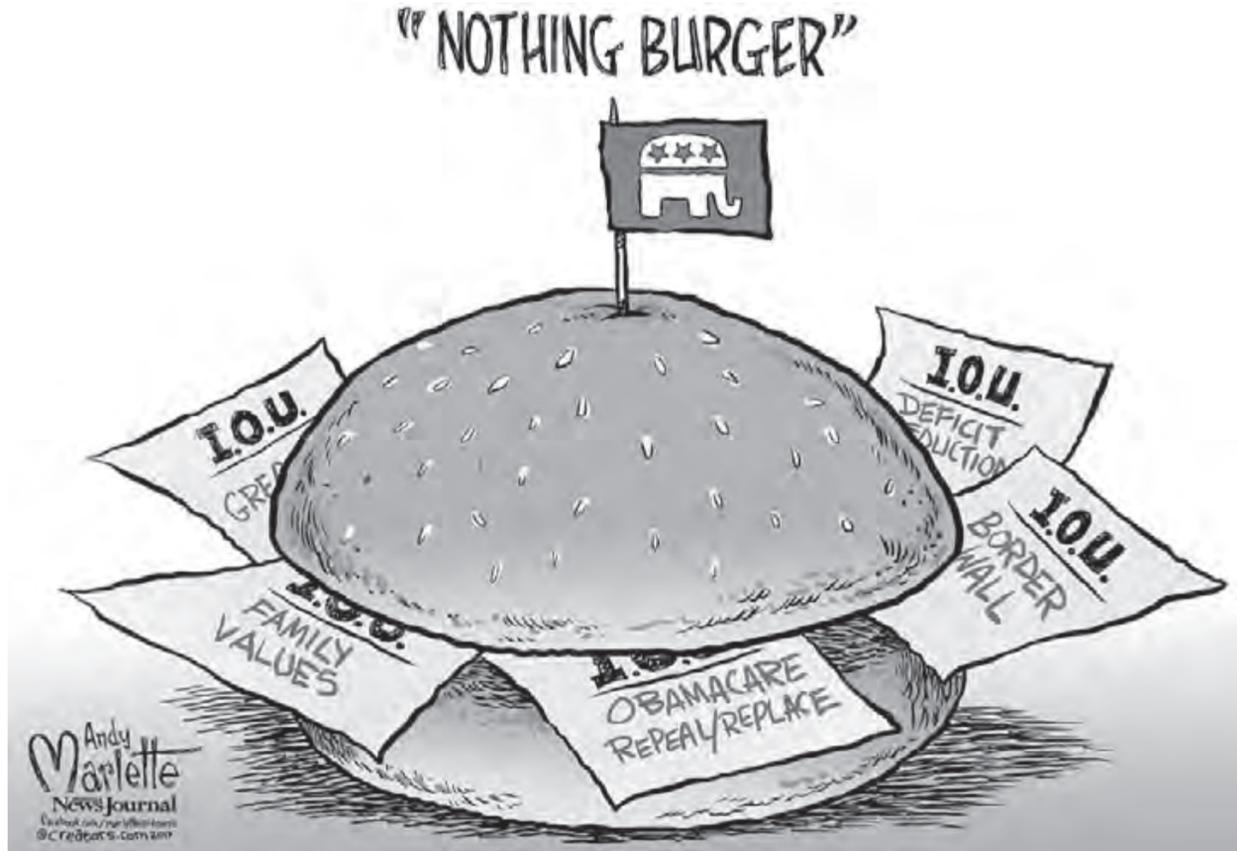
Can I prove this?

Nope.

But it's a win-win for Putin and Trump — and a huge loss for humanity.

Ken Hurley, Jacksonville

Another view: Andy Marlette Creators Syndicate



Letters from Readers

MEDICAID

MANY HAVE MUCH TO LOSE

The poor, the aged and the disabled have the most to lose if the new health-care bill passes because so many depend on Medicaid. My grandson, disabled from autism, whom I'm raising, has been on Medicaid for most of his life and is very dependent on it for survival.

Thousands of other autism families rely on Medicaid for insurance. It's extremely costly to provide the necessary treatments for a child or young adult on the spectrum. Medicaid helps pay for Applied Behavior, speech and occupational therapy.

It pays for medicines for my grandson in order to correct his autoimmune disorder and microbiome.

Autism is a medical disorder, not a mental one — and these medicines are necessary to keep him alive and functioning at the highest level possible.

Medicaid is indispensable for us.

Maurine Meleck, Ponte Vedra Beach

TRUMP VS. CLINTON

THE CHOICE WAS CLEAR

To the letter writer who recently ranted about how his accomplished, non-political family would see through a "bleached blond" braggart with a beautiful, younger wife and would never vote for him, I have two words for him and the other letter writers who snipe at the president: Hillary Clinton.

The writer is justifiably proud of his family lineage; I would be, too. The writer's ancestors sound like the kind of solid, productive people who have helped build this country into what it is.

And kudos to them.

However, in the last election what were the voters to do? If the Republicans had run a candidate I absolutely could not vote for (which in this case I did), I would have stayed home or voted a write-in.

But these Trump-bashing writers seem to have forgotten who the only other option was in 2016: the most corrupt, scandal ridden, lying, unqualified person to ever run for president — with the possible exception of former President Barack Obama.

There is no way we should ever let this woman near the White House again.

Life in the U. S. is good and getting better, and I suggest the Trump haters give it a rest and move on with their lives.

Mike Gable, Jacksonville

ANN COULTER

GET A LIFE, LEFTISTS!

I chuckled at the leftist, spittle-flecked, screaming meemie, ad hominum (or in this case "ad femina") letter slamming columnist Ann Coulter.

The letter writer backs up her argument with these "salient" points:

* Coulter has a "white complexion."

(That apparently proves she's racist.)

* Coulter has "bleached-blond" hair.

(That apparently proves she's a bimbo.)

Oh, come on, lefties.

Is this all you've got?

Richard Bohler, Jacksonville

VOTING

WE DON'T EXPECT SAINTS

I never go to the polls with the expectations of voting for someone who is likely to be elevated to sainthood.

I'm looking for the action he or she might take to make people's lives better. It's really hard to turn the status quo on its head, but I think it's easier to do when you start as a successful businessman or woman who has already made their mark and can concentrate on doing what's best for America and Americans.

You go, Mr. President. Get it done.

It has been much too long since we the people got a doer rather than a talker.

Joe Kennedy, Jacksonville

CATHOLICS

PICKING BELIEFS

I think City Councilman Bill Gulliford is a hypocrite. Gulliford claims to be a Catholic but calls the Catholic pope a communist in a Facebook post.

I suppose Gulliford would call Jesus a communist, too. He conveniently overlooks the Catholic catechism that teaches inequality is sinful.

This is what our small-minded politicians will do to attract attention to themselves no matter how foolish they look to the rest of the world.

We should not expect anything less from a Trump supporter or the political party he represents.

Peter Harding, Jacksonville

TRUMP AND WASHINGTON

THERE'S NO COMPARISON

Our first president, George Washington, is to have said "I cannot tell a lie." Our 45th, and a I reluctantly use the word president, Donald Trump, believes that by telling the same lie eventually ignorant people will believe you.

In Donald Trump Jr.'s case, "the apple does not fall far from the tree."

In the year 2017 you can tell your children it is wrong to tell a lie — unless, of course, you are named "Trump."

Rick Mansfield, Ponte Vedra Beach

INFRASTRUCTURE SPENDING

WHAT ABOUT PEOPLE?

I've heard that infrastructure spending is a bipartisan issue. I think the administration wants to spend \$1 trillion.

How come everyone can agree to spend \$1 trillion on bridges and roads but insist on reducing Medicaid?

We need to invest in our people first.

A healthy workforce is our greatest asset.

Scott Schleifer, Jacksonville

LETTER POLICY

- Letters of about 200 words are preferred.
- All letters should include a name, address, occupation and telephone number.

Email is preferred:

letters@jacksonville.com

Mail: Letters From Readers

The Florida Times-Union

P.O. Box 1949

Jacksonville, FL 32231

Find us on the Web: jacksonville.com/opinion