

viewpoint

OPINIONS PAGE BLOG

You will find comments from editorial board members and columnists, videos of newsmakers, longer pieces and extra content from readers.
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Do victors write history? Not on the Civil War



mike clark
editorial page editor

The passionate debates over Confederate statues in Jacksonville and elsewhere have produced a great deal of discussion about American history.

Good. The meaning of the Confederate statues is being hotly debated along with the meaning of the Civil War. It has sent me to my history books and looking for original sources.

For instance, the cause of the Civil War is still being debated. In a Pew Center poll in 2011, 48 percent said the cause was states' rights as opposed to 38 percent who said slavery.

So what did the leaders of the seceding states say when they were creating their Confederacy?

A number of the states issued their own declarations of independence or articles

of secession. Do a Google search of "Declaration of Causes" for Florida's Articles of Secession. Or read the Articles of Secession for Georgia, Mississippi or Alabama and decide for yourself.

Even better, read the Cornerstone speech by Confederate Vice President Alexander Stephens.

Slavery is all over the place. Were they all wrong?

SPOTTING BIAS

When it comes to mainstream news services, familiarity breeds contempt. Many conservative readers are critical of The Associated Press and The Washington Post, peppering our Letters from Readers with their criticisms.

In a recent editorial, we described how readers can spot and analyze fake news.

But reader Bob Hicks asked a good question: Are there actually other sources for national news that are better than the

AP and the Post? Frankly, no. But that doesn't mean that T-U readers are helpless. Here's some advice: No story tells it all. Stories evolve.

Over time, the truth will come out as new information is discovered — so try not to overreact to a single news story.

Are other news sources confirming a story independently? That provides some confirmation.

ANONYMOUS SOURCES

Washington operates on anonymous sources. We can't do much about that. That's just life in the nation's capital.

So when you see a story with anonymous sources, look for these facts:

- How many are there?
- A single-sourced story had better be awfully convincing.
- Look for general descriptions of the single source.

Is this person highly placed in the administration? Was the person involved in a meeting being described in the story?

- Has the reporter used other means to confirm comments from an anonymous source?

OH, THOSE CARTOONS

Editorial cartoons have a way of getting under the skin of readers. Even though cartoons are designed to be full of exaggeration and hyperbole, readers are still prone to become easily offended by them.

So during the past few Sundays, we've been running news photos instead of more cartoons — and we've been picking the photos based on their uplifting tone.

What do you think? Would you like to see more photos rather than the cartoons? Email me at mike.clark@jacksonville.com.

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Trump's move to the Democrats has a message



patrick buchanan
syndicate

Donald Trump is president today because he was seen as a doer, not a talker.

And it was exasperation with a dithering Republican Congress that caused Trump to pull the job of raising the debt ceiling

away from Republican House Speaker Paul Ryan and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell — and give it to Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer.

Hard to fault Trump: Over seven months, Congress showed itself incapable of repealing Obamacare though the GOP promised this as its first priority in three successive elections.

Returning to Washington after five weeks of vacation with zero legislation enacted, Ryan and McConnell were facing a deadline to raise the debt ceiling and fund the government. Failure to do so would crash the markets, imperil our bond rating and make America look like a deadbeat.

Before year's end, Trump and the Congress will also have to deal with an immigration crisis brought on by his cancellation of the Obama administration's amnesty for the "Dreamers."

He will have to get Congress to fund his wall, enact tax reform and finance the repair and renewal of our infrastructure or be called a failure. We are likely looking at a congressional pileup before Christmas — from which Trump will have to call on Schumer and Pelosi to extricate him and his party.

Having cut a deal with Democrats for help with the debt ceiling, will Trump seek a deal with Democrats on amnesty for the "Dreamers" in return for funding for border security? Trump seemed to be signaling the idea.

Will he give up on free-trade Republicans to work with Democrats to protect U.S. jobs and businesses from predator traders like China?

Will he cut a deal with Democrats on which infrastructure projects should be funded first?

Will he seek out compromise with Democrats on whose taxes should be cut and whose retained?

We could be looking at a seismic shift in national politics with Trump looking to centrist and bipartisan coalitions to achieve as much of his agenda as he can. He could collaborate with Federalist Society Republicans on justices and with economic-nationalist Democrats on tariffs. But the Congressional gridlock that exhausted the president's patience may prove more serious than a passing phase.

Congress alone has the power to declare war. But recent wars have been launched by presidents over congressional objection, some without consultation. We are close to a second major war in Korea — the first of which, begun in 1950, was never declared by the Congress. It was declared by President Harry Truman to be a "police action."

In the age of the internet and cable TV, the White House is seen as a locus of decision and action while Capitol Hill takes months to move.

Watching Congress, the word torpor invariably comes to mind — a word that Webster's Dictionary defines as "a state of mental and motor inactivity with partial or total insensibility."

The result: In a recent survey, 72 percent of Americans expressed high confidence in the military; 12 percent said the same of Congress.

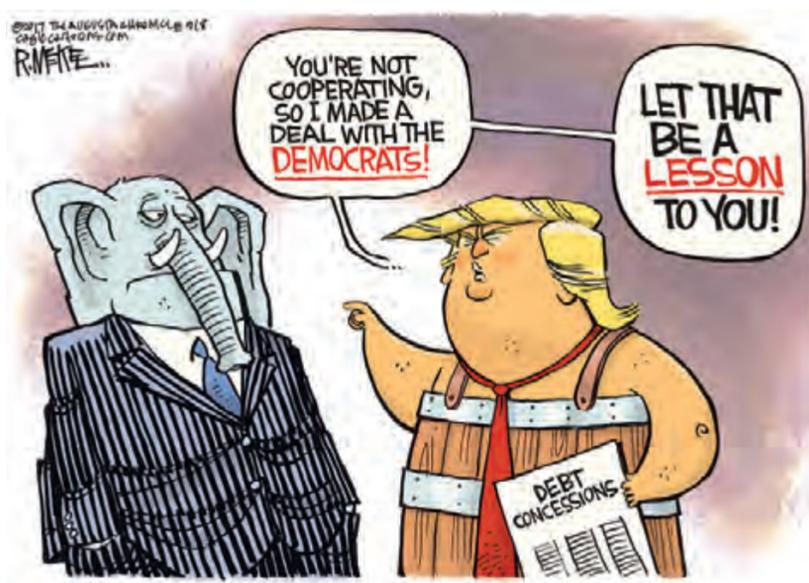
If democracy, as Freedom House contends, is in global retreat, one reason may be that legislatures, split into hostile blocs, are checkmating one another into gridlock.

Those days are long gone.

Another view: Gary Markstein Creators Syndicate



Another view: Rick McKee The Augusta Chronicle



Let's pay pension debt early

point of view

danny becton

Earlier this year, City Council passed the mayor's pension reform bills that lowered the payment that the city

will pay into the Police and Fire Pension fund on an annual basis.

The yearly payment was set to rise beyond the city's means to pay without raising taxes or cutting city services drastically. Though this reform legislation has its benefits today, it does have its consequences tomorrow.

The pension reforms, much like a huge credit card debt, pushes the \$2.8 billion liability into the future, allowing the city to make only minimum payments until a later date.

Thus, the \$2.8 billion turns into over \$10 billion worth of payments between 2031 and its payoff.

That \$10 billion will be paid by a sales tax for \$4 billion of the total, but the rest will be shouldered by the next generation having to pay \$6 billion from the city's coffers. This was a major concern from constituents and the Florida Times-Union editorials during the pension reform debate.

Prior to passage of the reforms, I drafted legislation as an amendment to the reform that added a requirement that today's payments would be combined with an extra payment each year, based on new revenue as a fixed percentage.

My plan is to take 15 percent of that new revenue before it is budgeted and allocate it to this purpose.

These payments would reoccur each year through 2031, adding to or reduced by each year's new revenues received.

If this plan were to be implemented, today's generation could help pay a significant amount toward that future debt in an amount estimated to be over \$500 million based on a paltry 3 percent growth rate projection.

I had this legislation filed separately as

Bill 2017-348.

But since I filed this legislation on May 9, it has not been received favorably.

The administration has voiced its displeasure with the idea. And several conservative council members have voiced their concerns that the 3.8 billion extra dollars of new revenue that the city will have over and beyond the extra-contribution will just not be enough!

In 2031, it is estimated that the city will take in almost \$600 million dollars a year more than today. It is my opinion that it is unconscionable to think that we do not contribute one extra dollar beyond the minimum to help the next generation with those revenue projections.

Since the bill's filing, all of the residents I have encountered have told me that this is a good idea.

The next generation will have to shoulder over \$10 billion worth of debt in paying a sales tax and pension payment that in 2047 is expected to be as high as \$397 million.

This extra contribution bill is still alive, and it is about to go back into committee. But since its introduction, not much has been said or written in the press — and this includes the Times-Union editorial page — to inform citizens of this fact.

If this bill doesn't pass, City Council will potentially be viewed as having kicked this huge debt onto others.

You can help by letting your voices be heard by all council members — call and email them with your opinion on this legislation. It is important.

If you would like more information, please visit my district website at www.dannybecton.org to see charts, graphs and information regarding the debt and the bills impact on that debt (and you can also find your council member's email addresses).

Your voice and your opinion matter. Danny Becton is City Council's District 11 member.

Lessons still to be learned from Trump's election



clarence page
tribune media services

Before he left the White House, President Donald Trump's former chief strategist Steve Bannon gave Democrats a piece of advice that Trump himself shows no desire to follow:

"identity politics." "The Democrats," Bannon said in an interview with Robert Kuttner of the liberal American Prospect, "the longer they talk about identity politics, I got 'em. If the left is focused on race and identity, and we go with economic nationalism, we can crush the Democrats."

TRUMP STOKES THE FIRE

In theory, if the left focuses on race and identity while Team Trump focuses on economic issues like trade, tariffs and immigration policy, even I would give Team Trump favorable odds for re-election.

But instead, Trump has exploited racial anger, fears, resentments and suspicions enough to alienate voters and scuttle his own economic message and legislative agenda.

A quick review: Trump's White House quest began with a bogus challenge to former President Barack Obama's birth certificate.

He portrayed Mexican immigrants as mostly rapists and murderers.

He called a federal judge disqualified for a case based on his Mexican-American ethnicity.

He waffled on recent deadly violence between white supremacist and white nationalist protestors and anti-racist counter-protesters in Charlottesville, Va., and then decided there were "very fine people" on both sides.

Does Trump's racial flame throwing work for him? Like a charm.

Polls show his base remains solid at about 40 percent or less.

RISING ECONOMIC ANXIETY

In hindsight, it's easy to see how Democrat Hillary Clinton's campaign blundered by paying too little attention to anxious and frustrated working-class and middle-class voters, especially in the crucial Rust Belt swing states like Michigan, Wisconsin, Ohio and Pennsylvania.

Against that backdrop, when Republicans say "identity politics," to some ears it's just another way to say "people who are not like you."

That might help explain an August poll by liberal-leaning Public Policy Polling that asked which racial group faces the most discrimination in America — 45 percent of Trump voters said white people.

When host Bill Maher asked the Rev. Jesse Jackson on HBO's "Real Time" about those numbers, Jackson said, "There may be something else going on" besides racism.

Jackson recited figures from an August study by CareerBuilder showing rising economic anxiety in all racial groups.

"Seventy-eight percent of Americans live paycheck to paycheck, 51 percent make \$30,000 a year or less," Jackson said.

"There's a deep sense of anxiety where you've had a globalized economy. These people feel locked out. And they start scapegoating. ... So, yes, they're being exploited but they have tremendous economic anxiety underneath that must not be ignored."

Indeed, the smart message to take away from Bannon's advice is don't let voters feel ignored.

Everyone likes to be asked for their vote, according to an old political motto. No one likes to be taken for granted, either.

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