

viewpoint

OPINIONS PAGE BLOG

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Hemming Park is a symbol of local dysfunction



ron littlepage
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There's nothing like having sat through several meetings during which City Council members debated Hemming Park to be reminded why Jacksonville is a not-so-little city that couldn't.

The park is the centerpiece of downtown. It's essential that it be safe and welcoming.

For two years, the Friends of Hemming Park has been trying to make that happen. That's the group that stepped up to operate the park when, by the way, no one else would.

Hours have now been spent recently slicing and dicing the Friends over how the group spent city money.

Those meetings have included the public flogging and extraction of a pound of flesh that's the habit of one council member.

Another council member asked why the park should get city money since his constituents live 30 minutes away and

wouldn't visit the park.

I'm confused. About 800,000 Jacksonville residents don't attend Jaguar games, but here's \$45 million for you, Mr. Khan. Do you need anything else?

Then there was the meeting when council members spent time questioning expenditures like the \$100 a month Friends spent on software.

Meanwhile, the time clocks for a roomful of highly paid city officials clicked away.

Any outsiders from a progressive city who stumbled into that meeting would have left scratching their heads.

This is the situation going into yet another meeting on Hemming Park next week when, thankfully, I'll be on vacation.

The Friends of Hemming Park is trying to get \$74,000 to keep operating this month and in September.

There's a very good chance that legislation won't be approved by the council. What would happen to the park then?

Some council members are suggesting closing the park and building a fence around it that would keep "those people"

out of the park.

"Those people" are now being called "congregators" instead of the once favored term "homeless."

By the time the park is reopened, perhaps with a new look and a new plan, perhaps "those people" will have left.

Concertina wire on top of the fence would be a nice touch.

It would fit in quite well with the bombed-out look of the Laura Street Trio (the city that couldn't), the empty Barnett Bank building (the city that couldn't) and the historic Snyder Memorial church that remains unused after all of these years of city ownership (the city that couldn't).

You might as well kiss goodbye the momentum that had been building for a revitalized downtown.

Here's another swell idea making the rounds: Take all of the furniture out of the park that "those people" sit on, replace the bricks with grass and turn it into a passive park.

However, leave the fountains. But wouldn't "those people" still sit on the fountains' walls? Put spikes on the top.

Yes siree, that would send a good message about downtown and Jacksonville.

The most sensible idea came from Sam Mousa, the city's chief administrative officer, during a meeting with several council members last Thursday.

Mousa said that Mayor Lenny Curry's proposed budget for the fiscal year beginning Oct. 1 includes \$250,000 to operate the park for six months.

He suggested using that time to get a handle on what needs to be done at the park.

It's essential that the city continue on the path that was started two years ago to turn the park into an asset for downtown instead of the eyesore it had become.

The six months would also allow time to solicit proposals from any groups interested in operating the park as some council members want.

It's a far better idea than fencing off a key part of downtown and proving to the world that Jacksonville is indeed a not-so-little city that couldn't.

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Reagan's son learned to forgive John Hinckley



point of view
michael reagan

A federal judge has ruled that John Hinckley Jr., the mentally disturbed man who tried to assassinate my father

35 years ago, be set free.

Many people, including members of my own family, think it's a terrible injustice that Hinckley, now 61, will be allowed to leave the mental hospital and live permanently with his elderly mother in Virginia.

I don't. Before I explain, I'd like to remind people of what my father said and did in the days following the events of March 30, 1981.

When I walked into his hospital room the next day and saw my wounded father, the first thing he said to me, after "Good morning," was "Michael, if you're ever going to be shot, don't be wearing a new suit."

What? I thought to myself. "Well, yesterday I was shot."

"I know, Father. I know." "Well, I was wearing a brand new suit I had just picked up the day before. And I'm telling you, if you're going to get shot don't be wearing a new suit."

"The last time I saw it it was in shreds in the corner of my hospital room. That young man who shot me, John Hinckley Jr., I understand his parents are in the oil biz."

"Yes, they are, Dad." "I understand they live in Denver."

"Yes, they do, Dad." "Do you think they have any money?"

"Dad," I said, "they are in the oil business and live in Denver. Of course, they have money."

My dad looked at me and said, "Well, do you think they'd buy me a new suit?"

Humor was my dad's way of making strangers feel comfortable in his presence. He was the same way with his family.

Before my father was well enough to go back to the White House, he did something completely serious. He said he had forgiven Hinckley.

It proves, as I always like to say, that my father didn't just recite "The Lord's Prayer," he lived it.

A lot of people can't forgive Hinckley even today.

They were shocked in 1981 when he was found not guilty by reason of insanity, and they were angry when they found out he'd become eligible for release some day.

Because of Hinckley, the laws were changed. Today if you shoot at the president, you stay in prison for life, no matter how crazy you are.

Over the years all of us in the families hurt by Hinckley have watched the courts and doctors slowly but surely release him through the mental health system.

Hinckley's not a threat to my family or anyone else's. But he's not totally free and never will be.

He may not have bars to look through, but he has his own type of jail. People will be watching him all the time. So will the Secret Service.

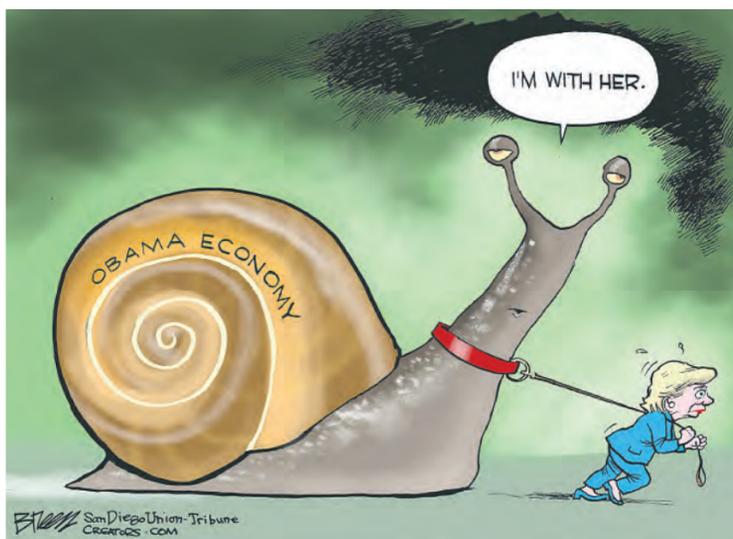
At first I was very upset and angry when Hinckley got off on the insanity defense. How could a person shoot the president of the United States and be allowed to ever have any freedom at all?

Fifteen years ago I was still angry. But 15 years later I want to be more like my father and have a forgiving heart, not an angry heart.

So at the same time John Hinckley has been set free, maybe I have been too.

Michael Reagan is the son of President Ronald Reagan, a political consultant and an author.

Another view: Steve Breen San Diego Union-Tribune



Another view: Mike Luckovich Creators Syndicate



Will the GOP self-destruct?



patrick buchanan
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At stake in 2016 is the White House, the Supreme Court, the Senate and, possibly, control of the House of Representatives.

Hence, Republicans have a decision to make. Will they set aside political and personal

feuds and come together to win in November after which they can fight over the future of the party and the country?

Or will they split apart, settling scores now, lose it all, and then after November begin a battle to allocate blame for a historic defeat that will leave wounds that will never heal.

Republicans have been here before. After the crushing defeat of 1964, Govs. Nelson Rockefeller, George Romney and William Scranton, whose principles required them to abandon Barry Goldwater, discovered that when the cheering of the press stopped, they were finished as national leaders.

Richard Nixon took off two months in 1964 to campaign for Goldwater.

Four years later, with Barry's backing, Nixon was rewarded with the party's nomination and the presidency.

Now between Goldwater and Trump there are great differences. A relevant one is this: Trump still has a chance of becoming president.

In August 1964, Goldwater was 36 points behind LBJ.

As of today, Trump is 10 points behind Clinton. From Harry Truman to George H. W. Bush, many presidential candidates have been able to close a 10-point gap and win.

Between Trump and the presidency today stands not Paul Ryan but Hillary Clinton.

The Donald, his campaign and party need to cease attacking one another to

the elation of a hostile media and redirect all their fire on the sole obstacle between them and a Republican sweep.

Nor is it all that complex or difficult a task.

As secretary of state, Clinton made a compelling case for her being ranked as about the worst in American history.

As of mid-July, 56 percent of Americans thought the Democratic nominee should have been indicted.

Her "reset" with Russia was brushed aside by Vladimir Putin. Spurned, she now compares him to Hitler. Is this the temperament America wants in the First Diplomat in dealing with nuclear powers?

She was a cheerleader for a war in Libya that left that nation a hellhole of terrorism, requiring another war to clean up.

"Benghazi" has today become a synonym both for the selfless heroism of American warriors and for the squalid mendacity of politicians desperate to cover their fannies.

Trump will secure the Southern border and halt illegal immigration.

He will throw out the Obama tax and trade policies that have betrayed American workers and bled us of our manufacturing power.

Where Clinton regards Ruth Bader Ginsburg as her model Supreme Court justice, Trump's nominees will be in the tradition of Justice Antonin Scalia.

"America First" will be the polystar in foreign policy. Allies will start standing on their own feet and paying their fair share of the cost of their own defense.

As for the defense of the United States, "Peace through Strength," the Eisenhower policy, will be the Trump policy.

America's era of endless wars is coming to an end.

As for the renegade and cut-and-run Republicans who just won't come home, as they say at Motel 6, "We'll leave the light on for you."

Clinton campaign benefits from Trump's missteps



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It is not enough to succeed, Gore Vidal said; others must fail.

As Hillary Clinton enjoys a bump in her polls after the Democratic National Convention, she's getting a boost from her Republican opponent Donald Trump's epic fails.

First, there was his ugly and self-destructive denigration of Khizr and Ghazala Khan, the parents of a fallen American military hero. Their son was awarded the Purple Heart and sacrificed his life to save the lives of his fellow soldiers from a car bomb in Iraq.

Yet, as his father said, "If it was up to Donald Trump, he never would have been in America."

We know by now that Trump has a very thin skin, too thin to let him express the simple and sympathetic reactions of such previous presidents as George W. Bush and Barack Obama when they were criticized by Gold Star parents. In an ABC interview Sunday, Trump also equated his "sacrifices" as a billionaire businessman to those made by the Khans.

All of this, by way, ended a week with three other self-inflicted wounds:

- Trump invited Russian hackers to uncover and release Clinton's private emails.

- He sounded as confident, yet confused and ignorant, about the turmoil in Ukraine as a student who was trying to fake his way through an oral exam for which he had not studied.

- He mocked another Democratic convention speaker, who happens to be a retired four-star general, as a failure.

But at least those Trumpian attacks, like most of his previous jabs, involved public figures.

His decision to pick on the grieving parents of a slain war hero is enough to raise concerns about his mental and emotional health.

After all, if Trump goes this nuclear over criticism from grieving Gold Star parents, one wonders how he would deal with, say, Kim Jong Un? I, for one, hope we never have to find out.

Most frustrating to other Republicans, the calls for GOP leaders to repudiate Trump for his growing list of offenses distract from their efforts to undermine Clinton.

On Sunday, for example, Clinton undermined her own efforts to improve her shaky poll numbers for trustworthiness. During a Fox News interview, she uttered a whopper that was serious enough to earn "four Pinocchios," the Washington Post's fact-checking department's worst rating.

She said in part that FBI Director James "Comey said my answers were truthful, and what I've said is consistent with what I have told the American people."

Post Fact-Checker columnist Glenn Kessler wrote that she was "cherry-picking statements by Comey to preserve her narrative about the unusual setup of a private email server" and "skate past the more disturbing findings of the FBI investigation."

Yet after Trump tweeted Clinton's Pinocchios, Kessler tweeted, "Both amusing & irritating to see @realDonaldTrump tout a 4-P fact check on HRC when his staff almost never responds to fact check queries."

Indeed, in this contest between two candidates with unusually low public approval ratings, neither can afford to make too many mistakes.

But Trump has made enough unforced errors lately to qualify as a non-cash contribution to Clinton's campaign.

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