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'BRANGELINA'



Board chair: Why Vitti should go

His minority achievement plan is too slow, Smith Juarez says

By Denise Smith Amos denise.amos@jacksonville.com

Duval School Board Chairwoman Ashley Smith Juarez issued an "open letto Superintendent Nikolai Vitti on Tuesday

she asked him to resign last She has also called a spe-

that lays out the reasons





cial meeting of the School Board on the district's future this Friday.

view, made it clear that he wants to continue working with the School Board on the issues she brought up, though he does not know and wouldn't predict if he will get that chance Friday.

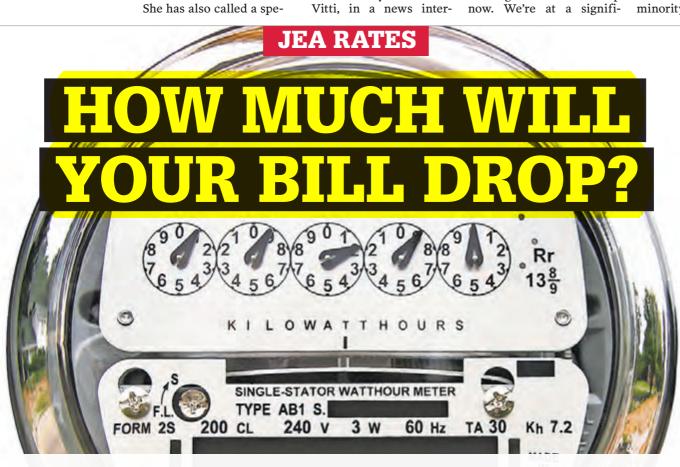
"I just hope it doesn't end," Vitti said. "There's a lot of work still to do, and we've gone too far to stop now. We're at a significant place where stopping doesn't make sense."

Smith Juarez's letter says her reasons for seeking Vitti's resignation lie in strategic plan targets Vitti recently proposed for the school district at recent board meetings and in the growing achievement gaps between minority and nonminority students.

Smith Juarez likened the continued acceptance of an achievement gap between minorities and their white

peers to racism. "All students deserve a high quality and equitable education; these results do not meet that standard," she wrote. "To accept these

VITTI continues on A-4



Proposed JEA electric rate changes

The JEA Board of Directors set a hearing for its Oct. 18 meeting and will consider changes to its rates that will be among a set of proposals that staff expects to save customers \$100 million over eight years. The following are the proposed changes for a typical customer.

	JEA	Recommended electric rate restructuring							
	customer base		CURRENT CHARGES (TYPICAL)				NEW CHARGES (TYPICAL)		
-	- 396,000 residential	(1	Base charges ncludes taxes)	Fuel charges	Bill amount	Base charges (Includes taxes)	Fuel charges	Bill amount	Percent change
	COMMERCIAL & INDUSTRIAL	Residential	\$87	\$37	\$124	\$91	\$33	\$123	-0.2%
	47,000 general services	General services	\$219	\$92	\$310	\$227	\$81	\$309	-0.6%
	4,000 general service demand	General service demand	\$5,267	\$2,499	\$7,766	\$5,228	\$2,210	\$7,438	- 4.2%
	150 general service large demand	General service large demand	\$44,920	\$29,400	\$74,320	\$44,709	\$26,000	\$70,709	- 4.9%

Note: Customer base does not include 45 Interruptable clients Source: JEA

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Proposal saves typical customer \$1 per month, businesses much more

By Sebastian Kitchen

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The JEA board set the stage Tuesday for a vote next month to change electric rates, with staff expecting the changes to save customers \$100 million over the next eight years and avoid rate increases for the next five years.

"It would lower bills for all custom-

ers today," Chief Financial Officer Melissa Dykes told board members at their Tuesday meeting.

Every JEA electric customer would see a rate reduction in the coming months, but commercial customers would see larger drops in rates, according to an outline of the proposal.

A typical residential customer would see savings of just .2 percent, about \$1 a month for the typical customer. Some commercial customers could see reductions of more than 4 percent.

The board set a rate hearing for its Oct. 18 meeting, when it would vote on the proposed changes. If approved, the rate changes would be effective Dec. 1.

Dykes told the board the proposal

JEA continues on A-4

Community spending bill in the rough

Bid to clear up rules for how council members spend money raises issues

By Christopher Hong

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A Jacksonville City Council panel delayed clearing a plan to set aside \$70,000 for council members to host community

events after several council members raised questions about how the money could be spent that weren't answered to their satisfac-

For years, council members who wanted to host events at city parks would

request access to the property as well as other city resources, like staff, bleachers and stages, said City Councilman Reginald Brown, who introduced the plan.

This year, the mayor's office told him

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Suspect's journal included talk of bombs, martyrdom

By Eric Tucker, Larry Neumeister & Jennifer Peltz Associated Press

NEW YORK | Ahmad Khan Rahami vowed to martyr himself rather than be caught after setting off explosives in New York and New Jersey, and he'd hoped in a handwritten journal championing jihad that



"the sounds of bombs will be heard in the streets," authorities said Tuesday as they

filed federal charges against him. Criminal complaints in Manhattan and New Jersey federal courts provided chilling

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The Duval County School Board held a committee meeting Tuesday morning. Among those not in attendance were School Board Chairwoman Ashley Smith Juarez who has asked Superintendent Nikolai Vitti to resign.

Continued from A-1 results is to accept the

racism that has plagued our district for decades; that is unacceptable." She said her reasons

are not the result of personal affronts or strained relations between board members and Vitti.

"I can handle disrespect and strained relationships," she wrote. "I am grown and I have my education. I cannot tolerate mixed results and low expectations. That affects our students' future.'

Smith Juarez noted the board adopted literacy as a priority three years ago, but in the past school year less than half — 46 percent — of Duval's students in grades three through 10 passed state reading ex-

That includes 35 percent of African-American third-graders. Students not reading on grade level by third grade could be held back.

"These [third-graders] are students for whom you have been Superintendent since they were in kindergarten," she wrote, noting that less than a third of black third-graders passed while 65 percent of their white peers did.

Vitti proposed that reading proficiency will grow 2 percent per year. Smith Juarez said at that rate it will take 27 years for all students to be proficient. She added that Vitti's projection of 0.5 percent annual growth in reading for kindergarten through second grade means it would take Duval 140 years for all second-graders to reach proficiency.

Meanwhile, in algebra, achievement gaps already widened, she said. Algebra I passing grades went up by 6 percentage points over last year, but African-Americans' passing rate fell by 1 percentage point.

"The result is a 9 point widening of the achievement gap in just one year," she wrote.

"If African-American students progress at your proposed rate of growth for all students, it will take six years to achieve

"I can handle disrespect and strained relationships. I am grown and I have my education. I cannot tolerate mixed results and low expectations. That affects our students' future."

Ashley Smith Juarez Duval School Board Chairman

the proficiency rates their white peers do today. It will take multi-racial students seven years to make up the one-year, 11 point widening of the gap between their white peers."

Only 11 percent of black students were proficient in Algebra II, down from 12 percent the previous

Even so, Vitti said, Duval's achievement gaps between black and white students are among the smallest among major urban districts in Florida and nationwide.

"I wake up every day knowing that all our children can do better than they're doing," he said, "especially the most academically fragile."

While acknowledging Vitti and the board have done some good work over the years, Smith Juarez said Vitti hasn't come up with a plan for accelerated growth, nor has he incorporated some of the board's suggestions.

"When we last spoke, you told me, again, that you could do no better for children," she said. "The success that you promised and that I expected has not been realized. And, the expectations you have for children are not high enough."

Vitti said he does not believe and did not say that this is all he can do for children.

Smith Juarez confirmed that she suggested he use his talents elsewhere and acknowledged she is losing "a friend in reform."

"I am open to discussing our path forward, as I always have been, but I will not compromise significant improvement of all students' achievement," she wrote.

Vitti said he is willing to discuss and "evolve" his

targets with board input or perhaps input from a third "Those targets were a

proposal to start a conversation; I'm in no way entrenched in those targets," he said.

He said he believes targets are just statistical benchmarks against how other districts do; they're not his vision for how Duval students will perform.

Vitti and Smith Juarez both joined the district leadership in 2012. Vitti said they both shared the same passion for education reform and improving student achievement.

"I don't think we're at a junction that we can't work through her points of frustration and expectation," he said. "I'm optimistic that she and I can go back to that place where we started."

Meanwhile, the community continues to debate over whether the School Board should fire or keep Vitti.

Tim Sloan, an education activist and Duval parent, spoke during Tuesday's meeting about the timing of Smith Juarez's actions.

He likened it to the Jaguars winning consistently and getting close to but not making the Super Bowl. He said the community would object if owner Shad Khan then decided to fire a key coach.

Similarly, Sloan predicted, the community would be upset about losing Vitti when the district made improvements while not faring well in some measures.

'Our school district has excelled," Sloan said. "Last year we had a new curriculum which had flaws but our teachers ... still educated our children." Sloan added that

achievement gaps have existed long before Vitti came to Jacksonville in 2012.

"It was nothing new," Sloan said. "The truth is, the separation of the [student] subgroups has always been. They were there when some of you were teachers," referring to several board members who used to be teachers.

Gary Chartrand, a Vitti proponent, said Vitti's targets were on the mark and were similar to those set by the state and some of Florida's other large urban districts. Chartrand is a Jacksonville businessman and political donor who also sits on the state Board of Education.

He said it's "outrageous" to consider firing Vitti over some projections.

"I don't think that's a reason to terminate him; that's a reason to sit down and work through the mediation process," Chartrand said, referring to an idea Smith Juarez proposed last week.

But there are others who already are thinking about life without Vitti at the district's helm.

Chris Guerrieri, a teacher and blogger who frequently criticizes Vitti, predicted teacher morale would rise.

"If he left Friday, instantly teacher morale would improve dramatically and that would be more than worth any pains the district experiences as they search for the next super," he said.

Wanda Hedrick, a University of North Florida professor who teaches educators how to teach reading, said the "Duval school district is not going to fall apart if and when Dr. Vitti leaves."

"I see so much potential if we can get someone to lead that can harness the talent in the school district and the community at large. ... I know brave teachers who are helping children read better, in spite of the reading curriculum that Dr. Vitti has put into place. That's what good teachers do, but how much better if the superintendent had put into place a curriculum that they did not have to work around."

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BROWN

that wasn't allowed, so Brown introduced legislation to create clear rules for council members to arrange events intended to

benefit their district. His original legislation simply created a new process, but a council committee on Monday added a provision that would give each district council member \$5,000 to cover the event's expenses.

The \$5,000 amount was intended to prevent the city from paying to provide resources, like police and firefighters required to attend or other city equipment, for an unlimited number of events. said council President Lori Boyer.

There are no plans to set aside more money in the future, and council members would be responsible for fundraising once they spend their money.

However, members of another committee that met Tuesday began questioning how the money could be spent and learned it wasn't limited to the city's internal expenses. In fact, a city attorney said there were no limits to what council members could buy, as long as they followed the city's purchasing and procurement rules.

After several council members raised concerns about that detail, the committee delayed moving the bill to the full council for a final vote next Tuesday. "It didn't seem ready for

prime time," said Councilman Greg Anderson. "The concerns I had really revolved around what the

money could be used for. I think as we began asking questions, we didn't get the answers."

Brown, who wasn't at Tuesday's meeting, said he was disappointed to hear it was delayed, noting that he held a meeting last week to settle concerns about the

"If you had that type of concern, you should have come," Brown said.

Under Brown's legislation, the community events would be limited to 500 to 1,500 people. The events must benefit a council member's constituents and promote or inform attendees on governmental activities, programs or projects. The events are prohibited from being political in na-

Despite those rules, Councilman John Crescimbeni mentioned a few hypothetical gray areas, like attendees wearing political shirts in support of the host or a council member using city money to host an event on behalf of a nonprofit, that a city attorney acknowledged would likely be allowed.

"I'm not sure how I'm voting on this bill," Crescimbeni said. "It's really more of a concern about some newspaper article coming out about how this was mishandled." Unlike some of his col-

leagues who said they needed more information about the plan, Councilman Danny Becton said he's heard enough. "This is too frivolous of

a use of taxpayers' dollars," Becton said. "I'll be pressing the red button whenever it shows up."

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allows the utility to save \$100 million for customers while paying off \$190 million in debt early. JEA staff proposed a set

of changes including reducing the fuel rate to better line up with current fuel costs, adjusting the base energy charge for customers to "align with the cost of service," and accelerating its debt payoff for the next three years. JEA leaders also want to create an economic development initiative. The city-owned utility

has given customers a series of fuel refunds over the last four years and it reduced the fuel rate earlier this year.

Those changes and the proposed reduction in the fuel rate are possible because of the continued low price of fuel.

Dykes said JEA had to consider approaching environmental regulations, a significant drop in sales since 2006, the utility's access to power through facilities coming online and agreements with other utilities, and regulations that include a requirement to set rates based on the cost of service.

With all of those factors, JEA anticipated an increase in base rates for customers in 2019 and 2020 if the utility did not act. Dykes said the set of proposals out-

lined by staff would avoid increases in those years. JEA analyzed those and a variety of other factors including its debt and assets to arrive at Tuesday's recommendation.

Staff proposed paying off a portion of the debt scheduled to be paid in 2020 through 2025 in the next three years. The board would need to approve releasing excess reserve funds to pay down debt and to accept a debt repayment schedule that accelerates repayment of the principal.

Dykes said \$70 million of the debt pay down would be from reserves, with half of that from savings employees generated this year, and \$120 million through refinancing debt to pay more up front. She said several of the reserve funds are overfunded.

In paying down the debt early, JEA will save the associated interest costs, helping reduce costs for customers, and demonstrate to the credit rating agencies it's serious about paying down debt, Dykes

JEA has \$4.65 billion in debt now after it peaked at \$6.39 billion in 2010.

JEA's proposed economic development initiative would allow the utility to negotiate rates with businesses considering Northeast Florida that would not otherwise locate in the region.

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RAHAMI Continued from A-1

descriptions of the motivations that authorities said drove the Afghan-born U.S. citizen to set off explosives in New York and New Jersey, including a bomb that injured more than two dozen people when it blew up on a busy Manhattan street.

Meanwhile, more details emerged Tuesday about Rahami's past, including the disclosure that the FBI had looked into him in 2014 but came up with nothing. According to the court

complaint, Rahami's journal included a passage that said: "You (USA Government) continue your (unintelligible) slaught(er)" against the mujahideen, or holy warriors, in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

"Death to your oppression," the journal ended.

One portion expressed concern at the prospect of being caught before being able to carry out a suicide attack and the desire to be a martyr, the complaint said. Still another section included a reference to "pipe bombs" and a "pressure cooker bomb" and declared: "In the streets they plan to run a mile," an apparent reference to one of the blast sites, a charity run in a New Jersey shore town.

There also were laudatory references to Osama bin Laden, Anwar al-Awlaki the American-born Muslim cleric who was killed in a 2011 drone strike and whose preaching has inspired other acts of violence - and Nidal Hasan, the former Army officer who went on a deadly shooting rampage in 2009 at Fort Hood, Texas, the complaint said.

Before the federal charges were filed, Rahmani, 28, was already being held on \$5.2 million bail, charged with the attempted murder of police officers during the shootout that led to his capture Monday outside a bar in Linden, New Jersey. Rahmani remains hos-

pitalized with gunshot wounds. It wasn't immediately clear whether he had a lawyer who could comment on the charges. complaint The court describes Rahami buying

bomb-making equipment

so openly that he ordered

citric acid, ball bearings and

electronic igniters on eBay and had them delivered to a Perth Amboy, New Jersey, business where he worked until earlier this month.

Video recorded two days before the bombings and recovered from a family member's phone shows him igniting incendiary material in a cylinder, then shows the fuse being lighted, a loud noise and flames, followed by billowing smoke and laughter, the complaint said. Federal agents would

like to question Rahami. But Rep. Tom MacArthur, R-N.J., who received a classified briefing from the FBI, said Rahami was not cooperating; that could also be a reflection of his Investigators are look-

ing into Rahami's overseas travel, including a visit to Pakistan a few years ago, and want to know whether he received any money or training from extremist organizations. In 2014, the FBI opened

up an "assessment," the

least intrusive form of an

FBI inquiry, based on com-

ments from his father after

a domestic dispute, the bu-

reau said in a statement. "The FBI conducted in-

ternal database reviews, interagency checks and multiple interviews, none of which revealed ties to terrorism," the bureau said.

A law enforcement official said the FBI spoke with Rahami's father in 2014 after agents learned of his concerns that the son could be a terrorist. During the inquiry, the father backed away from talk of terrorism and told investigators that he simply meant his son was hanging out with the wrong crowd, according to the official, who was not authorized to discuss the investigation and spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity.

Rahami's father told reporters Tuesday outside the family's fried-chicken restaurant in Elizabeth, New Jersey, that he called the FBI at the time because Rahami "was doing real bad," having stabbed his brother and hit his mother. Rahami was not prosecuted in the stabbing; a grand jury declined to indict him.

"But they checked, almost two months, and they say, 'He's OK, he's clear, he's not terrorist.' Now they say he's a terrorist," the father said. Asked whether he thought his son was a terrorist, he said: "No. And the FBI, they know that."

The disclosure of the father's contacts with the FBI raises questions about whether there was anything more law enforcement could have done at the time to determine whether Rahami had terrorist aspirations.

That issue arose after the Orlando massacre in June, when FBI Director James Comey said agents a few years earlier had looked into the gunman, Omar Mateen, but did not find enough information to pursue charges or keep him under investigation.

Asked Tuesday about Rahami, White House spokesman Josh Earnest said President Barack Obama "is confident that the Department of Justice and the FBI will go back and review the interactions that this individual had with law enforcement to determine if there's something different that could have been done or should have been done to prevent the violence that we saw over the weekend."

was concerned that the 2014 FBI inquiry had been closed after finding no terror ties, Earnest noted Rahami's rights as a U.S. citizen. Rahami worked as an un-

As for whether Obama

armed night guard for two months in 2011 at an AP administrative technology office in Cranbury, New Jersey. At the time, he was employed by Summit Security, a private contractor. AP global security chief

Danny Spriggs said he learned this week that Rahami worked there and often engaged colleagues in long political discussions, expressing sympathy for the Taliban and disdain for U.S. military action in Afghanistan. Rahami left that job in 2011 because he wanted to take a trip to Afghanistan, Spriggs said.

AP spokesman Paul Colford said the AP told law enforcement officials about Rahami's work at the Cranbury facility. Summit's vice president

of security services, Daniel Sepulveda, said Rahami last worked for the company in 2011. Sepulveda said he was unaware of any complaints about Rahami's conduct.