

viewpoint

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JaxPort needs a Plan B for shaky dredging plan



ron littlepage

times-union columnist

There are good reasons for that.

Getting the massive amount of tax dollars from the federal government needed to pay for the dredging project got even more remote on Sept. 15.

The U.S. Senate voted on that day to approve the Water Resources Management Act 2016, and it doesn't include any money for JaxPort's dredge.

It does, however, include money for Port Everglades to dredge its channel to 48 feet.

More significantly, it provides the funding for the Port of Charleston to dredge its channel to 52 feet.

In backroom conversations, some Jacksonville decision-makers are expressing doubt about the viability of JaxPort's \$700 million plan to deepen the St. Johns River shipping channel.

There are good reasons for that.

That depth will allow Charleston's port to handle the supersized container ships now making full use of the expanded Panama Canal.

Even if JaxPort found the money to dredge the channel to its goal of 47 feet, the giant ships, if fully loaded, would have to wait for the right tidal conditions to use JaxPort, a time restriction that would put the port at a competitive disadvantage.

There's another factor at play here. All of these proposals to spend billions of dollars to deepen multiple ports along the East Coast are based on capturing the trade with Asia.

I would like to think that Congress has come to the realization that it makes no fiscal sense to deepen every port — that business gained by one port is business lost by another.

Even if that's not the case, events of the last few weeks have dampened talk about the "exploding" Asian trade.

South Korea's Hanjin Shipping Co., the seventh largest in the world, has filed

for bankruptcy, and the South Korean government said last week it has no plan to bail out the company.

Add to that a report in The Wall Street Journal last week that Maersk, the Danish shipping and oil giant, was splitting its operations to battle what was described as "one of the worst shipping down-cycles and a historic oil-price rout."

The Journal reported that low crude oil prices have hit Maersk's energy unit hard.

"Meanwhile, the container-shipping industry has seen freight rates tumble amid a capacity glut, prompting price wars between operators that have pushed freight rates to levels barely covering fuel costs," the Journal said.

It's always been a gamble that spending about \$1 billion to deepen the St. Johns channel and to pay for other infrastructure improvements would add the new business needed to earn an adequate return on investment.

Getting federal money has become more and more unlikely, the Port of

Charleston is far ahead in getting deeper water and the shipping industry is facing hard times, all of which makes that gamble even murkier.

JaxPort needs a Plan B, which it says it doesn't have.

Those decision-makers mentioned earlier are saying one needs to be found.

Port Tampa Bay is aggressively pursuing business with Cuba. JaxPort needs to get into that game in a big way.

And some argue that improving JaxPort's infrastructure and intermodal capabilities would be a wiser investment and less expensive than a deep dredge of the channel.

There's other business out there besides the fully loaded supersized ships that require 50 feet of water or more.

Being a successful midsize port is better than investing in a project that could turn out to be a \$1 billion boondoggle.

Find that Plan B.

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Trump needs to show he is not a media caricature



patrick buchanan

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he had inflicted the first crippling wound on Lyndon Johnson.

"Pat, you don't have to win up here, you know," he assured me. "All you have to do is beat the point spread."

"Beat the point spread" is a good description of what Donald Trump has to do in Monday night's debate.

Trump does not have to show a mastery of foreign and domestic policy details. Rather he has to do what John F. Kennedy did in 1960 and what Ronald Reagan did in 1980.

He has to convince a plurality of voters, who seem prepared to vote for him, that he's not a terrible risk.

The Trump on stage at Hofstra University will have 90 minutes to show that the malicious cartoon of Donald Trump is a lie.

He can do it, for he did it at the Mexico City press conference with President Pena Nieto.

Kennedy won the first debate because he appeared more lucid, likable and charismatic, more mature than folks had thought. And he seemed to point to a brighter, more challenging future for which the country was prepared after Ike.

After that first debate, Americans could see JFK in the Oval Office.

Reagan won his debate with Jimmy Carter because his sunny disposition and demeanor contradicted the malevolent media-created caricatures of the Gipper as a dangerous primitive or an amiable dunce.

Even George W. Bush, who, according to most judges, did not win a single debate against Al Gore or John Kerry, came off as a levelheaded fellow.

Trump has the same imperative and same opportunity as JFK and Reagan. He is the challenger who fills up the sports arenas with the tens and scores of thousands, not Hillary Clinton.

TRUMP'S TASK IS CLEAR

What does Trump need to do?

He needs to show that he can be presidential. He needs to speak with confidence, but not cockiness, and to deal with Clinton's attacks directly, but with dignity and not disrespect. And humor always helps.

Clinton has a more difficult assignment. America knows she knows the issues. But two-thirds of the country does not believe her to be honest or trustworthy. As her small crowds show, she sets no one on fire.

Blacks, Hispanics and millennials who invested high hopes in Barack Obama seem to have no great hopes for her. She has no bold agenda, no New Deal or New Frontier.

"Why aren't I 50 points ahead?" wailed Hillary Clinton this week.

The answer is simple. America has seen enough of her and has no great desire to see any more; and she cannot change an impression hardened over 25 years in 90 minutes.

But the country will accept her if the only alternative is the Trump of the mainstream media's portrayal. Hence, the strategy of the Democratic Party for the next seven weeks is obvious:

Trash Trump, take him down, make him intolerable and we win.

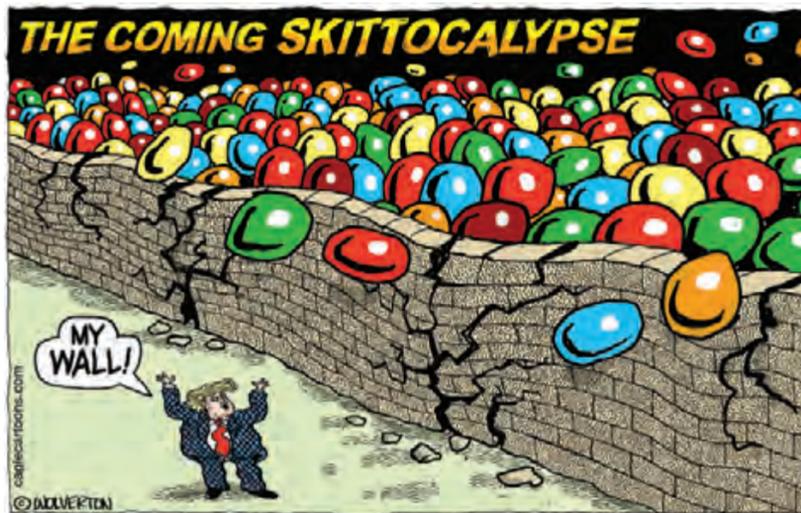
No matter how she performs though, Trump can win the debate, for he is the one over whom the question marks hang. But he is also the one who can dissipate and destroy them with a presidential performance.

In that sense, this debate and this election are Trump's to win.

Another view: Dave Granlund Cagle Cartoons



Another view: Monte Wolverton Cagle Cartoons



Curry: Progress is underway

point of view

mayor lenny curry

Last month, an overwhelming majority of voters approved my solution for tackling the greatest threat to Jacksonville's future:

our crippling pension debt.

Encouraged by the bipartisan coalition of members of City Council, business and community leaders, the faith community and others, voters approved extending a half-penny sales tax and took a major step toward financial security for our city.

As Ron Littlepage's Sept. 9 column points out, the next step involves negotiating new, sustainable pension plans with city employee unions. But the suggestion that Jacksonville was ever in a "holding pattern" because of the pension debate ignores several key facts. From downtown to our neighborhoods, progress has been made throughout Jacksonville since Day 1. Not long after taking office, I discovered many delayed, abandoned and neglected programs and initiatives that could accurately be described as being in "holding patterns" or even suffering steps backward.

I inherited reductions in law enforcement on our streets, infrastructure failures like the collapse of Liberty Street/Coastline Drive and financial threats like our unfunded pension liability, among other issues.

My administration immediately took action. And we've never stopped.

During my first year in office, city investment included downtown infrastructure improvements like repairs to roads impacted by the Liberty Street collapse.

We encouraged the creation of hundreds of new jobs, increased business and residential occupancy, and supported historic preservation and restoration through a variety of grant and loan programs.

Financial stewardship and governance have contributed to improved and upgraded debt ratings. Private investment from companies has brought new jobs and downtown development. New practices and priorities have resulted in board and commission appointments that bring a serious, business-minded leadership to every facet of my administration.

My team has championed neighborhood improvements, including a septic tank phase-out that prioritizes historically underserved areas of Jacksonville while also reducing pollution in our waterways.

I established an Office of Blight Initiatives to oversee "Fight Blight," a citywide blight reduction awareness program designed to help beautify our neighborhoods and our city.

Our re-established Neighborhoods Department engages with citizens and makes government more accessible. And I've continued to personally reach out to residents through neighborhood walks and town hall meetings.

This outreach and openness allowed me to shine a light on slumlords at Eureka Gardens and engage with state and federal partners to find solutions.

When it comes to public safety, my administration's top priority, we've never slowed down. We relaunched the Jax Journey, a crime prevention and intervention program focused on vulnerable youth and communities, and increased its funding by 100 percent.

My first city budget included funding for 40 new police officers and 40 new community service officers. The result of that commitment, along with additional police overtime funding, was a 40 percent decrease in non-domestic shootings. This year's budget proposal adds another 40 police and 40 community service officers.

Although it's true that pension-related budget constraints forced me to say "no" to a number of projects in recent months, most citizens I met during nearly 100 town hall and community meetings wisely recognize the progress we've made over the last year. More importantly, they recognize the potential of what Jacksonville can accomplish without the burden of overwhelming pension debt. I thank them for their vision and support for a city of Jacksonville that values all citizens.

I'm proud of the work we've done and look forward to building on the momentum that inspires my service to the people of this great city.

Lenny Curry is mayor of Jacksonville.

Undecided voters evaluate two flawed candidates



clarence page

tribune media services

Are there undecided voters left?

Yes, polls show almost 10 percent of voters still haven't made up their minds.

I used to think they were pathologically indecisive. But the holdouts deserve

respect.

I spent Friday evening with a roomful of undecided voters on the other side of two-way mirror from me and about a dozen other journalists.

Republican pollster Frank Luntz organized the three-hour session for AARP in Alexandria, Va.

The group consisted of 30 people, including 11 women by my count, a range of age brackets and a sprinkling of black, Hispanic and Asian-Americans. Ten said they voted for President Barack Obama twice, 15 voted against him twice. Four said they had voted for him once, including at least one of the black men. He said he voted for Republican Sen. John McCain in 2008.

VOTERS ARE FED UP

These voters were fed up, and they let us know it. They didn't like either major party's nominee.

When Luntz asked for one-word descriptions of Clinton, participants called out responses like "deceitful," "slimy," "liar," "untrustworthy" and "corruption."

Trump was described just grumpily as "crazy," "unstable," "unbalanced," "arrogant," "a bigot," a "buffoon" and "megalomaniac."

A few said without enthusiasm that they might consider an alternative party's candidate like Libertarian Gary Johnson or the Green Party's Jill Stein, although neither was catching fire with this group.

The group was shown an array of attack ads and feel-good ads for both candidates and asked to rate each one, moment-to-moment with hand-held dials. The dial results didn't move up very much.

They liked an ad in which Clinton promised to work with Republicans. But they also liked an anti-Clinton ad that featured a retired naval officer's challenging question to Clinton about her emails and national security at NBC's recent "Commander in Chief Forum."

VOTERS WANT SOLUTIONS

"It's on the spot," one focus-group participant said of the ad. "It's not staged. There's no performance."

At one point near the end, Luntz left the room briefly to talk to us journo's in the observation room.

"We have now reached the point," he said, "when even the standard sound bites do not work."

The ad with the naval officer connected because it featured a real person earnestly asking a real question, not a professional announcer.

Judging by Luntz's group, undecided voters are turned off by the fakery, attack ads and attack sound bites. They're looking for solutions.

Trump's ads offered more diagnoses than prescriptions. Clinton offered proposals but without a unifying or inspiring theme.

For both, positive messages were welcomed more than negative ones — but were also more rare.

For both candidates, Luntz suggested, the election may well come down to who Americans would rather wake up to as their next president on the morning after Election Day.

If so, I think Clinton's best hope may be that undecided voters choose the flawed candidate they know over the flawed newcomer that they don't.

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