

# viewpoint

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# River deepening project deserves lively debate



**ron littlepage**  
times-union columnist

I'm still dumbfounded. The unelected members of the JaxPort board are committed to spending a half-billion dollars to dredge the St. Johns River shipping channel, and our elected officials are mostly twiddling their thumbs and looking the other way.

Attempts for a public debate on what could very well turn into a financial and environmental debacle for Jacksonville have fizzled because JaxPort has taken its ball and gone home.

The excuse that JaxPort uses is that the private lawyer the board hired to represent it told port officials not to talk in a public forum because of a lawsuit the St. Johns Riverkeeper organization has filed to stop the dredge.

Of course, if port officials spoke the truth, there shouldn't be any fear that something said could be used against the dredge in court if the project is really all

that JaxPort has cracked it up to be.

Besides the Riverkeeper didn't sue JaxPort; it sued the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. JaxPort asked to intervene in the suit, which conveniently gave it a curtain to hide behind just as groups concerned by the lack of transparency were ramping up calls for a public airing.

Among those were people with the credentials to challenge JaxPort's rosy economic projections for the dredge.

Not satisfied with shutting down public debate, JaxPort officials have taken to disparaging those who question their plans.

It's become more like "On the Waterfront" than good government.

Meanwhile, the City Council, which I have watched argue for hours over trivial government spending, such as for refreshments, is mostly silent on a project that will end up costing more than a billion dollars when landside improvements are figured in.

Why the zipped lips?

Some of them who have legitimate questions are fearful if they raise them,

there will be retribution from Mayor Lenny Curry, who supports the dredge.

They have other projects they are pursuing that will require Curry's support.

But other City Council members have simply guzzled the overflowing cups of Kool-Aid that JaxPort has been handing out to the JAX Chamber and other groups, such as the Civic Council.

City Councilman Tommy Hazouri has at least got a commitment from JaxPort to provide a quarterly report beginning in September that updates "the economic and environmental impacts and data that JaxPort is relying on."

That's no substitute for a tough, open debate about what the return on investment will be, what damage will be done to the St. Johns River and its tributaries, and how that damage will be mitigated.

City Council does have a forum available to demand that a debate takes place.

The council has to approve JaxPort's budget. The debate could take place in the Finance Committee or when the budget moves to the full council.

It would really be quite simple: No debate, no approval.

At least put the same energy into it as arguing over whether some city agency should buy a couple of hamburgers.

We're talking perhaps as much as \$2 billion here when all is said and done.

And to our friends in the Clay County Chamber of Commerce and the Nassau County Economic Development Board, who have written letters supporting the dredge, we appreciate your interest. It would be more relevant, however, if you wanted to help pay for this boondoggle.

But it's Jacksonville that will be on the hook when the dredge goes south.

And when the St. Johns is damaged despite assurances from the Corps that won't happen.

And when the jobs and revenues from the increased shipping that JaxPort salivates over never materialize.

Of course, our current — and silent — elected officials will be out of office then.

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## Has Trump lost control to the war faction?



**patrick buchanan**  
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In crafting the platform on which Donald Trump would run for president, America Firsters inflicted a major defeat on the War Party.

The platform committee rejected a plank to pull us deeper into Ukraine by successfully opposing new U.S. arms transfers to Kiev.

Improved relations with Russia were what candidate Trump had promised and what Americans would vote for in November.

### EDGING INTO A CONFRONTATION?

Yet this week, The Wall Street Journal reports: "The U.S. Pentagon and State Department have devised plans to supply Ukraine with antitank missiles and other weaponry and are seeking White House approval ... as Kiev battles Russia-backed separatists ... Defense Secretary Mattis has endorsed the plan."

As pro-Russia rebels in East Ukraine have armored vehicles, Kiev wants U.S. tank-killing Javelin missiles, as well as anti-aircraft weapons.

The State and Defense departments want now-President Trump to send the lethal weapons.

This is a formula for a renewed war with far higher casualties in Ukraine than the 10,000 dead already suffered on both sides.

If Trump approves this State-Defense escalation plan, we could be looking at a rerun of the Russia-Georgia war of August 2008.

The Journal reports, "The point of lethal aid is to raise the price (Russian President Vladimir) Putin pays for his imperialism until he withdraws or agrees to peace. ..."

Russia's security interests there seem clear.

What are ours?

Along with Trump's signing of the new sanctions bill imposed by Congress, which strips him of his authority to lift those sanctions without Hill approval, these developments raise larger questions.

### HAS TRUMP LOST POLICY CONTROL?

Is Trump losing control of Russia policy?

Has he capitulated to the neocons? These are not academic questions.

For consider the architect of the new arms package, Kurt Volker, the new U.S. Special Representative for Ukraine Negotiations.

A former CIA agent, member of the National Security Council and envoy to NATO, Volker believes Russian troops in Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk are all there illegally — and U.S. policy should be to push them out.

A former staffer of Republican Sen. John McCain, Volker was until July executive director of the neocon McCain Institute.

He has called for the imposition of personal sanctions on Putin and his family and European travel restrictions on the Russian president.

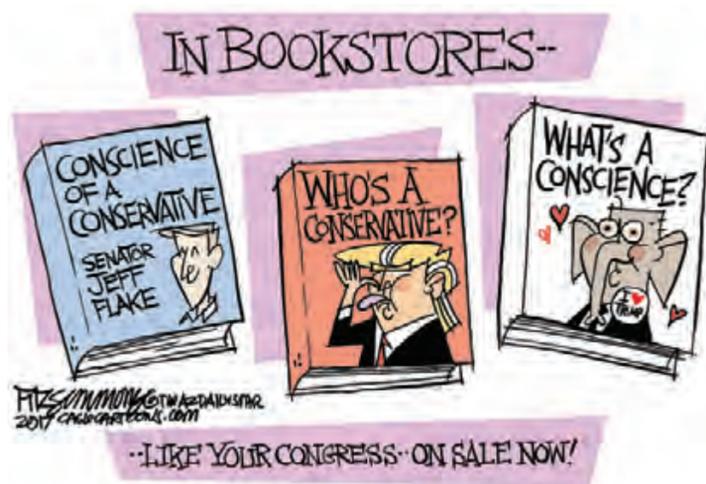
Volker believes giving antitank and anti-aircraft missiles to Ukraine will bring Putin to the negotiating table, as he fears the prospect of dead Russian soldiers coming home in caskets before his 2018 election.

Volker envisions a deepening U.S. involvement in a Ukrainian civil war that can bleed and break Russia's Ukrainian allies and convince Putin to back down and accept what we regard as a just settlement.

Does Trump believe this?

What if Putin refuses to back down and chooses to confront?

## Another view: David Fitzsimmons Arizona Daily Star



## Another view: Chip Bok Creators Syndicate



## Fulfill the promises of consolidation



**chris hand**  
downtown columnist

Aug. 8, 1967, was a watershed moment for Jacksonville.

Faced with government corruption, fiscal instability and discredited schools, Duval County citizens voted to consolidate county and city governments into a single city of Jacksonville. The vote created what is now the largest city by area in the contiguous United States and the 12th largest by population.

The best-known chronicle of consolidation is Richard Martin's book "A Quiet Revolution." It quotes former Mayor Hans Tanzler as saying that consolidated government was "the salvation" that prevented "absolute rubble and shambles."

This landmark consolidation decision was also praised as a model of good government and municipal innovation.

Consolidation has undoubtedly produced benefits. As former General Counsel Rick Mullaney described in a 2009 Metro Jacksonville column, one advantage is efficiency. "We don't have 35 Public Works Departments."

Another virtue is accountability. Our estimated 930,000 residents have a single government to hold responsible for its actions.

But many residents reasonably question whether an initiative designed to unite Jacksonville has actually produced a tale of two cities. In 2013-2014, a City Council-established task force reviewed the status of consolidated government. In their final report, the members found that the promise of consolidation has gone largely unfulfilled in certain parts of Jacksonville ([website: tinyurl.com/y9kvqhm2](http://www.tinyurl.com/y9kvqhm2)).

"As the task force investigated the needs of neighborhoods, it became clear that in many older neighborhoods that were part of the former city, promises were made to gain the residents' support for the consolidation of county and city governments. Included in these promises

were paved roads, streetlights, water and sewer lines and flood prevention.

"Today, there are miles of unpaved roads, hundreds if not thousands of homes and many businesses that do not have water lines available and a similar number using septic tanks due to a lack of sewer service. ...

"It is noteworthy that many of these neighborhoods have high minority populations and high rates of poverty. As we heard from representatives of JEA and the City, it was clear that neither took responsibility for fulfillment of these promises."

These unsatisfied promises exist despite numerous opportunities to keep them.

- In 1986, Jacksonville levied a half-cent gas tax to help pay for road construction and maintenance.

- The following year, in 1987, voters approved a \$199 million bond issue to build public schools.

- In 1993, the city launched the \$235 million River City Renaissance.

- Seven years later, in 2000, voters approved the \$2.25 billion Better Jacksonville Plan to enhance infrastructure, economic development and public facilities.

- In 2014, the City Council extended the local gas tax for 20 more years.

Some progress is being made. The city and JEA recently launched a \$30 million effort to replace failing septic tanks. The proposed city budget recommends investment in key community projects. Yet much more work remains to be done.

On Tuesday, Jacksonville should celebrate the 50th anniversary of the historic vote. But this is not an occasion to rest on consolidation's laurels.

The celebration will be incomplete without a citywide recommitment to keeping all of the promises made five decades ago.

■ Chris Hand is a Jacksonville attorney who served as chief of staff for the city of Jacksonville from 2011-2015.

■ Hand and former Florida Gov. and U.S. Sen. Bob Graham are co-authors of "America, the Owner's Manual: You Can Fight City Hall — and Win."

## Trump's reckless comments sure aren't funny



**clarence page**  
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So President Donald Trump was just joking when he suggested police officers should play basketball with the heads of suspects against the doorways of police cars?

That's what White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said she believed on Monday. The tragedy is that she's right.

One of the many things that we have learned about the nation's self-described "law and order president" is his mammoth appetite for laughter and applause. As a result, he has become the first president in recent memory to have not just one but two speeches repudiated by his host organizations in the same week.

First the Boy Scouts distanced themselves from the political and bawdy monologue he delivered to thousands of young men and boys at their national jamboree.

Three days later, police officials were doing the same to his advice on policing.

When arresting "these thugs," Trump said to law enforcement officers on Long Island, "please don't be too nice."

Hesitant laughter at that remark turned to applause as Trump continued: "Like when you guys put somebody in the car and you're protecting their head, you know, the way you put their hand over, like, don't hit their head and they've just killed somebody, don't hit their head. I said, 'You can take the hand away, OK?'"

The Suffolk County Police Department was not amused. In an official statement, the department pointed out that it "will not tolerate roughing up of prisoners" and that violations are taken "extremely seriously."

That was comforting to hear since the department has been under federal oversight by the U.S. Department of Justice since 2013 amid allegations of discrimination against Latinos and immigrants.

The International Association of Chiefs of Police, for example, issued a statement on the use of force by police, saying officers are trained to treat everyone with "dignity and respect."

In an email, Paul Butler, a former District of Columbia prosecutor and author of the new best-seller "Chokehold: Policing Black Men," called Trump's remarks an "encouragement to wanton police violence" and "one of the most irresponsible comments from a president in the last 50 years."

Still, some police unions and groups like Blue Lives Matter dismissed Trump's remarks as a joke.

As a law-abiding citizen who seeks effective law enforcement, I beg to differ. I oppose Trump's idea of a joke because it gives a simple-minded nod and a wink to the sort of roughhouse policing that alienates police from the communities they're assigned to serve.

Former Dallas Police Chief David Brown, best known for his handling of the shooting deaths of five Dallas police officers by a sniper in July 2016, learned that lesson on the job. In his new memoir "Called to Rise," he describes how he focused on "locking away villains" until he was assigned to a community policing program.

By having police officers "connect with the people they served" through homeowners organizations and other community activities, Dallas' crime rate took a historic decline between 2010 and 2015 until budget cuts led to staffing shortages.

As for Trump, he seems to prefer cracking heads.

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