

opinion

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A VERSE FOR TODAY
By your patience, possess your souls.
Luke 21: 19

A deeper harbor, a stronger Jacksonville

If Jacksonville's port is to remain competitive, it must not turn away from all the opportunities before it.

That means deepening the port, as has been done for over 100 years.

Ships are getting bigger.

With federal and state help, Jacksonville is on the way to funding a necessary port deepening plan.

The critics are widespread.

But the history of progress in this country is replete with naysayers

Like the skeptics who called the Dames Point Bridge a "bridge to nowhere."

Or the "black hats" who 50 years ago sought to retain the status quo and keep intact a corrupt city government and an underperforming county government.

The voices of the business community and those who are involved in the port need to be heeded.

They know the value of a deeper channel.

Jacksonville's port is a lifeline for this economy.

We must go forward.

This is no time to take a backward step.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS

The economic impact has been questioned by several experts, but we are more impressed by facts provided by JaxPort. We should not allow the wave of cynicism and skepticism that aims to torpedo the dredging project to diminish this reality:

Deepening the harbor, by any objective measure, will have a significant and positive impact on Jacksonville's and Florida's economies.

• According to data produced for the Florida Department of Transportation, every dollar invested in the deepening will return \$16 to \$24 to the state's economy.

JaxPort is likely to be at the high end of that ratio, given its growing stake in the Asian trade market — which has increased by 57 percent in a five-year period.

There are commitments from customers to bring in more cargo on bigger ships once JaxPort has a deeper harbor capable of handling them.

• According to the most recent estimates, JaxPort supports some 130,000 jobs in Northeast Florida — more than 24,000 directly in Jacksonville — and it's realistically estimated that 15,000-plus new jobs will be created by the dredging.

That's a conservative estimate.

And that means more than 15,000 new people who are making a living in our area — and pumping money for homes, apartments, groceries, clothing, medical care, entertainment and other areas into our economy.

• Among the local industries and facilities that directly or indirectly benefit from JaxPort include: trucking, warehousing, distribution centers, manufacturing, supply chain management, retail, rail transportation, freight forwarding, transportation service providers and vocational programs.

All of them will reap the economic advantages of a JaxPort that boasts a deeper harbor that attracts larger ships and increased volumes of cargo.

A more prosperous JaxPort will also increase the level of intangible benefits for our community — namely, by providing opportunities and hope for local residents who might otherwise lack either.

JaxPort already has a successful partnership with Operation New Hope on a Port Academy program that is training non-violent past offenders to re-enter the workforce and helping them obtain jobs with port tenants who need employees.

Meanwhile, Local 1408 of the International Longshoremen's Association — which represents some 1,200 workers employed at JaxPort — recently awarded \$48,000 in scholarships to local students.

Since 1995, the union has provided well over a half-million dollars in scholarship money to youths (many of whom are the first in their families to attend college).

Now envision the additional ripples of hope and opportunity that will result from a JaxPort that is even more active and competitive because of a deeper harbor.

PROTECT THE RIVER

However, we are uncomfortable with the minimal amount of mitigation included in the deepening project.

An earlier proposal to support opening the Rodman dam and infusing fresh water into the St. Johns River ran into a hurricane of political opposition from Putnam County.

And in all fairness, the opponents of breaching the dam had a point.

Just what impact would that have had on the river? And how would that compare to other projects to improve the St. Johns?

Would \$1 spent on breaching Rodman dam compare to \$1 spent to replace failing septic tanks that dump into tributaries?

The city needs a cost-benefit analysis for improving the St. Johns River.

This ought to be the first goal of a renewed River Accord first established by Mayor John Peyton.

Population growth alone is stressing the river; there are twice as many people in the region than 50 years ago.

Sea level rise will put more stress on the river. And the occasional toxic algae blooms are clear warning signs.

Along with a revived River Accord, the city should examine other ways to protect the river from possible damaging effects of dredging.

One possibility would be identification of a funding stream to pay for mitigation. Another possibility would be a performance bond that would be tapped only if dredging causes damage to the river.

The Florida Legislature should be pressed to consider the health of Florida's longest river as just as important to Central and Northeast Florida as the Everglades is to South Florida.

Grants could be available if a local focus were established. But if you never look for the grant money, you will never find it.

The St. Johns River is an economic driver for the region and a key to our quality of life.

We must foster and protect the river's value to our economy — and to our quality of life.

Political parties

It's time for a true centrist movement

America is not red or blue.
It is purple.

If you are reading this and consider yourself a common sense, middle of the road American who just wants their elected leaders to go to work, do their jobs without drama and actually work together to solve problems, then I urge you to check out the Centrist Project today (www.centristproject.org).

We are a nationwide organization with over 10,000 members working to get a handful of centrist independents elected to the U.S. Senate in 2018.

This strategy will finally allow the overwhelming majority of Americans who are moderates to have real power and a real voice — and finally bring both sides towards the middle to compromise and work together.

It will force the House, Senate and president to be more moderate to get bills passed that actually solve problems for Americans.

Yes, the system will still be broken at that point. But it will be a huge start toward getting it on the road to recovery.

If you are reading this and skeptical, yes, we have an uphill climb. But they say the definition of insanity is continuing to do the same thing and expecting different results.

President George Washington warned in his farewell address about the dangers of political parties. And after 220 years of them dividing our country, we have more independents or No Party Affiliations registering every day.

The Democrats and Republicans have had their chance. Their need to gerrymander to create safe legislative districts across this country and right here in Florida is a sign of weakness, not strength. Their days are numbered.

The only question is how long it will take us as a people to free ourselves from these two parties and simply vote for the best person, not the party.

The 21st century will be an independent century. So what would you like to tell your grandchildren many years from now?

Would you like to tell them that you were a part of continuing the same old, divisive system?

Or would you like to tell them that you got in on the ground floor of starting a new movement that changed the country permanently for the better?

Perry Waag, funding member,
The Centrist Project,
Julington Creek

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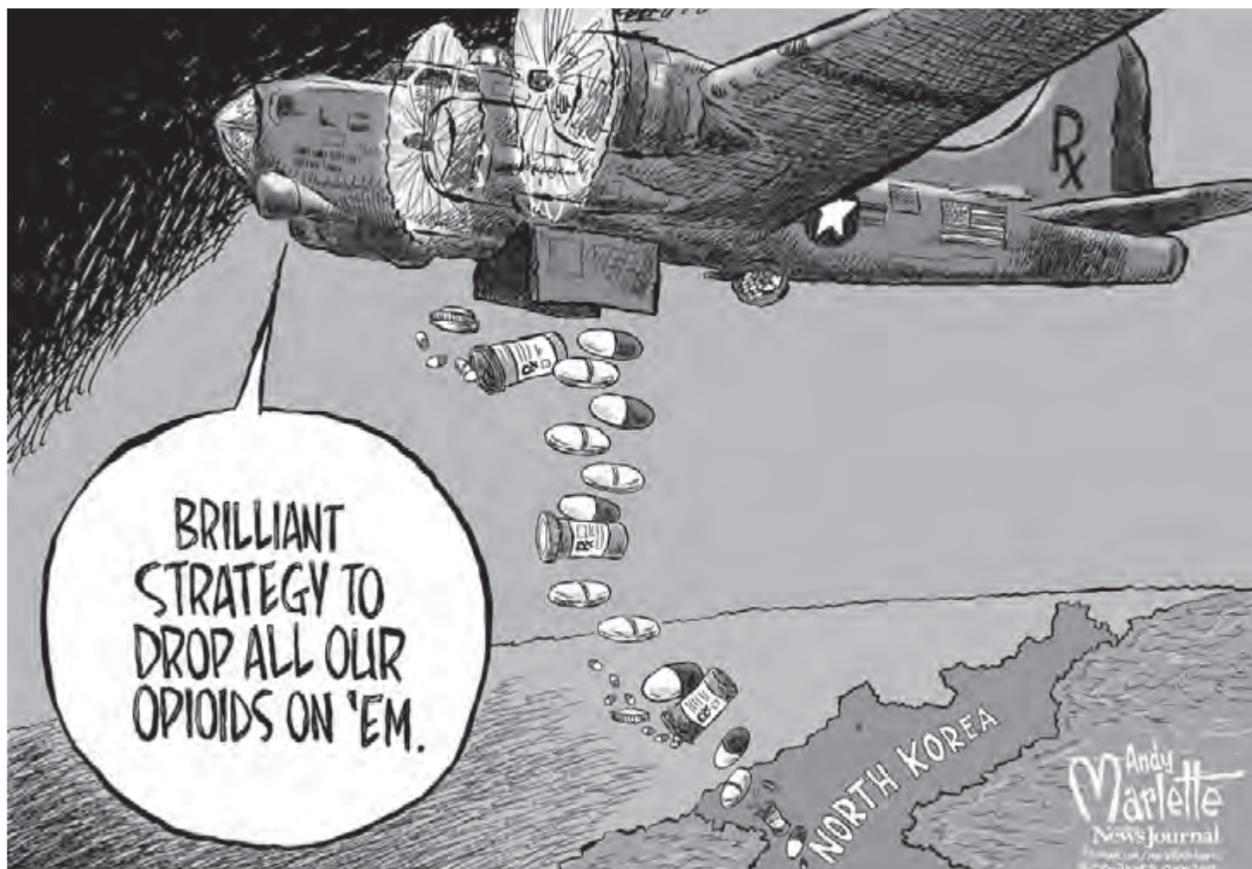
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Another view: Andy Marlette Creators Syndicate



Letters from Readers

HEADLINE ON TRUMP

WHY SO NEGATIVE?

When I opened Friday's Times-Union, I was taken aback by the headline "Trump escalates North Korea rhetoric."

Once again the Times-Union followed the lead of The Associated Press like a little lost puppy dog.

A more appropriate headline would have been "North Korea escalates rhetoric toward America" or "Trump responds in defense of America."

Can President Donald Trump do anything that liberals will agree with and back him up on?

Every time the left criticizes our president, it just emboldens our enemies. It makes his job much harder — and our country less safe. But maybe this is what the liberal left wants.

Unbelievable!
Ed Laing, Jacksonville

TRUMP AND NAFTA

KEEPING HIS PROMISE?

Our community knows all too well that the North American Free Trade Agreement is in need of a serious overhaul. Although President Donald Trump has called it "the single worst trade deal in this country," he has since said he only wants to tweak it.

The lopsided trade arrangement benefits multinational corporations and CEOs but provides few job protections for the rest of us.

And Trump's vague list of objectives for reworking NAFTA doesn't make clear whether the new deal will include policies that improve the lives of working people.

NAFTA eliminated corporations to lower wages and enabled 700,000 North American jobs.

The treaty made it far too easy for businesses to profit at the expense of others, thanks to the absence of enforceable labor

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standards. All the while, greedy CEOs fattened their bottom lines.

The new NAFTA must hold companies accountable and help put an end to the exploitation of people working in Canada, Mexico and the United States.

NAFTA negotiations kick off this month. Our elected officials must create an agreement that boosts everyone's ability to build a strong foundation to provide for their families.

Jackie Mims, Ponte Vedra Beach

SUSTAINABILITY

FLORIDA CAN DO MUCH MORE

I watched the documentary on WJCT about Colorado University at Boulder regarding solar panels, sustainability and recycling.

I didn't see one plastic water bottle being used. They have machines where the students fill their water bottles.

All this from reclaimed water. I cannot do this film justice. They bike and do not send garbage to landfill.

We are so behind here. We are the Sunshine State, but do we have much solar in use?

I only wish our leaders were more into solar and all in this documentary.

We could do all this, and the money they talked about saving.

I have a friend with a complete solar

home, and they sell energy back to the energy company.

Why don't we do better?
Someone needs to lead here.

P.J. McCrary, Jacksonville

TRUMP'S STATEMENTS

HE'S NOT HELPING

President Donald Trump should shut his mouth when talking about North Korea. If he wants to bomb someone, why not Syria?

But then he'd get Russia on his bad side.

The Iraq wars were stupid, but at least they were on foreign soil. If Trump keeps blabbing, it will be on our soil.

Deborah Cernal, Orange Park

DRAINING THE SWAMP

IT'S UP TO US

During the campaign President Donald Trump talked about draining the swamp, and he is doing what he can, but it is up to the people to really do it.

While the approval rating of Congress is only 15 percent, the re-election rate is above 91 percent.

That indicates that most people are not paying attention to what their representatives really stand for and what they really do.

Most of our politicians, both Democrat and Republican, consider themselves members of the untouchable ruling class who are addicted to the power and prestige of public office, whether it's local, state or national.

They have forgotten that they are supposed to be servants of the people. They can spout all sorts of rhetoric, but behavior never lies. What they believe is demonstrated by what they do.

If we are going to drain the swamp, it is going to have to be done by the people. And if it doesn't happen, we have no one to blame but ourselves.

Charles Bickerstaff, Orange Park