

viewpoint

OPINIONS PAGE BLOG

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Orlando agitator is back to oppose the city's HRO



ron littlepage
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Oh, joy. Roger Gannam of the Take Away Liberties Counsel is back in town. If he is so concerned that laws banning discrimination against the LGBT community will cause the downfall of mankind, why isn't he fighting such an ordinance in his hometown of Orlando? But, no, he has to keep coming to Jacksonville, stirring up hate while professing to love the sinner just as he did earlier this year when he helped lead the unsuccessful charge to stop the Jacksonville City Council from passing an expanded Human Rights Ordinance. This time he's with a group that announced last week that it will try to put initiatives on the August 2018 ballot that would give voters an opportunity to eventually override the City Council action.

"A sword is hanging over the head" of the people of Jacksonville because of the HRO, Gannam declared during a news conference announcing the petition drive.

I don't see a sword, but I do see a gathering cloud of bigotry forming over the city, one that will put a negative national spotlight on the city.

We've been here and done this before.

Not surprisingly, the news conference announcing this misguided move was held at First Baptist Church.

That Downtown monolith sent busloads of people to public forums on the HRO expansion to argue against it by predicting a parade of horrors that would happen if it passed, most often involving an obsession with bathrooms these people seem to have.

And when an earlier attempt to pass similar legislation failed, First Baptist invited council members who voted against it to a Sunday service where they were hailed as heroes and applauded.

By the way, since the HRO was expanded in February, none of those predicted horrors have happened.

Critics have long argued that First Baptist has stymied progress Downtown. That's probably an exaggeration as many factors are to blame.

But if this group is successful, you can kiss goodbye the rebirth of Downtown that's happening now.

There will be no need for a new convention center because groups won't come here just as they turned their backs on North Carolina.

Those national sporting events we are trying to lure to our shiny new facilities, such as the NFL draft, will head elsewhere as well.

And young people, the key demographic we are trying to attract to help fill Downtown housing and to enliven an improving cultural and entertainment scene, will say, see you later, until the city reflects the diverse world we live in.

There are several ways to deal with this

latest attempt to discriminate in Jacksonville.

First, don't sign the group's petitions to put their initiatives on the ballot.

Second, treat them as the splinter group they are, one that doesn't represent the beliefs of the majority in this city, including other churchgoers.

Third, encourage people to register to vote.

And finally get off your duffs and vote.

This only passes if there is a small turnout, which is why this group is aiming for the August ballot instead of the November general election.

The 2018 elections are going to be pivotal for a number of reasons, many of them involving Washington.

If this gets on the ballot, add another to that list. Register to vote, then vote and if you get the chance, encourage Roger Gannam to tend to his own house and stay out of ours.

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America's history no longer unites our citizens



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Decades ago, a debate over what kind of nation America is roiled the conservative movement.

President George W. Bush bought into the neocon mandate to "go forth and teach all nations." Result: A series of foreign policy disasters beginning with Afghanistan and Iraq.

Behind the Trump slogan "America First" lay a conviction that it was time for America to come home. The insight attributed to Alexis de Tocqueville — "America is great because she is good, and if America ceases to be good, she will cease to be great" — was a belief shared by almost all.

What makes our future appear problematic is that what once united us now divides us. While Presidents Woodrow Wilson and Harry Truman declared us to be a "Christian nation," Christianity has been purged from our public life and sheds believers every decade. Atheism and agnosticism are growing rapidly, especially among the young.

Traditional morality, grounded in Christianity, is being discarded. Half of all marriages end in divorce. Four-in-10 children are born out of wedlock. Unrestricted abortion and same-sex marriage — once regarded as marks of decadence and decline — are now seen as human rights.

Where we used to have three national networks, we have three 24-hour cable news channels and a thousand websites that reinforce our clashing beliefs on morality, culture, politics and race.

Consider a few events post-Charlottesville. "Murderer" was painted on the San Fernando statue of Father Junipero Serra, the Franciscan who founded the missions that became San Diego, San Francisco, San Juan Capistrano and Santa Clara.

America's oldest monument honoring Columbus, in Baltimore, was vandalized. Sen. Tim Kaine of Virginia called for Robert E. Lee's statue to be removed from the Capitol and replaced by Pocahontas. Why did Kaine not call for John Smith himself, leader of the Jamestown Colony that fought off Indian attacks, to be honored?

In New Orleans, "Tear It Down" was spray-painted on a statue of Joan of Arc, a gift from France in 1972.

Taken together, we are seeing the discoverers, explorers and missionaries of North America demonized as genocidal racists. The Founding Fathers are either slave owners or sanctioners of slavery.

Our nation-builders either collaborated in or condoned the ethnic cleansing of Native Americans.

Bottom line for the left: Americans should be sickened and ashamed of the history that made us the world's greatest nation. And we should acknowledge our ancestors' guilt by tearing down any and all monuments and statues that memorialize them.

To another slice of America, much of the celebrated social and moral "progress" of recent decades induces a sense of nausea, summarized in the lament, "This isn't the country we grew up in."

So what makes us one nation and one people? What do we offer mankind, as nations seem to recoil from what we are becoming, and are instead eager to build their futures on the basis of ethnonationalism and fundamentalist faith?

If advanced democracy has produced the disintegration of a nation that we see around us, what is the compelling case for it?

A sixth of the way through the 21st century, what is there to make us believe this will be the Second American Century?

Russians Tango



Stanislav Fursov and Ekaterina Simonova, from Russia, compete in the stage category at the World Tango Championship final in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Wednesday. (AP Photo/Natacha Pisarenko)

Pope and the people



Pope Francis holds a baby during an audience he held for participants at the 68th national Liturgical Week at the Vatican on Thursday. (AP Photo/Domenico Stinellis).

City should sue makers of opioids

point of view

bill gulliford

I believe there are pharmaceutical companies that produced prescription opioids that are culpable in the opioid crisis we are witnessing.

Since civil action is the only option, I am all in on that effort. I will continue to urge the mayor and my colleagues to support that direction.

The pharmaceutical companies are responsible for this crisis along with doctors.

Even our society has put pressure on doctors to make treatment "pain free."

Some of the responses in a recent query on the editorial page as to whether to sue or not seemed to ignore key facts.

For instance, someone wrote, "Should the city sue vehicle manufacturers or gun makers or food producers since food causes obesity?"

Furthermore, gun manufacturers don't advertise their guns won't kill you.

In fact, vehicle manufacturers have been sued on many occasions for faulty products. Consider the legal action against Volkswagen for falsifying emissions.

On the other hand, pharmaceutical companies advertised that their prescription opioids were not addictive in order to promote the sales of their products. That fact is well documented and as a consequence, doctors were grossly misled. Why would they do that? Just look at the billions of dollars of ill-received profits they realized from the sales of prescription opioids. The numbers and their financial gain are staggering! It is also documented that better than 70% of addictions start with opioid prescriptions.

Another person wrote, "Shall we sue the companies that make alcohol and cigarettes as well?" There has been substantial and significant legal action and recovery against tobacco companies in the past. Additionally, some of that money has been used to fight tobacco use, which is a good thing.

I believe the pharmaceutical companies that had a large hand in creating this crisis should bear some of the financial burden of trying to help us fix it. That is my primary reason for wanting to sue them.

And to that end, it could help fund the overwhelming expense our government and others are going to witness in trying to correct this horrible scourge. Our six-month pilot program to address the opioid overdose problem is costing \$1.4 million.

If successful, what do you think the cost will be to implement it in every emergency room in Jacksonville and provide the recovery resources needed to meaningfully address this pandemic?

We also are seeing significantly increasing costs for our first responders. I worry about them burning out with the heavy, additional burden placed on them.

Readers wrote about personal responsibility of the addicted individuals. Many trusted their medical professionals and the prescribed opioids they were administering.

Over 70 percent of opioid addictions start with legal prescriptions.

This addiction is not like any other; it steals body and soul. Many intelligent and hard-working people have been overcome by it, bringing tragedy and death to innocent people and their families.

This tragedy continues to unfold due to advance distorted profits for greedy drug companies and unscrupulous doctors.

We are on a track that will increase overdose deaths in Jacksonville by 51 percent in 2017, or about 700 overdose deaths. In addition, families continue to be ripped apart, and innocent babies are being born addicted.

I will continue to address this crisis, including my desire to sue all responsible parties. Those citizens who are deceased due to opioid overdoses, addicted infants and those still addicted as well as their families deserve nothing less.

William Gulliford is a City Council member.

Dick Gregory used humor for civil rights



dick gregory
tribune media services

Dick Gregory died recently at the age of 84 after leading a bunch of lives. He was at various times a stand-up comedian, social critic, political activist, political candidate, nutrition regimen entrepreneur, diet consultant and, increasingly in his later years, obsessive purveyor of bizarre conspiracy theories.

But my favorite memories of Gregory come from 1961 when I was a Midwestern kid watching his fame rise on TV like a Jackie Robinson of black standup comedians.

Robinson broke Major League Baseball's color bar. Gregory broke the nightclub color bar, and did it with controversial political subjects long before Larry Wilmore, Trevor Noah, Wanda Sykes or W. Kamau Bell.

Until Hugh Hefner hired Gregory to fill in at the Chicago Playboy Club, blacks tended to be hired in white-owned clubs as singers or dancers, not to stand and talk. Otherwise, Gregory explained to me in an interview in the 1980s, "the system would know how brilliant you are."

Understanding "the system" helped him to beat it.

He learned, above all, to be entertaining before trying to make a serious point. He explains how he studied audiences in his best-selling 1964 autobiography.

In the "big white night clubs," he decided, "I've got to go up there as an individual first, a Negro second," he continued. "I've got to be a colored funny man, not a funny colored man."

He also prepared himself for hecklers. He enlisted his wife to call him by the N-word over dinner, so he could prepare funny comebacks without losing his cool.

Fortunately, he prepared himself well because, as luck would have it, his big break came on a January night in 1961 at the Playboy Club before an audience of "frozen food executives from the South." He might have backed out, he recalled, had he not been broke.

Instead, he followed his plan. He led by making fun of himself: "Just my luck. I bought a suit with two pair of pants today — and burnt a hole in the jacket!"

Then he broadened out to the elephant in the room: "Wouldn't it be a hell of a thing if all this (gesturing at his face) was burnt cork and you people were being tolerant for nothing?"

Heckling quickly gave way to laughter, applause, encores and a regular gig at the Playboy Clubs, which led to a Time magazine profile, "The Tonight Show" and a heroic sort of national stardom. He was the black comedian who could have white audiences laugh at the absurdities of racism.

But show biz was not enough. In 1964 he joined the civil rights movement. He traded nightclubs for college campuses. He became a healthy food apostle and a political activist.

In recent decades, Gregory's obsessions with conspiracy theories made him something of a joke, even among his friends. Yet here, too, he had a following among fellow conspiracists.

Yet I could not fault Gregory for believing in conspiracies. According to papers obtained by a Chicago Tribune reporter in 1978 under the Freedom of Information Act, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover had ordered the bureau's Chicago office to secretly "neutralize" the comedian-activist in 1968, perhaps by informing Mafia bosses about some impolite remarks Gregory had made about them.

Even paranoids have enemies.

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