

OPINION

The Times-Union

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OUR VIEW

JEA's future deserves full study

By Times-Union Editorial Board

Two phrases come to mind when it comes to the discussion of selling JEA. Get over it. Get on with it.

We need to get over personal and political battles. We need to get on with the serious discussion of the future of JEA.

We need to get over the political pressures of JEA employees packing City Council chambers and look to the future of the city as a whole.

Council Member Jim Love is one of the more thoughtful members of the chamber, but he has jumped the gun with a promise to introduce a measure that would express the council's desire not to sell JEA. Council President Anna Lopez Brosche ought to be opposing that suggestion rather than implying support. We need leadership now and not kneejerk reactions.

City Councilman Matt Schellenberg, who has long supported a look into selling JEA, says we should at least find out how much it is worth. If the price is not high enough, then don't sell it.

But he also turns around the question: Would we be buying JEA today? And will JEA's annual contribution to the city be as reliable in the future as it has been in the past?

We need to hold off on making a decision on selling JEA before all of the information has been compiled.

Frankly nobody has all the facts. It would be premature to support a sale and just as premature to oppose one.

It was a good move by City Council to expand the special committee studying the issue to all 19 members. It's an issue that deserves all the members' attention.

It also was a good move to scrap the proposal to take oaths and issue subpoenas. It was an insult to respected city officials and was slowing down the process.

It is important that the issue be thoroughly studied.

In Florida, there are several recent options. The city of Vero Beach is selling its municipal utility to Florida Power & Light. The city of Winter Park has bought back its utility from Florida Progress. And TECO, the parent company of Tampa Electric, was sold to a Canadian energy company.

One possibility mentioned by pfm, the consultant hired by JEA, is to hire a private management firm to run the utility.

This was done by the Long Island Power Authority.

"Under this option, JEA would continue to exist as a legal entity with a skeleton staff primarily responsible for contract management, financial reporting and long-term strategic decision-making," pfm wrote. "All utility operations are contracted to a third party that is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the utility."

Another option is to sell generation assets only while JEA would retain transmission, distribution, customer service and the water and sewer system. An example is North Carolina Eastern Municipal Power Agency.

Or a portion of the utility's business could be outsourced, such as new business.

Maybe JEA should get into the natural gas business like TECO, Tampa Electric.

Which one is right for Jacksonville? We need to consider all of the options. Even if the city keeps JEA, the future is likely to be one of rapid change.

It's possible — probably likely — that some third option exists that has not even been fully explored. That's what the process is all about and why the Jessie Ball duPont Fund, in its civic wisdom, offered to fund an independent consultant to help give City Council expert advice.

JEA has been far too slow in enacting strategies to compensate for a loss of revenue.

This would require management with a much more entrepreneurial attitude, which is far from the historically conservative style of the utility industry.

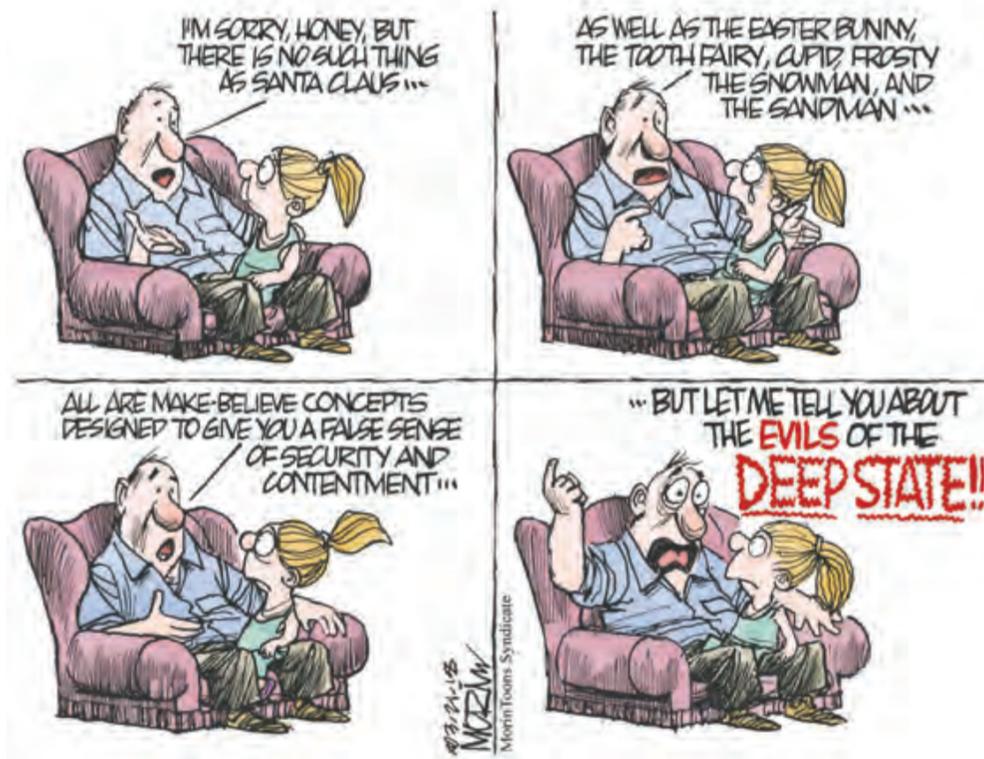
And is government best suited for an entrepreneurial management style? Common sense says no.

We need to get over the history of JEA and realize that in an era of great economic disruption, the past is not guaranteed.

Whether that means selling the utility or some less dramatic option remains to be seen. Nevertheless, it is far too early to be jumping to conclusions.

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ANOTHER VIEW



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

By Times-Union readers

An even-handed theory

on why local drivers

don't use signals

A letter writer questioned why so many drivers in Jacksonville do not use turn signals. I may have hit on the reason: It normally takes two hands and steady vision to drive safely.

With that said, most drivers in Jacksonville are reduced to single-handed driving since they are steering with one hand and holding their phones or other electronic devices with the other.

Being the safe drivers they profess to be, I can understand why they do not take their driving hand off the wheel to activate the turn signal.

It wouldn't be safe, and they couldn't possibly let go of their electronic devices while they're driving.

Some say that driverless vehicles will be the norm in the future.

But we already have them here in Jacksonville. In fact, we have way too many of them.

Roger Sallas, Jacksonville

Creating daytime site for homeless is no solution

A recent letter writer suggested we create "a space for the Downtown homeless to use during the daytime."

At first, I thought it was meant to be a joke.

I would contend that the vast majority of the Downtown "homeless" are alcoholics or drug addicts on the street by their own choice. The public should do nothing to make them more comfortable or acceptable.

Feel-good actions are rarely solutions. What would probably be best for them and us is returning to the mental hospitals of the 1930s and 1940s; during that era, people were permanently housed until deemed safe to be back in society. I realize this is unlikely to happen, but continuing to rely on good intentions leaves us with the status quo.

I do not want my kids, friends or myself harassed, robbed or hurt by these dangerous, self-absorbed people. If you doubt what I am saying, try walking around Downtown Jacksonville or the Beaches at night.

There are good people who are legitimately temporarily

homeless through unfortunate circumstances. They are trying to get back on their feet, and I have no problem with helping them. But building a better park does not help, house or feed them.

Lewis Story, Jacksonville

Ingraham is rightly paying the price for her insensitivity

So Laura Ingraham of ultra right-wing Fox News finally met her match: a teenaged Parkland school shooting survivor whom Ingraham had the nerve to mock and accuse of whining.

Now Ingraham has temporarily left Fox after more than a dozen companies pulled their ads from her TV show.

It is ironic that Ingraham would persistently show up as a guest on former Fox personality Bill O'Reilly's nightly program. She now appears to be headed down the same road of disgrace that O'Reilly finds himself on.

Carl J. C-Hafner, Jacksonville

Trump is uncovering the corruption hidden for too long

I pride myself on being open-minded and fair. But after seeing the reaction of former FBI Deputy Director Andrew McCabe and others after McCabe's recent firing by President Donald Trump, it is hard not to consider it a miracle that Trump was even elected.

After seeing how former President Barack Obama allowed top Internal Revenue Service official Lois Lerner to go unpunished after her shameful testimony before Congress — and now discovering the corruption in the FBI, Justice Department and State Department that developed during Obama's presidency — how can you not be thankful that Hillary Clinton didn't become president?

All of this hidden, behind-the-scenes corruption would never have been exposed had Clinton won.

It will take years to overcome the damage that Obama's two terms has done to our country.

I am definitely not happy with all aspects of Trump's presidency.

However, I am proud that we are now correcting some of the terrible manipulations that took place during Obama's presidency, but were never addressed.

John Carson, Jacksonville Beach

It's no surprise Trump has such dubious people for friends

It should not be a surprise that President Donald Trump would host Don King, a man who served prison time for stomping to death someone who owed him \$600 — and who reportedly stole millions over decades from the boxers he represented.

Trump locked the doors of his failing casinos and other projects that went south.

He left contractors, subcontractors and employees holding the bag while he fled under the darkness of night.

As the saying goes, if you roll around with the pigs, you are probably going to end up smelling bad.

Rick Mansfield, Ponte Vedra

Scott's rhetoric on supporting schools does not jibe with his sorry record

Gov. Rick Scott likes to brag about his support of Florida's schools.

But his record tells the real story.

Scott was elected governor in 2010 as the economy was starting to improve. One of his targets was the education budget, which took a cut of \$1.3 billion.

Many innovative educational programs, including protections for the disabled and impoverished students, were decimated. Tax dollars were diverted from public schools to private for-profit schools that are not held to the same standards and lack accountability.

Now as the November elections draw near and Scott seeks a Senate seat, he apparently wants to reshape his image. Yet Scott and the Florida Legislature worked together to pass a law that only increases operational funding for the state's public schools by 47 cents per student.

Public schools are critical to Florida's future. Providing high-quality public education represents sound economic policy for our state: It provides students future opportunities and employers a means to entice businesses to Florida.

That's why funding for education must be competitive with other jobs to attract the brightest and best teachers. Yet Florida currently ranks 47th in the nation for teacher salaries and resources are not being adequately provided for public schools.

Scott and the lawmakers responsible for the paltry increase in public-school funding all deserve to hear a resounding "No" from voters in November.

Karen Adler, Jacksonville

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A VERSE FOR TODAY

... "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

LETTERS POLICY

Letters of about 200 words are preferred. All letters are edited for space, clarity and newspaper style. Include a name, address, phone number and occupation. **Email:** letters@jacksonville.com. **Mail:** Letters from Readers, The Florida Times-Union, P.O. Box 1949, Jacksonville, FL 32231.