

OPINION

The Times-Union

Mark Nusbaum President
Mary Kelli Palka Editor
Frank M. Denton Editor at Large
Michael P. Clark Editorial Page Editor

Editorial board: Nusbaum, Denton, Clark, Bobby Martin, Roger Brown, Paula Horvath, and citizen editorial members.

OUR VIEW

Overreaction is not wise on JEA sale

By Times-Union Editorial Board

Don't bother them with evidence. That seemed to be the motto of a few City Council members regarding the potential sale of JEA.

There are legitimate concerns with any sale of this magnitude — \$3 billion to \$6.4 billion — and it requires diligent analysis, not instant rejection.

So here are a few of the objections and our responses following the unveiling of a consultant's report regarding the sale of JEA.

Loss of jobs

City Council chambers were packed with JEA employees, friends and family on Wednesday. They carried signs: "JEA Not for Sale" and "JEA is Ours."

Concern about jobs is understandable. We get it. Any sale of JEA should be contingent on current employees keeping their jobs. Let's make it clear: It's not negotiable.

There are other strings that could be attached to a sale.

For instance, a share of the proceeds could go to bringing water and sewer services to Northwest Jacksonville and to placing power lines underground.

These are longtime needs for Jacksonville that just never have been filled with the current JEA setup. The status quo hasn't worked in these areas. A sale could bring major improvements.

It's the principle

Council member Danny Becton led a philosophical discussion on the timing of such an issue. In his mind, this is like selling your house. Even if someone offers you twice what it's worth, maybe you don't want to sell.

That's fine for an individual homeowner, but JEA affects an entire city. What if selling JEA immediately improves the quality of life here?

As a homeowner, wouldn't you want the chance to at least turn down an offer? Becton might not care, but his neighbor might feel differently.

As a representative of the city, he should take a much broader view.

Loss of local control

There were times in recent history when local control didn't work so well for JEA because of political meddling.

The utility, pressured to keep rates low, has been stuck with one source of fuel. This led to sky-high electric rates with imported foreign oil. Later, the utility turned to debt rather than raise rates.

Local control can turn into political pressure that results in a poorly managed operation. JEA is supposed to be independent but there have been times when that hasn't been the case.

Loss of confidence

Some readers fear that city officials can't be trusted to wisely spend a big pot of money. They like to quote the cost of the Duval County courthouse, which grew from \$190 million to \$350 million. They conveniently overlook all the successes of the Better Jacksonville Plan, such as new libraries, the arena, the baseball park and miles of paved roads.

The smart approach would be to clearly identify funds to be used and place them in a lockbox that can't be touched by future City Councils.

Doing nothing based on cynicism is no way to run a government.

Politics

Several local Democratic Party leaders were present to lead the opposition fight. Curry publicly has not taken a position on the sale, but if this works out like his successful pension sales tax campaign, it could propel him to other political offices.

While politics is always going to play a role in major city issues, it should not be the leading factor. The city's quality of life should be a win-win for everybody.

How a few people can disregard a \$3 billion to \$6.4 billion payment to the city is mind-boggling.

This requires a thorough vetting along with a sense of urgency for a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

ANOTHER VIEW



LETTERS FROM READERS

Let's stop this senseless cycle

It's happened again.

Innocent people, most of them children, are shot dead in a place where they should have been safe.

All of those children who will never know the joy of finding their soul mates, holding their own children in their arms, watching them grow and becoming grandparents.

They were cheated out of their lives.

Their families and friends will never recover from the horror that took them away.

So who is responsible for this terrible tragedy?

Is it the mentally disturbed person pulling the trigger over and over?

Or is it our lawmakers in Washington who have done nothing to curtail this senseless violence?

The most guilty of all are the politicians in Washington who refuse to ban assault weapons because their pockets are being padded by money from the National Rifle Association.

They have put their political careers and their seats of power over the lives of every American, including the lives of our children.

The blood that was spilled recently in that high school in Florida is on their hands — as is the blood from the many mass shootings that previously took place.

Once again we will hear the cry that authorities are "trying to take away our constitutional right to bear arms."

That is not true, and everyone knows it.

I have a gun, and most of my family members have guns for protection.

Assault weapons, however, are not ordinary weapons.

Their only purpose is to kill a lot of people quickly.

Contact your elected officials and demand that they put the safety of our children and loved ones before the powerful National Rifle Association and ban the deadly assault weapons.

Candy McCullough, Jacksonville

Republicans care about helping other people

Republicans are often accused of not caring for disadvantaged members of society.

A recent letter writer only perpetuated that belief

when he stated that the job of government is not to be a charitable organization that hands out goodies to citizens.

As a Republican, I can understand that view — but the answer is not to ignore the people who need assistance.

The answer is to help those people by giving to them directly or through charitable organizations that are much better equipped to help them.

When people help other people in their neighborhood or community, they build relationships and make connections.

While Republicans may differ on the methods of helping others, they do believe in helping others.

Each one of us should be personally involved in helping those who need help.

Margaret Davis, Jacksonville

Why all the fawning over North Korea?

During the Winter Olympics in South Korea, some media outlets have been fawning over Kim Yo-Jong, the sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un.

What's up with that?

Wasn't their half-brother assassinated just last year?

I doubt that a reunification with North Korea would go well for South Korea.

John C. White, Orange Park

It's time for a bold approach Downtown

I've been in Jacksonville for over 30 years, and the one constant when it comes to Downtown is nothing has changed.

Same skyline.

Same closed storefronts.

Same homeless people.

Same mentality of "roll up the sidewalks" once it's 6 p.m.

And same lip service about doing something to change things.

It's sad, but the reality is it's never going to change.

I love Jacksonville, and I wish we had a vibrant, thriving Downtown.

But that's not who we are. Instead of trying to become more urban, we need to make Downtown more suburban.

Let's not have high-rise offices.

Let's focus on having high-rise homes and condos.

Let's not have dense blocks of buildings.

Let's have open spaces and

parks.

Let's not have a handful of decent restaurants.

Let's have dozens of great places to eat.

This might just be a pipe dream, but it's no worse than the track to nowhere that we're on now.

Ed Robertson, Jacksonville

Letter writers are ignoring realities

I would like to comment on some recent letters from readers.

One writer criticized President Donald Trump's plan for a military parade, but it really seemed to be nothing more than a criticism of Trump.

Since about half of the country seems not to agree with or like Trump, why didn't the letter writer just come out and say so?

That would be easier to understand than the letter writer's approach of citing family's connections to the military as a reason to blast Trump's idea as being a waste of money.

Another writer objected to the term "illegal alien" and claimed that we don't have open borders.

Really?

"Illegal alien" is a reasonable and accurate term — and suggesting that we don't have open borders is like arguing that the sky is purple.

Finally, another letter writer lamented that no Jacksonville entrepreneur will spend money on a grand attraction to revitalize our Downtown.

I believe that already has been tried, and it has generally failed.

It seems that only the Jaguars are able to pull that off — and that's only with massive subsidies from the taxpayers.

If the writer wants a big attraction Downtown, then do the work, raise the money and do it.

Tony Veiga, Ponte Veda Beach

Stop dismissing the power of prayer

What a great idea!

In Ohio, a T-shirt has been created by people who are being deprived of their right to pray before school events.

The simple message on the T-shirt: "Prayers Matter."

What a reminder that our country was founded on freedom of religion — not freedom from religion.

Amen!

Cyndy Roberts, Jacksonville

A VERSE FOR TODAY

"Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth."
John 17:17

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.