

## ANOTHER VIEW

# Trump: No proven collusion with Russia



Marc Thiessen

The recent indictment issued by special counsel Robert Mueller shows a conspiracy of stunning sophistication by Kremlin-connected Russians, posing as American citizens or using stolen U.S. identities, to influence the 2016 presidential election.

What it does not show is any evidence of collusion between the Trump campaign and Russia.

Quite the opposite, the indictment shows evidence of a lack of collusion.

"Some defendants, posing as U.S. persons and without revealing their Russian association, communicated with unwitting individuals associated with the Trump campaign ... to coordinate political activities," the indictment reads.

If these Russians were colluding with the Trump campaign, there would be no reason to hide their true identities from multiple campaign officials.

Moreover, the indictment states that the Russian effort began in 2014, a year before Donald Trump declared his intention to run for president. No one took Trump seriously as a candidate when he declared in 2015.

The idea that the Russians saw what all of us didn't — that Trump had a serious shot at winning the White House — and figured this out

way back in 2014, before Trump even declared his candidacy, is absurd.

The Russians did develop a preference for Trump, but their effort was much bigger than Trump, according to the indictment.

"The Russians' stated goal was to 'spread distrust toward the candidates and the political system in general.'"

This is a grave threat. Republicans and Democrats should be working together in bipartisan way to confront it. So why is this not happening? Because Democrats have politicized the issue, weaponizing the Russia inquiry in an effort to delegitimize Trump's victory over Hillary Clinton with these unfounded collusion charges.

In fact, the only evidence so far of any cooperation between a hired operative of a 2016 campaign and Russian officials is when the Clinton campaign and the Democratic National Committee paid Christopher Steele to collect dirt on Trump from Russian officials.

If Trump had paid a former spy to collect dirt on Clinton from Russian officials, Democrats would be shouting that they had the "smoking gun."

Russia's effort was sophisticated and complex, and presents an ongoing threat not just to America but to our allies as well.

For three years, President Barack Obama did virtually nothing in response to this attack on America. It's way past time to address this threat, and we need to do it in a bipartisan manner. But for that to happen, Democrats need to stop politicizing the Russia investigation.

## ANOTHER VIEW

# Parkland students take the adult role



Leonard Pitts

You need to grow up.

As far as I know, no survivor of last week's mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High in Parkland has used those words to challenge conservatives who have created a world where mass shootings are almost an everyday thing. But the sentiment is there.

Consider Cameron Kasky, a 17-year-old junior, who told CNN, "My message for the people in office is: You're either with us or against us. We are losing our lives while the adults are playing around."

Students have called a rally — "The March For Our Lives" — for March 24 on the National Mall.

I can't tell you how proud I am of these young people.

When the shooting happened, I begged my editor not to ask me to write about it because I could think of nothing to say I haven't already said a dozen times. My tank on this topic was empty.

Yes, what happened was terrible. It was also terribly old.

But let me tell you one of the best things about kids: it's never old to them. When you reach a certain age, you have a longer personal context through which to

view the crimes, sins and absurdities of humankind. When you haven't graduated high school yet, you essentially have only now.

Context is a good thing. It can provide valuable perspective. But it can also make you jaded and weary, convince you that crying out is futile because nothing's going to change.

But if you have only now, if crimes, sins and absurdities are visceral and new to you, you confront them with a fervor, energy and anger often inaccessible to your elders. You don't yet realize that change is impossible. And so, sometimes, you create change.

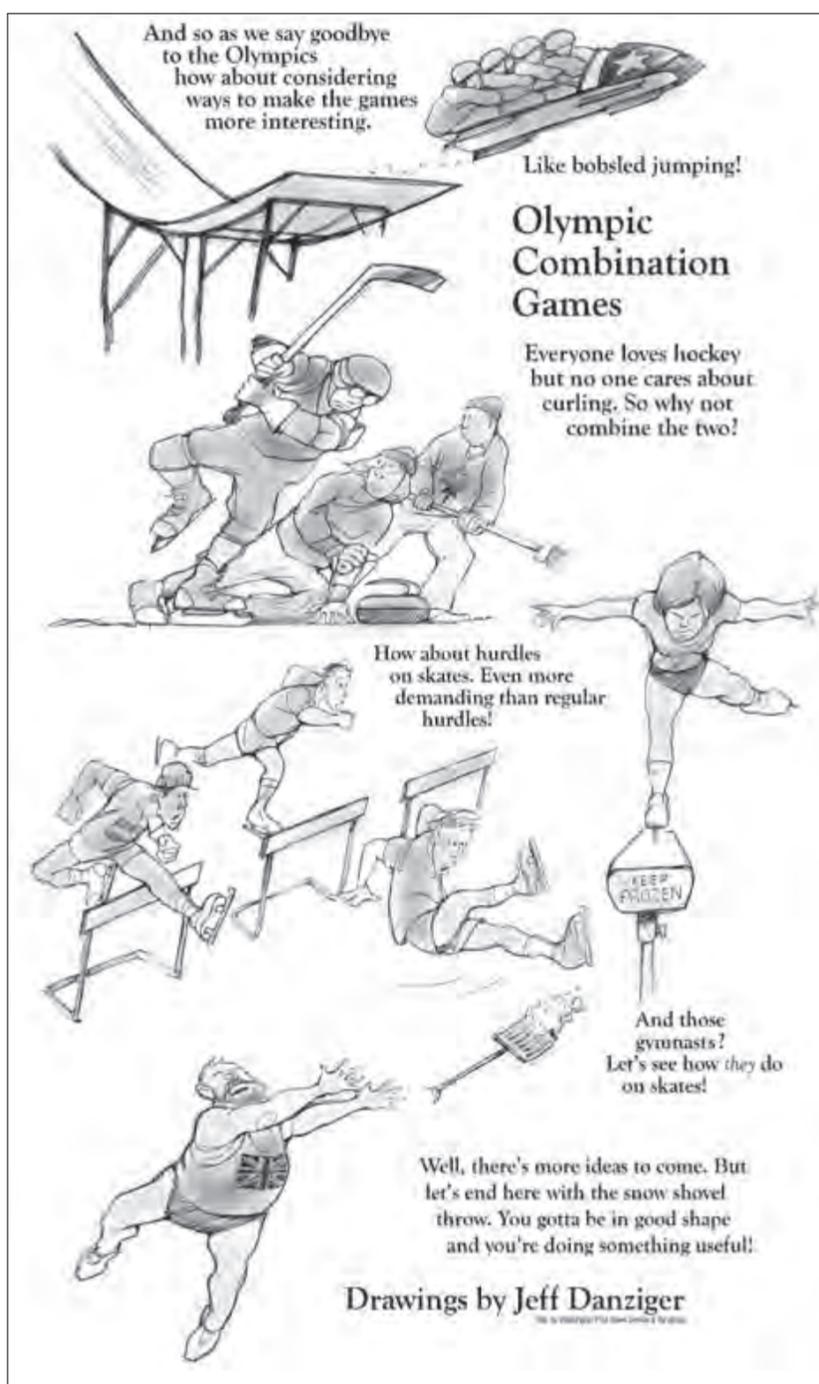
That's the hope that emerges from this tragedy.

And someday, when America is sane, when future generations wonder how it ever was we protected guns more than we did children, or that a disturbed 19-year-old was able to legally purchase a weapon of war, or that carnage became routine, or that some of us said this routine carnage was the price of freedom, maybe we will look back on this as the pivot point. President Donald Trump, Florida Sen. Marco Rubio and every other politician who accepts money soaked in blood from the extremist NRA should consider themselves on notice:

You are being called out by America's children. They have a simple message. Act like adults. Grow the hell up.

That's more than many of their friends will ever have the chance to do.

## A SATIRIC LOOK AT THE OLYMPICS



## ANOTHER VIEW

# Main point on JEA sale was skipped

By Danny Becton

Several past articles including Sunday's Times-Union editorial board suggested that I led a "philosophical discussion on the timing of such an issue" in a way to insinuate that the selling of JEA should have been determined before demanding a price valuation and that I am being narrow-minded, suggesting "I should take a much broader view." This is hardly the truth.

I am open to a discussion about the evaluation of selling JEA or the prudence of holding on to this city asset. This is the discussion that should have occurred before spending \$100,000 on what turned out to be a valuation study.

The presentation led by JEA Board Chair Alan Howard, a mergers and acquisition attorney, stated that nothing would be done without the will of the Council. It was my contention that perhaps we were getting the "cart before the horse" again, a misquote in a previous Times-Union story. This opinion was based on Howard's assertions, the presentation being incomplete and the auditorium being void of supporters.

The city has valued the utility before (2007 and 2012) but chose to take no action. Here we are again in 2018 and the JEA board has spent approximately \$100,000 for an "evaluation presentation" by Public Financial Management (PFM) that did not include all of the facts but only a perceived valuation of the utility that PFM is not certified to give. Where was JEA's unfunded pension liability debt? Where was the return on equity analysis of the city's

contributions, the dividends? If this was an evaluation, not a valuation, where was the rest of the story?

Unknown to the Editorial Board, my assertion was to take a broader view but in a different order. Let's first have a debate whether the benefits of owning this utility outweigh any sum of money the utility might bring in an open market. Then, if there is a willingness on the council and public opinion to further explore this option, let's then spend the money to get it appraised by a certified, third-party source. There are just some assets where no reasonable dollar amount would move the needle to motivate a sale. If that is not the case, then let's explore valuing and selling all city owned assets including parks, entertainment venues and buildings. We can lease back City Hall, if it will fetch a good price.

This platitude of "immediate quality of life" for us is self-serving and detrimental to the future generations of Duval County residents. Does this sound familiar?

Asking "Do we even want to sell JEA?" as the first step, not the second, might have gotten us to the answer quicker and just may have saved us the \$100,000 without the possible loss of valuable executives and employees who will begin looking for the exit door. This is what I was implying when I related this to how most folks decide first on selling their home before they look at spending their hard-earned money on a certified appraisal.

Would it have been better to have the discussion "Do we even want to sell JEA?" first was exactly my point.

City Councilman Danny Becton represents District 11.

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