

OPINION

The Times-Union

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OUR VIEW

Will JEA be the last monopoly?

By Times-Union Editorial Board

Civic-minded people have been asking recently, why the sudden interest in selling JEA? What has changed?

Actually, there are two changes, one visible and one not so obvious.

The first is the sellers' market for electric utilities, evidenced by the billions being offered. Tampa Electric, for instance, was sold for over \$10 billion a few years ago.

A consultant hired by JEA estimated that the utility could be worth from \$3 billion to \$6.4 billion after paying its debt.

The billions at stake justifies a thorough evaluation of the potential benefits of a sale.

The JEA board is going to hold a workshop. City Council President Anna Lopez Brosche has appointed a special committee. Both are good ideas.

The second change has more to do with JEA's future. Its past status as a golden goose for city finances is well known. Its value was based on the utility as a monopoly. Jacksonville could count on revenues and electric use increasing from year to year, especially in a growth market like Florida.

But the revenues have gone flat and its future monopoly status is questionable.

Utilities nationwide are discovering that electricity use is not increasing. It was expected that power use would dip during the Great Recession then return to historic levels but use has remained sluggish even as the economy turned upward.

Consumers are finding ways to conserve energy. Appliances and new homes have more energy-saving features. That means one of the few ways that utilities can grow is to expand or merge — thus the sellers' market.

Another factor is the digital revolution. Industries that once had virtual monopolies — for instance newspapers, taxis and retail stores — have been disrupted.

Could competition be on the horizon for electric utilities? It's already a reality in several states, including Texas where 85 percent of Texans live in areas where consumers have a choice of which power company to use.

Also on the horizon is the specter of solar energy. The cost of solar equipment has been dropping fast. What if a few homes and businesses find it economical to get off the electric grid entirely? All it would take would be more affordable batteries and backup power.

Once that happens, JEA would start losing some of its most profitable customers and reliable revenue.

The question Jacksonville citizens must ask: Can we expect that JEA's over \$100 million contribution to the city of Jacksonville would be guaranteed in the future?

Or is JEA threatened by the double whammies of decreasing electric use and increased competition?

While we may fear change, there are dangers in the status quo, too.

And the status quo hasn't done much to extend water and sewer lines to Northwest Jacksonville or burying power lines to avoid outages. Both are multi-billion dollar projects that would require rate increases of some sort.

A sale could provide a big boost of revenue for both projects. Current employees could be protected, rate increases could be avoided for a period and other strings could be attached to make a sale more palatable.

Civic-minded people ask, unlike the pension crisis, where is the JEA's crisis? Well, the pension crisis did not happen overnight.

Florida TaxWatch, spurred by the Times-Union Editorial Board, blew the whistle on Jacksonville's pension crisis in 2008. It took eight years before a solution was found, the pension sales tax.

In an era of economic upheaval, we have learned that the past is a poor predictor of the future.

Can this sellers' market for utilities last forever?

If we wait for a crisis, it may be too late.

The future is coming, whether we like it or not.

We're at the early stages of evaluating this major civic decision.

Let's investigate a sale boldly and wisely.

A VERSE FOR TODAY

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away."

Luke 21:33

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.

ANOTHER VIEW



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Follow the lead of Northern states

It is no coincidence that in my home state of New York and the New England states — places where there are high numbers of college-educated citizens — state governments have passed responsible gun laws.

Connecticut leads the nation on gun laws, banning assault rifles and limiting the number of rounds per clip for any weapon.

Meanwhile in the South, where fewer college-educated citizens reside, the most liberal gun laws in the nation exist.

It is inconceivable that less than a week after the massacre at a Parkland high school, Florida lawmakers refused to take up a ban on assault rifles.

They brought shame upon themselves, and shame to the state of Florida.

The only saving grace is that today's high school students are soon-to-be eligible voters.

Rick Mansfield, Ponte Vedra

You go, Council President Anna Lopez Brosche!

I was critical of Council President Anna Lopez Brosche on this page when she cut in line to become council president — and again when she wantonly took up the subject of Confederate monuments.

But the recent news coverage of her rebuffing Mayor Lenny Curry was interesting; I thought it was a little comeuppance, and that it was gutsy and appropriate.

Curry is an effective mayor, but without a doubt he is also a hard-charger.

Now, however, the mayor has met his match — and I wonder how he's handling it.

The Editorial Board's recent chastising of Brosche was a call for better behavior by her and Curry.

I agreed with that.

But then I read Brosche's response to that critique; in it, Brosche asked why the mayor usurped her role to set an agenda and didn't signify that he had planned to speak.

It does seem contrived to me that the JEA board chairman wanted to introduce Curry to speak.

And I really liked Brosche's reference to the fact if she were a man, she wouldn't be publicly coached to take the high road and not take things so personally.

As a proud father of two daughters and grandfather to three granddaughters, I say this to Brosche: "You go, girl!"

Rob Richardson, Jacksonville Beach

Left won't face the truth on guns

In the aftermath of another tragic shooting, the left is calling for "more gun control!"

The problem is it won't solve the problem.

A recent national news broadcast provided the

following facts that are worth considering:

About 7,500 homicides are committed each year by handguns (pistols).

Around 700 deaths are caused by long guns (rifles and shotguns combined) — or less than one-tenth.

No study has concluded that National Rifle Association members are doing the daily drive-by shootings or mass shootings.

And no one has proven that right-wing Republicans or evangelicals are going on shooting rampages either.

You may not like this conclusion, but here are the facts:

- The daily shootings that we see on the nightly news primarily involve inner-city youths gone wild.

- The mass shootings involve deranged individuals who have mental issues and are, as Gov. Rick Scott described, "pure evil."

Joe Edelson, Jacksonville

Florida lawmakers right to approve Bethune statue

I am so proud of the Florida Legislature for approving the removal of a Confederate statue and the installation of a statue of Mary McLeod Bethune in the U.S. Capitol's Statuary Hall.

What a wonderful symbol of our state's commitment to education and fairness for all!

And shame on state Rep. Jay Fant of Jacksonville for being the sole lawmaker to vote against the legislation.

Hopefully the Bethune-Cookman University board of trustees will generate the needed donations to build and install the statue quickly.

I have already started the ball rolling with my donation.

Sally J. Marks, St. Augustine

Critical of T-U article on mortgage lending

The article headlined "Black, Hispanic borrowers face hard road to home mortgages in Jacksonville" is another example of the Times-Union bringing race into a story where it doesn't belong.

An accurate headline would have read "Unqualified borrowers" — not "Black, Hispanic borrowers."

The story provides no evidence that a mortgage has been denied because of race or ethnicity. Yet the story does use the term "redlining," which is a practice that was outlawed years ago.

There are more than a few instances I could cite of the Times-Union practicing race-baiting — for example, the series "Walking While Black" was an example of space wasted in an attempt to use an exception to prove a rule.

There are problems regarding race in our community but articles dealing with the issues must be factual and colorblind.

"White privilege" doesn't exist, but "American

privilege" does.

It's the privilege we all have regardless of race and ethnicity to seek opportunity to improve our lives.

It's the privilege enjoyed by those who understand the responsibilities and obligations to take advantage of an opportunity.

The Times-Union would serve us better by focusing on services and organizations providing support to those who need some help and guidance to enjoy the American privilege.

Donald Gould, Ponte Vedra Beach

Rummell is brave to speak up on the dangers of guns

Enough is enough! As a lifelong Republican I advocate for the right to bear arms.

However, I see no reason for anyone to have an assault weapon or any type of rapid-fire mechanism.

Finally, we have a prominent Republican in Peter Rummell who has the courage to go against party lines and speak out.

I urge all Republicans to join Rummell and his campaign to vote against any Republican who does not support a ban on assault rifles and rapid-fire mechanisms.

Blaming police and the FBI for not taking care of our latest shooter is misdirected.

We cannot jail someone in this country for being mentally ill without due cause.

Let's start with Rummell's campaign to see how that progresses and if it will change anything.

How many more kids must be sprayed with bullets to stop the sale of these weapons?

Lynn Lisenby, Fleming Island

Tearing down school makes no sense

Why must a school be torn down because a mad shooter killed a lot of people?

Don't the authorities clean up bloody crime scenes every day?

Has Broward County produced more than the average share of snowflakes?

How will they face real life after school?

I don't really care if Broward taxpayers built their own new school on their own dime.

But I'm sure the rest of us will be required to fund the emotional decision made in liberal South Florida.

John F. Klein, Orange Park

Inaction on guns is the deadliest thing to do

The left says: "Guns kill." The right says: "People kill."

I don't know who's right.

But I know one thing for sure — inaction will kill, and it will probably kill more kids.

#neveragain

Scott Schleifer, Jacksonville