

# OPINION

## The Times-Union

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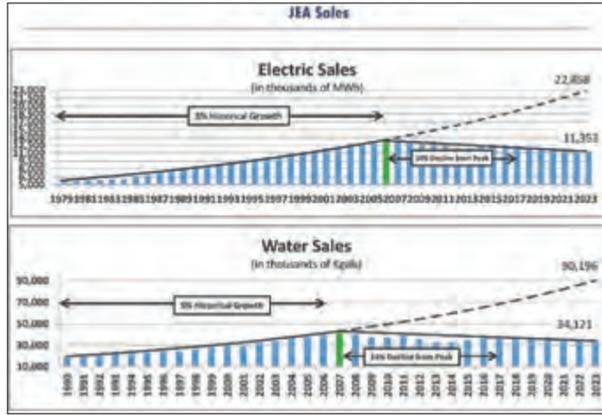
Editorial board: Nusbaum, Clark, Bobby Martin, Roger Brown, Paula Horvath, and citizen editorial members.

### OUR VIEW: JEA

# Mistrust slows progress

There are a few clear facts about the possibility of selling JEA. It's far too early in the process to say you're for or against the sale. Let the process play out. However, there is good reason to go through this process due to potential sale value of \$3 billion to \$6 billion after paying debt. This may be the biggest financial decision in the history of Jacksonville, certainly in the nearly 50-year history of consolidated government. While JEA is not broken, it is in the midst of the sort of disruption affecting many U.S. businesses. JEA sales for both electricity and water-sewer have been declining or flat since about 2007 (see the accompanying chart). A special City Council committee on the sale is taking the issue seriously to the point that they attempted to put two potential speakers under oath Thursday, Chief Administrative Officer Sam Mousa and JEA CEO Paul McElroy. When both of them declined to take the oath, the committee started proceedings to send them subpoenas to compel them to appear. Now in our experience, Mousa, is both truthful and blunt. If he knows how to spin, we have never seen it. And JEA has been forthcoming with information in our experience.

So while we see no great need to put them under oath, if this is what it will take to convince certain City Council members that they are getting the truth, then this is an unfortunate necessity. General Counsel Jason Gabriel warned the committee this might happen. A person under oath is going to be very careful and may need a lawyer present, Gabriel said. Gabriel said that putting speakers under oath is routinely used in quasi-judicial proceedings like zoning matters. The JEA sale is a policy matter but it clearly is rarely used in such settings. In the final analysis, it's likely that council members will have a simple though difficult decision to make. Will JEA's \$116 million annual contribution to the city be as reliable as it has been over nearly 50 years of consolidated government? Can it continue to grow. Or will it be under threat as consumers continue to conserve energy? If that annual contribution is going to be declining in future years, then selling JEA needs to be seriously considered. As for the water and sewer utility, that makes less sense as a sales candidate. JEA has been running it for about 20 years, investing billions in upgrades, though making little progress in extending lines to areas of septic tanks. Even if a sale is seriously considered, the jobs and pensions of current employees ought to be protected. Also consumers ought to be protected against rate increases. It should be noted that Florida Power & Light's rates in recent years have been lower than JEA's and that JEA is staring at a potential \$1.7 billion bill for its share of a failed nuclear power plant. All in all, we are in the early stages of a long process that clearly is emotional. At the end of the process, no matter how it turns out, let's hope we can look back and say the entire city treated it with the due diligence it deserves.



### A VERSE FOR TODAY

"Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word."  
**Mark 4:18**

### ANOTHER VIEW



### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

By Times-Union readers

#### Trump's foreign policy runs counter to American values

With the exit of Rex Tillerson as secretary of state, it is important for us to re-examine our foreign policy. Do you know what America stands for these days? I am not clear. I used to know. As an immigrant growing up in America, our country stood as a beacon of hope for many around the world. The word "America" instantly draws upon the icons of democracy, freedom, liberty and justice for all. We advocated strongly against countries with human rights violations, and exported our free-market capitalism and liberal-democracy governance model across the globe in the hopes that many other nations would be attracted by the aspiration of self-determination that shaped our own experience. While the concept of universal values and the role of America as a promotional state have never been flawless, at least we knew clearly what we stood for.

But President Donald Trump's "America First" foreign policy is inconsistent with our longstanding national identity. It has stripped away the crucial liberal element from our identity. Not having a moral ground to stand on — while implementing a "realist" foreign policy based strictly on self-interest — is similar to working for a corporation that cares only for making profits while displaying a total disregard for ethics.

The aspiration human element is also missing from Trump's "America First" foreign policy. It is a policy that promotes strength, but not progress. It is a policy that projects authority, but not influence. It is a policy that stresses sovereignty, but not legitimacy. It is time for us to relocate that lost purpose that made America the beacon it continues to be.

**Sichao Ni, Jacksonville**

#### It only makes sense to arm our teachers

What's the bottom line on all these shootings? Bad people shoot because that is what they want to do; good people shoot because that is what they have to do. We should arm our teachers — or bring in retired military or law enforcement officers. It's very sad that we have armed security guards in all of our banks to protect our money, but too few armed people in

schools to protect our children!  
**Dayle Vickery, Orange Park**

#### We should embrace differences, not become enraged by them

There is a growing trend that many of us find confusing: There are lots of people who openly espouse the conservative ethos that "others should stay out of my personal business" — yet these same people seem to get so angry when others do things differently than they would. The idea of same-sex marriage is offensive to many — and it is certainly mysterious to us. But two people, regardless of their gender, publicly expressing their love for each other has no impact on the strength of our love for each other. It in no way diminishes the institution of marriage; it harms no one and it should remain a personal choice.

When we're at a ballgame, we stand for our national anthem, but we are not offended if others do not. Their relationship to our country is none of our business. If football players choose to kneel — hardly an offensive gesture — it has no effect on our love of country.

And here is one of the greatest mysteries of all: Why are people who worship a different God than you do perceived as a threat to you?

The recent rise of animus toward Muslims is an example, and it is directly opposed to our country's creed that freedom for all is an inalienable right. Yes, others may have a value system different than yours. But America was founded on the principle that the freedom to have those differences must be protected. We are a land of diverse cultures — it is one of our strengths.

We certainly should not be surprised or angered when others see things differently than we do. That means that while we may personally find Brussels sprouts to be outrageously offensive, we should allow others to be free to enjoy them — even if it is difficult to imagine anything pleasant about eating them.

If only we could all follow the immortal advice of John Lennon and Paul McCartney: Just "Let It Be."

**Fran and Pete Sheridan, Nocatee**

#### Why collect illegal signs but not punish the offenders?

The city's annual snipe sign and tire buyback event is a joke. On the surface, it encourages citizens to clean up our neighborhoods. But the city misses the mark with this event. No one at the collection site documents the business names

or phone numbers that are on the illegal snipe signs being turned in for cash.

It makes no sense to me why the repeat offenders who keep posting illegal "We Buy Your House" signs remain unpunished after the buyback event. And the signs are simply thrown in a dumpster.

**Scott Lara, Arlington**

#### Some modest suggestions for future Gate River Run events

As someone who has participated in the Gate River Run 16 times over the last 21 years, I was interested to read that the number of finishers was down 11 percent this year.

Please allow me to offer a suggestion.

I do not need another commemorative racing T-shirt. I have more than a dozen hanging in my closet. Keep the T-shirt.

I do not need another finisher's medal. I have a drawer full of them in my garage. Keep the medal.

Instead, why not drop the entry fee to \$10?

And just give me a bottle of water when I cross the finish line.

I will be happy with that.  
**David Zuckerman, Jacksonville Beach**

#### National Rifle Association is oblivious to the carnage

I could not disagree more with the letter writer who stated that the reason to have guns is for protection from a tyrannical government.

The Second Amendment states: "A well regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to bear arms shall not be infringed." The Founders intended the people to protect the state, not overthrow it.

It seems as though the letter writer has been brainwashed by the gun lobby like a multitude of others have been. And that is precisely what another letter writer meant when he called America's gun culture an "illness."

The National Rifle Association waited all of 30 minutes — 30 minutes! — before it filed suit against the bill signed by Gov. Rick Scott encoding some very common sense measures aimed at trying to alleviate some of this gun violence/madness.

The National Rifle Association is an organization out of control; it is obsessed with opposing — in lockstep fashion — anything that does not conform to its misinterpretation of the Second Amendment.

In doing so, the National Rifle Association is deaf, dumb and blind to the carnage that is going on in our schools and churches.

**Richard Pearson, Intracoastal West**

### 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.