

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

Auditor's report reflects on pros, cons of selling JEA

By Times-Union Editorial Board

No doubt, JEA has been a golden goose for city finances in its nearly 50-year history. And JEA is intertwined within city government even though it is an independent authority. So if City Council were to vote to sell the utility, it would create all kinds of ripple effects. The question: Is the past a predictor of the future? Put another way, would a JEA with stagnant sales be better for Jacksonville than a large sum of money provided to the city from an investor-owned utility?

Some pros, lots of cons

In a recent report, the City Council Auditor's Office listed a few pros but lots of cons on the sale issue. The pros were clear: A large sum of money to use without increasing debt or raising taxes. Property taxes and stormwater fees would be collected on former JEA property. The public schools would receive about \$8 million a year for capital. But the list of cons was pretty lengthy. First, the auditor estimated the potential net from a sale would be less than the \$3 billion to \$6.4 billion projected by a longtime JEA consultant. The auditor came up with \$1.7 billion to \$5.2 billion. Second, the auditor said any revenue should be used to pay for city debt and not for operating expenses. And here are some other advantages that the city enjoys by owning JEA — and that would be lost in a sale:

- Since 1997 JEA has taken over the city's water and sewer utility, investing over \$3 billion and actually returning contributions to the city from that utility.
- JEA spent about \$53 million on electric, water and sewer infrastructure for Cecil Commerce Center.
- JEA spent about \$40 million for 5,000 acres of preservation land to complement the city's preservation project.
- JEA basically set up a new utility, a chilled water plant, that provides services for the arena, baseball stadium, Main Library and courthouse.
- JEA provides lower rates to the city, the Duval County Public Schools, the U.S. Navy and the Marine Corps.
- As a municipal utility, JEA qualifies for FEMA aid following hurricanes. Investor-owned utilities don't have this benefit and must add riders to their customers' bills.
- JEA maintains a major Downtown headquarters with some 2,000 employees.
- There is local control of JEA. While this can lead to political meddling at times, the city would obviously have less influence on an investor-owned utility with headquarters outside Jacksonville. And a JEA sale would mean future rates would be determined by the Public Service Commission, not a local JEA board.
- Finally, here's another stark item in the "con" column: Selling JEA would likely be an extremely time-consuming process — a deal for Florida Power & Light to purchase a Vero Beach utility, for instance, has been lingering since 2011 and still isn't final.

A complicated decision to make

Most interesting is a third option that was listed as a final set of recommendations: A task force could be established to look for ways that JEA can increase its contributions to the city and pursue other goals (such as placing power lines underground or extending water and sewer services). JEA could become a natural gas utility like TECO. JEA could sell or lease rooftop solar systems to customers. JEA could take over the city's stormwater utility. A study could be done to examine if the city should hire a management firm to run JEA, instead of relying on the current network of JEA executives and board members. In short, the idea of selling JEA is no trivial deal. It's a complicated decision that will demand plenty of time, reflection, discussion and accurate, reliable information. The City Council Auditor Office's report made a constructive and valuable contribution to this process.

A VERSE FOR TODAY

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live."
John 11:25

ANOTHER VIEW



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Trump hardly the change agent America wanted and expected

When I listened to President Donald Trump's recent news conference to discuss the omnibus bill, I felt sick to my stomach. Americans voted for real change during the 2016 election. But we just got more of the same. The only winners in the bill were the military and pork projects. I firmly believe many Trump voters will stay home during the midterms and give power back to the Democrats. And the Republicans deserve to lose.
Scott Lara, Arlington

Do city drivers know they're supposed to use turn signals?

I have to hand it to Percy Douglas, the man who in 1907 applied for a patent for a device that would indicate the left or right movement of a vehicle — better known, of course, as the turn signal. The intent was also to eliminate drivers from putting their left hand out the window to manually signal when the vehicle would turn or stop. Some may remember those manual signals:

- Left arm straight out for left turns.
- Left arm up for right turns.
- Left arm pointed down, with the palm showing, to indicate slowing or stopping.

In 1939, the flashing turn signal was introduced for rear lights. In 1940 the flashing directional signal was added to the front lights. Since then, car manufacturers have made great progress to make the turn signal as ergonomically friendly as possible. All of this leads to a very important question: Why do so many drivers in Jacksonville refuse to use this very important and necessary safety tool?

The most noticeable offenders are the drivers who weave in and out of traffic without using their turn signal — creating dangerous safety issues — and the ones who make a right turn without their turn signals and affect the crossing traffic. And let's not forget those drivers who think the turn signal is a right-of-way signal. Do we need more laws that impose stiffer penalties? Or do more drivers just need a major public wake-up call?

Use your turn signals, people!
Dennis Wade, Jacksonville

Baker County deserves praise for acting after red flags were raised

Finally, some common sense! A Glen St. Mary man collects a cache of assault weapons, adds a black skull mask and then photographs himself with his weapons crossed in front of his now

ego-induced powerful chest.

He posts the photo on social media with a suggested threat.

Oh, by the way: he had recently been fired by his employer for documented sexual harassment.

Amazingly, the Baker County sheriff's department takes the report of the man's threat seriously, and the gun-collecting, black-skull gentleman goes to jail.

Duh! Why did this not happen before the blood bath in Charleston?

Why did it not happen with the shooter in South Florida when the sheriff had received more than 20 warning calls about the shooter before the tragedy?

Thank you, Baker County. Finally, someone is paying attention to the clues before it is too late.

Diann Catlin, Jacksonville

Numbers suggest the Southern states are the real moochers

A recent letter writer declared that the federal government and the American people were "essentially subsidizing the errant fiscal ways of the liberal North."

But according to a recent article by Wallet Hub.com., it is mostly the conservative Southern states that take more from the federal government than they put in.

Mississippi and Alabama are in the top 5 federally dependent states, while New York is 36 and New Jersey and Massachusetts are 47 and 46, respectively.

Florida ranks 28th, almost in the middle, but the liberal Northern states are doing at least as much if not more subsidizing than any conservative Southern state.

You can see the article at: <https://tinyurl.com/otwh26r>
James O'Donnell, Arlington

Body cams can play productive role in local law enforcement

A recent Times-Union story, stemming from the Jacksonville Sheriff Office's ongoing testing of camera technology, outlined the potential for misunderstanding police body camera footage in criminal cases.

While the potential always exists for incomplete footage, poor angles and other issues, the police and the community are far better served with these resources being used as part of broader law enforcement and police/community interaction. These potential pitfalls can be factored into the evaluation of information in any given case.

From a broader perspective, studies demonstrate that police officers and the public alike tend to be more respectful — and more conscious of being law-abiding — with the knowledge that cameras are rolling.

For these reasons, this

technology substantially elevates the quality of interactions between law enforcement and citizens.

Randy Reep, Jacksonville
Reep is a local criminal defense and personal injury lawyer.

Shameless media making a big deal over Trump non-story

The media made excuses for former President Barack Obama and his lengthy association with the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, the hyper-racist pastor who said, "God - - - America!"

Yet the unproven allegation that a porn star, Stormy Daniels, had a one-night stand with Donald Trump years before he became president is Page One news.

The media is absolutely shameless — and worthless.

Michael Pelt, Jacksonville

Just follow the rules when making jail visits

I'm very thankful that I have never had a need to visit any friend or family member in a jail.

However, if I did have to do so, I would be sure to follow any warnings or rules that applied to making such a visit, regardless of whether I thought they were fair.

If I could not afford a sports bra — which can be readily purchased at a dollar store for minimal cost — to replace a bra that was not compliant with visitation rules, I would save my pennies until I could buy one.

I would treat a jail visitation just the way I would treat going through the security screening process in an airport: I wouldn't attempt to ignore the rules and just hope for the best. Just follow the rules.

I know that is a novel concept in today's upside-down world.
Cathy Grooms, Jacksonville

Climate change editorial high in hype, low on relevant facts

The Times-Union's recent editorial on climate change was long on salesmanship and short on salient facts.

There is no information available to show that recent storms, floods, forest fires and droughts are worse or more frequent than those in the past.

And in the case of renewable electric energy generation, there would be serious drawbacks to heavily depending on wind turbines and solar panels to provide electrical power at the massive levels needed in this country. One major drawback is that these sources of energy rely on continuous sunshine and wind.

Faced with the certainty of frequent interruptions in the availability of adequate sunshine and wind, the public power companies would often fall short of meeting the demand for electrical power.

William Everett, Ponte Vedra Beach

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.