

Dear Nathan Crabbe, Editorial Page Editor,

successor to Ron Cunningham (1983-2013, who still has a Sunday column)

And Doug Ray, Executive Editor,

I am so pleased that the *Sun* continues to ask for my input, even after a group of 12 citizens was chosen as your first formal advisory board. I assume I am included because Nathan valued my past positive approach to Our Town. The last time he was kind enough to publish my article about Gainesville as the first Butterfly City, before that idea went belly up, though no fault of the *Sun*'s.

Your first question has to do with local election coverage. Y'all wrote: As you may know, turnout for Gainesville's municipal ballot earlier this month was typically bad. There is runoff for both races, though. What can we do to help better inform citizens and, perhaps, encourage more voters to participate?"

First Response: At the outset, I urge you this time to let readers/viewers know that the turnout for the municipal ballot was historically low, because of a word-of-mouth boycott. That information was provided to a local TV reporter Patrick Fleming III. He interviewed me after WGTN-TV news anchor McLeod Hageman in Davenport said the broadcaster was interested in telling my side of the story, about corruption, legal fictions, and other forms of dishonesty in Florida. Alas, their Gainesville boss, Dan Eschenfelder nixed the report. [PDF on request.](#)

The boycott has been one of the most successful political events in Gainesville, since the Silk Hat gang took over City Hall. On campus, UF folks stayed away in proverbial droves. The word-of-mouth campaign was started after I watched City leaders make fools of themselves at folks at an afternoon session of a briefing provided by the UF to the Mayor and City Commission. After I told friends about the "gee whiz" "know-nothing" expressions that afternoon, the campaign began.

Word was spread to ignore the election, after it became clear that no matter who is on the Commission, the result on significant issues likely will be whatever the City Manager and the Office of the City Attorney decide. Elected municipal officials in Gainesville have no power to do anything the City Manager, the City Attorney and the other four Charter Officers do not want done. [PDF on request.](#)

The boycott spread like proverbial wildflowers on campus, especially among grad assistants who would have liked political support for their monetary dispute with the University. Off-campus, I concede the boycott was less successful in the Black District where the token African-American would be chosen for the black seat.

But the successful boycott is only one of the key issues ignored by local media and unfortunately the candidates. But the worst mistake now being made is the failure to provide any information about the run-off which ends on Apr. 14, 2015.

Since Mr. Crabbe asked in his Sunday column for suggestions to improve voter turnout, *the Sun* has said or shown little about the issues or the candidates. The exception is a photo op for one candidate. He was shown in a photo with Ray Washington, attorney and former *Sun* reporter and one of the white males seeking to be the head of Gainesville Regional Utilities (GRU). Neither the caption nor the report itself made any connection of the GRU hiring to the coming election.

So what is at stake now? Will media, especially the Sun's Ray and Crabbe, pay attention to the run-off, or will I and others continue to advocate that this wasteful opportunity be ignored, so that voters have a real choice—not to participate in a democratic process that the media do not believe to be worthy of coverage.

SUGGESTIONS

1. What are some of the issues **beyond those the media have selected—**
 - a. More than a million dollars has been spent to cover up the still flawed 30-year-agreement for provision of biomass materials as a fuel source for electricity, since GRU head Bob Hunzinger resigned in the fall of 2013.
 - b. The money is being spent on a dozen private white law firms from Seattle; DC; New York; Chicago; Cleveland, Tallahassee, Jacksonville, Orlando, Miami. To get suggestion about such law firms, Kathy Viehe, interim manager, immediately contacted former GRU head Mike Kurtz. Each reminded the other that e-mails were public records, but they went on....
 - c. The current Mayor/Commissioner have decided to hire a new GRU head either before or simultaneously with public presentation of a requested audit of GRU operations since 2007-08 by Navigant Consulting. Navigant's prior support of bio-mass projects has been overlooked entirely. Mayor Ed Braddy earlier this year pooh-poohed the suggestion that Navigant's report should be released prior to the municipal election. Will it be released prior to the run-off on April 14? If so, will the candidates comment on it?
 - d. Is Depot Park still closed, because of contamination? If not, why has a Jacksonville law firm been hired to devote its time to "Depot Park issues?"

- e. In 2003, more than 170 primarily poor African-American households were evacuated from the Kennedy Housing Project, which had been built in 1968. Little if anything was done by the City for most of the women and children there despite promises from current Mayor Ed Braddy. The condemned structures were torn down. The City bought the land in 2008. Seven years later, nothing is visible on the site. One of the current candidates seeks to take credit for Plans which were drawn up last year by Gainesville's Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) after years of inaction! There is no hint apparently when development will follow design!
- f. Historic building and district advocates continue to demand more designations and tax-exempt status for protected properties. In Gainesville, most of the districts have been created based on property considerations developed in the era of de jure racial segregation to separate whites from blacks. Limiting land use in that area for "historic reasons" serves to protect houses in racially exclusive neighborhoods. Are candidates for or against the creation of these vestiges of the Jim Crow era?
- g. The current Mayor/Commission are doing their best to cover up the utter failure in recent years of the Charter Office of Equal Opportunity, to monitor city purchases and contracts with black businesses, and the dismal records of some City departments to promote blacks or hire them. For example, All of the 9-10 attorneys in the Office of the City Attorney are white; the only exceptions on staff since 1985 were two black males, one of whom spent less than a year in that office. He has since been disbarred. The other was kept out of the public eye until he was arrested, and publicly humiliated in 2013. He resigned, according to a staff person, but he did not have to do so!
- h. The City Auditor, a charter officer, is required to evaluate the Equal Opportunity Office from time to time. But the City Auditor has resigned effective April 2. Without waiting for the final election, the current City Commission hired a new Auditor who will start work after the election.
- i. The Office of Equal Opportunity was created starting with a Blue Ribbon Commission in the 1990's, to give an African-American an assurance of a Charter Officer being black. By a 14,000-12,000 vote, that Office was created. Jimmie Williams became the first in 2004; he was succeeded in 2009 by Cecil E. Howard, an attorney. In 2015, Howard left....

The Role of the Media

2. Local media, including the *Gainesville Sun* and its weekly *Gainesville Black Guardian*, as well as the April edition of the *Gainesville Magazine*, *Sun* bloggers covering City Hall and Soccer Moms, and other local magazines, shoppers, the rare editions of the *Black College Monthly*, and the TV news programs for the three network affiliated local stations, should find at least one item each day or week or monthly to feature about the upcoming local election.
3. Let us recognize that religion, race, gender, and fashion are issues voters likely will consider even if they are ignored by tacit agreement of public officials, the Gainesville Chamber of Commerce, candidates for office, the all-white 8th Judicial Circuit Court, UF's athletic director, basketball, football coaches.
 - a. Let us have a little in-depth background. Santa Fe's Lauren Poe will be replaced as Commissioner-at-large. His previous opponent, Nathan Skop, an attorney, logically could be expected to replace him, especially since the GRU controversy still is on the front burner. Unfortunately, with little notice, Skop moved away from the area last year to work as an engineer in Mirimar.
 - b. Clearly, the seat will be filled by a white male, to keep a sense of uniformity on the Commission. The Commission already has a white woman who will remain, no matter what the outcome, so the token gender issue is resolved? The seat reserved for an African-American thus can be filled by man or woman without the Commission having to worry about being all mucho macho male.
 - c. Luckily, as expected, all of the candidates for the At-Large seat were white, though a welcome touch of diversity was added by a Hispanic surname.
 - d. The At-Large run-off now is between a prominent local childless business couple (#1) who have given so much money and time to the community that even their accountants cannot keep track of their accomplishments, and an (#2) up-and-coming always smiling and fashionably dressed pair of pilots with two children available for all campaign and future modeling assignments.
 - e. Couple #1 is running on their substantive records. Couple #2 is running on their styles. Couple #1 is prominent in Jewish and local political circles. Couple #2 is prominent in circles which are not Jewish. The Chamber of Commerce supports Couple #2, although not because of religion.

- f. Couple #1 share at least a profit-making corporation together. The Couple #1 Male is a board member/officer for active corporations you never heard of, which he apparently holds for both profit and non-profit (tax exempt) reasons in a variety of fields, including religious radio programming (not Jewish), international medical supply distribution, and property ownership.
- g. But if you want to know where #1 Male made his millions you have to check out the numerous currently inactive corporations he used in the 1980s to buy and sell broadcasting properties, including the local current CBS-TV affiliate he founded. As for his professional life, he clearly was trying to be almost everything a Jewish mother like my own would wish—a lawyer, a dentist, and finally a CPA. Then he ambitiously married a department store heiress.
- h. The male in Couple #2 exudes leadership in his own small business company at the Gainesville Regional Airport Authority (GRAA). #2 Male's major asset in this political campaign is the support of the Gainesville Chamber of Commerce.
- i. Couple #1 tried to be elected to the Florida House of Representatives from the 27th District, though the media has suggested that this is their first attempt at seeking public office. Couple #2 also has a GRAA-related political past. Couple #2 was selected to host the kickoff for the 2013 mayoral campaign for Pete Johnson and his beloved Dakota, a golden retriever who died too early.
- j. Had that 2013 election been run properly, to assure the old outstanding humble leadership for Gainesville that the Silk Hatters used to demand, Pete would have won hands down. Unfortunately, media and voters concentrated their interest and attention on two candidates known for their public DUI arrests.
- k. Who do the powerful support in the At-Large race? One white pol knows. He was regarded as powerful in Gainesville more than 30 years ago. Today he works behind the scenes, to manipulate votes for the candidates of his choice. A former mayor, he perhaps was once known as the most interesting man in Gainesville, although his plan to be Florida's governor never really happened.
- l. He is none other than Kingmaker Martin Goldstein. He knows #1 from the '80's. Together, they rolled over broadcasting outlets to make money hand over fist. He knows #2 from his GRAA salad days. Who does Goldstein support? Who do Paula and Bruce Delaney support? Joe Little?

2 (cont.) The media should cover the contest between the two African-American contenders for the Token black seat, as if whites were running in that district. Why? The whites, who live in that section known as East Gainesville and environs, could influence the outcome by backing one candidate or the other. White participation may be minimal but it's crucial.

a. The Contenders for the Black seat are a study in contrasts. Candidate A is Male, Candidate B Female. Each is running without a male or female mate in sight. Candidate B is the incumbent. Publicly she has the support of the black Kingmaker Rodney Long and his main corporate sidekick, Diyonne McGraw. Together Long and McGraw serve as board members and/or officers in the following non-profit, tax exempt entities:

African-American Accountability of Alachua County, Florida, Inc; **the Martin Luther King Jr. Commission of Florida, Inc.;** **the Alachua County Coalition for the Homeless and Hungry, Inc.;** and **the Long Foundation, Inc.** The Kingmaker and his sidekick have similar capacities in the profit making **Plan East Gainesville (PEG) Development Corp., Inc.** and **Long Realty Services, LLC.** The Kingmaker and his wife control the **Rodney Long Bail Bonds Agency, Inc.,** Rodney Long & Associates, Inc. and **Judah Consulting and Development Corp., LLC.** Kingmaker Long has been Gainesville Commissioner and Mayor, Alachua County Commissioner and Chair.

b. Candidate B has her own non-profit tax exempt corporations—Gainesville H.I.P.P.Y. Inc.; The Visionaries, Inc., and Black Aids Services and Education, Inc.. But if you are looking for a real money tie, check out her long-term affiliation with the racially integrated Mt. Pleasant Methodist Church. Religion could be a factor in the outcome.

c. Methodists in Gainesville include several prominent judges, politicians, e.g., the current mayor and a former Speaker of the Florida House of Representatives, even a pastor who dabbles in political issues for his 1,500 Trinity United Methodist mega-church membership flock. Their support, financial as well as moral, could be great for Candidate B. She also is a walking repository of memories of segregation and its effect on the local and Florida black communities. She was graduated from all black schools in Gainesville, then studied at UF when the school was disrupted in 1971-72 by dozens of black students. UF blacks spoke up, sat in and were expelled. Candidate B kept quiet, and prepared to run for office in Gainesville, by completing 40 years in education in Miami.

- d. Candidate A as noted has a different history, some of it very specific; other segments remain unknown or vague, including the schools of higher education where he claims to have gotten a bachelor's and master's degrees. On the plus side, Candidate A blasted the *Guardian* when the white publishers first issued their weekly for local blacks.
- e. White media and The Guardian seem to have no interest in Candidate A's extensive connections to local law enforcement dating back to 1974. About four dozen misdemeanor charges were made against him during the next 20 years or so, primarily for worthless checks and an occasional battery. Indications of domestic violence also are present. The charges tapered off drastically in the last 20 years. Admittedly there is some confusion because his father and son, with identical names, but different generation identification, also seem to have been charged with various crimes and misdemeanors. But there can be little doubt that the bulk of the criminal charges seem to have been made against Candidate A.
- f. For the last 11 years, Candidate A has published a *Black College Monthly*. Circulation in Gainesville understandably is limited since there is no HBCU here. Print issues can be found from time to time at the Alachua County Public Library, and the Civic Media Center. In the past, some local candidates, e. g. Peter Johnson, Ed Braddy, Gabriel, have purchased ads for the issue preceding the local election dates.
- g. Perhaps naively some of us believed this would result in a newspaper distribution in the local black community, but there is no real evidence that ever occurred to any extent. So what did the candidates get for their advertising? They got copy printed, photos reproduced. They could use those ads as tear sheets. This time around apparently Candidate A did not take money for any ads, since he himself is a candidate.
- h. For the current election, Candidate A estimated for the Gainesville Chamber of Commerce in February that he had received more than \$3,000 in contributions. There is no easily ascertainable figure for contributions to candidate B, but as an incumbent with Methodist ties, the donations are likely to be much higher for her. Perhaps in the black community, money is less important than how well King Long likes you. PDFs are attached for background on each candidate, each Kingmaker.

Footnotes

PDFs with supporting proofs will be provided on request for what may seem like outrageous comments here. They are too numerous to attach.

1. For Crabbe's public offering to get the public involved in increasing the turnout for the run-off election and future municipal races, Commissioner Warren Nielsen of the Santa Fe Trio deigned to offer his suggestions (See remarks with photo of the Sante Fe gang. Apparently unable to help himself, the always honorable Nielsen left a parting insult for the voters.
2. Professor Nielsen suggests that people who do not vote have no reason to complain about the government they get. But Professor Nielsen knows or should know that people who vote also have no reason to complain either, because the people they elect have to defer to the professionals, especially the City Manager and the Office of the City Attorney, They have run Gainesville, since 1927.
3. With one key exception, elected officials in Gainesville have little meaningful power to take any meaningful action. Indeed, each may be charged with a criminal misdemeanor if he or she dares to talk to employees without permission from an appropriate charter officer. (See Charter PDF.)
4. The exception--elected officials do have the authority to hire and fire charter officers. But they do not want to use it. Instead, in the interests of civility and minimal controversy, erring charter officers are asked to resign, in return for an obscene package of monetary benefits. Meanwhile, the vacant Charter Officer chairs are filled by interim appointments. They of course have little authority to do anything. Currently three of the six City Charter offices are filled by interims.
5. What effect does their absence have on the local election? How does that crippled system work in this local election year? In 2013, Robert Hunzinger, GRU director since 2008, was forced to resign. Kathy Veihe was named as interim head. She immediately e-mailed Hunzinger's predecessor, Mike "Coal now, Coal forever" Kurtz, for advice on which lawyers might be hired to protect GRU from public slings and arrows.
6. Now instead of waiting until elected officials are seated in May, to select a new GRU director, the Mayor and what some refer to as the six dwarfs, that is the Commissioners, are interviewing finalists (sic) this week. What does this all-white, all male all-the-time group of GRU candidates have to say for themselves? Only the incumbents know. *The Sun* apparently is not telling.

Epilogue

To my knowledge, I have voted in most public elections since 1960. But when a boycott was proposed this time, I asked my life partner if she were willing not to cast a ballot this time. She made it simple. She did not know there was an election this year, but if I weren't just trying to be funny, she would consider it. Then the latest GRU bill came in. She agreed to support the boycott.

We were among the proud majority of more than 85 per cent who boycotted the At-large election. I do not know what the percentage of voters stayed away in the African-American District. Was it more or less than that for the City as a whole? In that Black District, voters at least had two decisions, not just one. For the run-off, voters in the Black District again get a two-for-one deal. Despite such benefits to the black community in off-year elections, African-Americans do not seem to take local elections more seriously than whites, and perhaps less so.

Will either of us vote in the run-off? That will be up to the media and the extent of news about the election. *The Sun* has the opportunity to examine its role in the process, and that of local media, by following the coverage provided for the upcoming run-offs for the two races at stake, for the 1) Commissioner at Large, and 2) Token Black Commissioner.

One issue I have not addressed may determine what I do. The *Sun* devoted extensive space during the week before the election to publicize the Public Records Act, and its limitations by public officials trying to avoid disclosure. No mention was made about City policy and practice for withholding public records or demanding exorbitant amounts before research would even begin for record inspection. In 2012, the *Sun* followed closely the City's demand for \$39,000 in advance from a former employee to see the e-mails she had written or received, before the City Attorney would even start a search. The series is provided here.

The final report is a judgment in favor of the City, which in effect allows Gainesville to charge what the traffic will bear. In that case, a judge issued a protective order which allowed former City Attorney Marion Radson to give a deposition without any public scrutiny. That same jurist, Judge Toby S. Monaco threw out claims without explanation that Gainesville had refused to provide any records at all, about the practices of hiring outside counsel and paying as much as \$900 an hour for attorneys to cover up some of the practices mentioned earlier. I certainly will vote if the candidates are quoted appropriately about their views concerning the release of public records and the outrageous charges by Gainesville.