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OPINION

Times recommends

Yes on three St. Petersburg referendum questions

IN ADDITION to the Penny for Pinellas referendum, St. Petersburg voters will find three other ballot questions on the Nov. 7 ballot. None of them are controversial, and all of them should be approved.

Charter amendment

The St. Petersburg city charter bans City Council members from directing or requesting the appointment or removal of city employees except for certain senior management, which is as exactly as it should be in the strong-mayor form of government. However, council members should be allowed greater latitude in expressing their individual opinions about the mayor's personnel decisions.

This charter amendment would allow council members to individually express their opinions about the mayor's creation of new management positions. It also would allow them to express opinions about hiring or firing staff who work for the council, and about appointments to city boards or commissions.

On the St. Petersburg city charter amendment, the *Tampa Bay Times* recommends voting **Yes**.

Referendum 1: Walter Fuller Park

Since 2009, the nonprofit St. Petersburg Baseball Commission has operated and maintained a city-owned baseball complex at Walter Fuller Park through a series of short-term leases. If voters approve this referendum, the city could negotiate a long-term lease with the baseball commission of up to 20 years in return for the commission investing at least \$300,000 in improvements. Any long-term lease would have to be approved by at least six members of the eight-member City Council.

This continues to be a good public-private partnership. This referendum has nothing to do with a proposal two years ago to build an 1,800-seat baseball stadium at Walter Fuller with county resort tax money, which went nowhere. Any concerns involving noise, parking or other issues could be addressed in negotiations for a long-term lease with the baseball commission. On St. Petersburg Referendum No. 1 involving Walter Fuller Park, the *Tampa Bay Times* recommends voting **Yes**.



Vinoy Renaissance Resort & Golf Club

As shown in this rendering, with the referendum the Vinoy would elevate eight tennis courts by one story to create space for about 270 parking spaces underneath on land behind the St. Petersburg hotel.

Referendum 2: Vinoy Resort

This referendum would enable the Vinoy Renaissance St. Petersburg Resort & Golf Club to elevate eight tennis courts by one story to create space for about 270 parking spaces underneath on land behind the hotel. A one-story parking garage with tennis courts on top should not be controversial and would mirror the existing parking and elevated tennis courts next to it.

More than three decades ago, voters approved an exchange of property with the city along the downtown waterfront that helped spur the reopening of the historic Vinoy hotel in 1992. The swap included restrictions on the 4.3 acres traded to the hotel to be kept as recreation open space such as tennis courts. In 1997 and in 2007, voters allowed part of the property to be used as a ballroom, health club, parking under elevated tennis courts and other improvements. This referendum would allow parking below elevated tennis courts on 2.3 acres now covered by ground-level tennis courts — and nothing else.

When it reopened, the Vinoy helped spark the city's downtown revival. There is a public interest in its continued success, and this additional parking would not be intrusive or alter the character of the property. On St. Petersburg Referendum No. 2 involving the Vinoy, the *Tampa Bay Times* recommends voting **Yes**.

Yes on improvements for Clearwater

In addition to the Penny for Pinellas referendum, Clearwater voters will be asked to amend the city charter to allow modest improvements along the downtown waterfront. This is another key step for the impressive Imagine Clearwater plan to remake the waterfront into an attractive destination with more amenities and plenty of open space. There is no formal opposition, and city voters should approve the referendum.

Last year, Clearwater voters approved three incremental steps toward enhancing the waterfront. Those referendums allow the city to make modest improvements to the small downtown marina, move and expand the band shell in Coachman Park and expand the uses of the city's attractive library on the downtown bluff overlooking the harbor. Now it's time for voters to take the next step.

The amendment on the Nov. 7 ballot would allow improvements on the downtown waterfront such as playgrounds, water features, artwork and restrooms. That is why I stand with the American Academy of Pediatrics in urging Congress to extend CHIP funding for five years immediately.

Imagine Clearwater is the master plan to revitalize the downtown waterfront that was approved by the



HR&A Advisors

Proposed renovations to the downtown waterfront in Clearwater include playgrounds, water features, artwork and restrooms.

City Council in February. It will include a new Coachman Garden with a modern playground near the library, a grand entry at the site of the existing Har-

borview Center, and the Green that would include a new bandshell where there is now a parking lot. The city is close to selecting a design consultant and expects to get a design completed within six months of the referendum. City officials hope much of the work could be completed within the next three years.

Even after this referendum, there will be more hurdles to jump before the revamped downtown waterfront reaches its full potential. For example, the Florida Legislature needs to approve legislation next spring to remove outdated language from state law that bans carnivals or shows of any kind on the property where the new band shell would be constructed. When redevelopment proposals are ready in the next few years for the Harborview Center and City Hall sites on the bluff above the waterfront, city officials anticipate voters also would be asked to approve those proposals.

Those decisions are all in the future. The November referendum only allows modest improvements to expand and enhance green space along the waterfront. It enables the Imagine Clearwater plan to keep moving forward, and it is essential to the revitalization of the entire downtown. On the Clearwater referendum question on improvements to the downtown waterfront, the *Tampa Bay Times* recommends voting **Yes**.

Your letters


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Las Vegas massacre

Seize killer's wealth

In the aftermath of the Las Vegas massacre, all our thoughts are on the "why" — which we may never know. The issue of the NRA and weapons possession is another issue for our politicians to struggle with.

All our hearts ache for the victims. I think that the wealth of this reported multimillionaire — every penny of it — should go to the injured victims who will need financial support for their medical and emotional recovery and to the families of those he killed. My thoughts and prayers are with them.

Patricia Knees, Sun City Center

Problem with large events

After the heinous act of a radicalized serial shooter in Las Vegas, we will hear many politicians offer prayer, condolences and deepest thoughts for the victims. That is well and good, but we need legislative action to bring the sale of assault weapons under control. Recent history tells us we will not see any such action.

In absence of gun control, it is time to rethink how we live in this society. The victims and survivors alike were cordoned into a concert by temporary fences — caged if you will. This circumstance made shooting them easier and rescuing the injured much more difficult. I ask our local and state leaders to immediately ban the caging in of our citizens at local concerts such as those periodically at Straub Park in St. Petersburg or Coachman Park in Clearwater.

The NRA will not come after our leaders for such

Children's Health Insurance Program

Renew children's insurance fund

As a pediatrician in training, I have seen how essential the Children's Health Insurance Program, or CHIP, is in keeping our nation's children healthy. Yet Congress missed the Sept. 30 deadline to extend CHIP funding, and now 9 million children are at risk of losing insurance. That is why I stand with the American Academy of Pediatrics in urging Congress to extend CHIP funding for five years immediately.

CHIP, known as KidCare in Florida, is a federally funded program that provides affordable, high-quality health care coverage to children across the country. Nearly 375,000 Floridian children rely on CHIP because their families do not qualify for Medicaid but also do not earn enough to buy private health insurance.

Since CHIP was enacted 20 years ago, the share of uninsured children nationally has been cut in half. In Florida, health insurance coverage for children is at an all-time high of 93 percent.

As a former mathematics teacher in a low-income neighborhood, I witnessed firsthand the effects of inadequate health coverage on my

students. Many missed school due to their own illnesses or injuries, and often needed to stay at home to care for an ill younger sibling because their parents could not afford to miss work. Parents had to decide between buying groceries or picking up the prescription given to them by the emergency department for their child's ear infection or sore throat.

Because of CHIP, my students could get routine checkups and sick visits, immunizations, affordable prescriptions, diagnostic testing, inpatient medical and surgical care, dental and vision care, mental health services, and the list goes on.

I thank Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Fla., for co-sponsoring the Keep Kids' Insurance Dependable and Secure (KIDS) Act of 2017 to extend CHIP funding for five more years, and I urge Sen. Marco Rubio to join him.

Dr. Saira Ahmed, Bethesda, Md.

The writer, a second-year pediatrics resident, grew up in Belleair Beach.

actions, and thus they may find the courage or spinal column to act on simple legislation like this. Then we can start talking about how to prevent large gatherings of more sitting ducks, like stadium sporting events. Sure, there will be repercussions

for such legislation. What concert organizer would want to organize a concert with "open boundaries"? But such are the costs living in a society without the ability to control instruments of mass casualty simply because industry leaders are unwilling

to sacrifice the profits they make from them and because politicians fail to honor the 2nd Amendment's requisite of a "well-regulated" militia.

Brad Rosenheim, St. Petersburg

Restrictions have support

As a former hunter and member of the NRA, I say that today is the day to discuss legitimate firearms restrictions. It is time for the NRA and our elected representative to stop making excuses about the purported evils of gun registration and restrictions.

The Second Amendment was not approved by the Founders so that all Americans could have the use of any class of firearm they desired, whenever and wherever they wished. (The murderer in Las Vegas could probably have defeated the Continental Army single-handedly with his cache of killing machines.) Requiring background checks for gun sales is not aimed at building a shadowy governmental database to spy on all gun owners and eventually seize all their guns. Semiautomatic and automatic rifles are not hunting tools; they were developed for war and are strictly people-killers.

A vast number of NRA members approve of legitimate gun restrictions.

Arthur N. Eggers, Tampa

Share your opinions

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