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# Editor's Note

## Educating Peyton

Doctors, lawyers, dentists, veterinarians – all spend about eight years in higher ed. They study, they learn, they acquire debt, and in the end, they emerge, girded with knowledge and prepared for their next endeavor.

And so it is for our outgoing mayor, who last week took a moment to reflect on his term and to offer the benefit of his acquired wisdom to the field of mayoral candidates. So what has John Peyton learned after eight years at “Jacksonville University”? Simply this: that his own candidacy was an exercise in hypocrisy.

He didn't put it that way, of course. But he did disavow every strategy, endorsement and tactic that made him a viable candidate in 2003, and ultimately allowed him to crush his opponents, despite not having an ounce of elective experience. The people he knocked out, it's worth remembering, had lots and lots of experience — Matt Carlucci, Ginger Soud, Jim Overton, Tommy Hazouri, Nat Glover, Mike Weinstein and Betty Holzendorf among them. Many of them also had specific proposals for how to run, or improve, city government. Peyton did not. His campaign deliberately —

used this kind of thoughtful response as an excuse to attack. He sent out one flyer that read: “Matt Carlucci and Mike Weinstein believe YOU DON'T PAY ENOUGH TAXES ALREADY! THEY BELIEVE GOVERNMENT ALWAYS NEEDS MORE OF YOUR MONEY.”

In the end, the financial emergency that Peyton's opponents were smart enough to fear came to pass. Property valuations plummeted, tax revenues dried up and Peyton was forced not only to raise taxes, but to impose and/or increase fees on everything from garbage service to stormwater to park entry. Lesson learned. Credit hours: 4.

With the benefit of his taxpayer-subsidized education, Peyton has also learned that the priorities he highlighted upon entering office — streamlining government, reducing bureaucracy — may not be the city's most pressing needs. Asked by the Times-Union what big issues the next mayor must address (part of a “wide-ranging interview” with the paper on his seven-and-a-half years in office <http://bit.ly/gPLEpJ>), Peyton identified these priorities: “finding a way to pay for indigent health care” and “taking care

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strategically — kept things “vague,” promising to run government “like a business” and to make schools “more accountable.” (A typical 2003 headline in the Times-Union: “John Peyton: He has broad message now; details later.”)

Where Peyton *was* specific was in his pledge to “fight any tax increase,” under any circumstances, “without exceptions” — a promise his opponents simply weren't comfortable making. Glover called it “pandering” and noted in the case of an economic emergency, the city might have to consider raising the property tax rate. Peyton

of at-risk kids.” Grade: pass. Credit: transferable.

Perhaps the biggest lesson Peyton wants to impart to his successor is that the political endorsements that carried him to victory are suspect. The support of the police and firefighters unions provided essential support in 2003, plastering Jacksonville with signs, adorning fire trucks with Peyton placards, and getting out the vote in force. But Peyton 2.0 says anyone who accepts the union endorsement should be viewed as tainted; a sellout to union demands. Grade: Fail. Credit: None.

With the 2011 mayoral contest well underway, Peyton told the Times-Union that he planned to act as a “reality check” during the election, making sure “things being said are intellectually honest.” Which is kind of hilarious, considering that his own candidacy was so calculated and cynical. Peyton The Candidate was not only *not* intellectually honest, he was the very picture of pretense — making impossible promises, dodging genuine policy discussions, making compromised alliances for political gain.

Hindsight is one thing. But true learning requires a degree of self awareness — and a willingness to acknowledge when one's personal mythology is pure fiction.

We welcome Peyton's enthusiasm for continuing education, as well as his desire to share all he's learned. It's just too bad that after eight years, we have so little to show for his sheepskin. □

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