

## MARIETTA DAILY JOURNAL

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### EDITORIAL | OUR VIEW

## New SPLOST committee has big job ahead

Efforts to persuade Cobb voters to approve this November's referendum on whether to extend the county's SPLOST for six more years are gathering steam.

A new committee was unveiled Tuesday to take the lead on those efforts. It will be co-chaired by Marietta lawyer Justin O'Dell, an articulate and savvy veteran of past pro-SPLOST efforts; business consultant Dale Hughes of Kennesaw; and South Cobb Redevelopment Authority member Darhyl Watkins, who lives in the Smyrna/Vinings area and works as a global client advisor for the Oracle Corp. Serving as treasurer for the group will be Steve LaMontagne, a partner at Moore Colson.

"There's the group of people that have supported (SPLOSTs) in the past and different working groups that have come together to support them. So, everybody begins talking about how we're going to get the information out there to the voters," O'Dell told the MDJ.

The group also has enlisted the services of political consultant Jeremy Brand, who ran Cobb Commission Chairman Tim Lee's successful re-election effort in 2012 and who this spring played a similar role for District 1 Commission hopeful Bob Weatherford's successful campaign for the GOP nomination.

The six-year special purpose local option sales tax would raise an estimated \$750 million for Cobb County, much of it going for local road and transportation needs.

The pro-SPLOST group's slogan will be "Secure Cobb's Future," and the three co-chairs put out a joint press release Tuesday that spelled out their position.

"The projects in the 2014 SPLOST are lean and necessary to secure Cobb's future," they stated. "This is an important opportunity to

continue to do something positive for Cobb in regards to transportation, public safety and quality of life, and we cannot afford to let it pass us by."

The new committee will have its work cut out for it. As those who follow local politics well know, SPLOST elections in Cobb typically are decided by razor-thin margins.

The current tax was approved in 2011 by just 79 votes out of 43,000 cast. And the reapproval of the prior SPLOST in 2005 was just as dicey. It won by just a 117-vote margin out of 40,000 votes cast.

Critics say, with some merit, public officials here and elsewhere have become so reliant on SPLOST funding the tax should no longer be considered "special"; and say SPLOST lists often are padded with "wants" rather than being limited to "needs."

Passage of a state law allowing for "split-penny" or fractional SPLOSTs would put pressure on local bodies to downsize the scale of their SPLOST programs, but the state Legislature has thus far refused to change the law to allow them. Thus, we're stuck with the existing SPLOST setup, which is not without its advantages.

Not only do SPLOSTs do away with the decades-long costs to taxpayers associated with bonded indebtedness — and not only is a considerable portion of the SPLOST paid by non-residents who happen to pass through the county — it also spreads the cost of transportation improvements onto the very substantial portion of the Cobb population that does not pay property taxes but nonetheless uses the roads. The alternative to non-passage of the SPLOST, after all, would be to shift those costs into the General Fund budget.

There are other SPLOST arguments to be made as well, and we're sure we'll all be hearing plenty of them in the days between now and November.



### COLUMNIST | GEORGE WILL

Putin's ambitions, fueled by anger, are ...

## 'HITLERIAN'

The Islamic State is a nasty problem that can be remedied if its neighbors, assisted by the United States, decide to do so. Vladimir Putin's fascist revival is a crisis that tests the West's capacity to decide.

Putin's serial amputations of portions of Ukraine, which began with his fait accompli in Crimea, will proceed, and succeed, until his appetite is satiated. Then the real danger will begin.

Suppose Ukraine is merely his overture for the destruction of NATO, the nemesis of his Soviet memory. Then what might be his version of the Gleiwitz radio station episode 75 years ago?

On the evening of Aug. 31, 1939, Nazi SS personnel pretending to be Polish partisans seized the station, which was about four miles inside Germany (Gliwice is now in Poland), proclaiming that Poland was invading Germany to achieve "our just [territorial] claims," and shot a German prisoner dressed in a stolen Polish uniform, giving Hitler his pretext for declaring war the next day.

Putin has discarded the minor inhibitions of what NATO calls his "hybrid war" — giving slightly surreptitious aid to Russian separatists; brazenly infiltrating Russian soldiers in unmarked uniforms. Russia has invaded Ukraine, although the Obama administration likes the semantic anesthesia of calling it an "incursion." Putin does not pretend that it will be, like President Nixon's 1970 "incursion" into Cambodia, temporary.

Suppose Putin, reprising his Ukrainian success, orchestrates unrest among the Russian-speaking minorities in Latvia, Lithuania or Estonia. Then, recycling Hitler's words that his country "could not remain inactive," Putin invades one of these NATO members. Either NATO invokes Article 5 — an attack on any member is an attack on all — or NATO disappears and the Soviet Union, NATO's original *raison d'être*, is avenged.

Although no one more detested Hitler than Gen. Erwin Rommel served, Winston Churchill acknowledged in January 1942 in the House of Commons the talent of Britain's enemy: "We have a very daring and skillful opponent against us, and, may I say across the havoc of war, a great general."

Putin is, the West should similarly acknowledge, more talented and dangerous than either Nikita Khrushchev or Leonid Brezhnev. Their truculence was not fueled by fury. Putin's essence is anger. It is a smoldering amalgam of resentment (of Russia's diminishment because of the Soviet Union's collapse), revanchist ambitions (regarding formerly Soviet territories and spheres of influence),

cultural loathing (for the pluralism of open societies) and ethnic chauvinism that presages "ethnic cleansing" of non-Russians from portions of Putin's expanding Russia.

This is more than merely the fascist mind; its ethnic-cum-racial component makes it Hitlerian. Hence Putin is "unpredictable" only to those unfamiliar with the 1930s. Regarding resentment and vengeance, remember where Hitler insisted that France formally capitulate in 1940 — in the railroad carriage near the town of Compiègne, where Germany signed the 1918 armistice.

Since its emancipation by the Soviet Union's demise, Ukraine has been ravaged by corruption that frays national sentiment, which even before this was a tenuous phenomenon. In "The Long Shadow: The Legacies of the Great War in the Twentieth Century," David Reynolds of Cambridge University cites a British diplomat's 1918 analysis:

"Were one to ask the average peasant in the Ukraine his nationality, he would answer that he is Greek Orthodox; if pressed to say whether he is a Great Russian, a Pole, or an Ukrainian he would probably reply that he is a peasant; and if one insisted on knowing what language he spoke, he would say that he talked 'the local tongue.'"

Ukraine may be an ethnic casserole susceptible to diminishment by Putin's ladle. But the Baltic States, by virtue of their NATO membership, are, regardless of their histories or sociologies, decisively different. And given Putin's animus, nourished by his negligibly resisted success in Ukraine, he is more dangerous than the Islamic State.

This group is perhaps 20,000 fighters possessing some artillery and armor but no air force. It is an island of tenuously occupied territory in a sea of hostile regimes — those of Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria, Iran, Iraq and Iraq's Kurdish region, which has its own regime. These command approximately 2 million troops who, with ample air power, can pulverize the Islamic State whenever the regimes summon the will to do so.

U.S. participation in this should be conditional on the regional powers putting their militaries where their mouths (sometimes) are in the fight against radical Islamists. U.S. participation in defense of the Baltic States is unconditional.

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### COLUMNIST | DAVID IGNATIUS

## Confirm the ambassadors

Talk about America's decline is usually wrong. But how else would you describe a country that, in a world of exploding tensions, is unable to confirm dozens of ambassadors to foreign posts because of partisan political squabbling?

Even by Washington standards, the Senate Republicans have hit a new low for hypocrisy. They denounce President Obama's inaction on foreign policy — and simultaneously refuse to confirm his nominees for U.S. ambassadors to such hotspots as Turkey, on the front lines against the Islamic State, and Sierra Leone, epicenter of the Ebola outbreak.

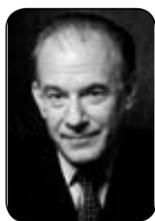
Let's say it plainly: This is how nations lose their power and influence, when they are unable to agree even on basic matters such as diplomatic representation. The decision-making system breaks down, and the public is too bored or disunited to take action. Sadly, that's a snapshot of America in 2014.

The State Department says it has 65 nominees awaiting confirmation. A few of them are ill-prepared political appointees who bungled their confirmation hearings and, frankly, should be withdrawn. But 40 of them are career diplomats with distinguished careers whose only misstep was to get caught in the

Washington morass of partisan politics. The average wait time for nominees who managed to clear the Foreign Relations Committee and the Senate floor is 237 days.

Here's a map of America's dysfunction: Eleven of our empty embassies are in Africa, where disease and terrorism are spreading, and countries are desperate for American leadership. Nine are in Eastern Europe, where Russian President Vladimir Putin is on the march. Six are in East Asia, where China is flexing its muscles. Worried about the Middle East? Sorry, but we lack ambassadors to the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, in addition to Turkey.

The State Department's Foreign Service doesn't even have a director-general. Arnold Chacon, a distinguished career diplomat, has been waiting 326 days for confirmation. John Estrada, a decorated former sergeant major of the Marine Corps who was born in Trinidad and Tobago, has waited 394 days to be confirmed as ambassador there. The Senate hasn't confirmed assistant secretaries of



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state to oversee the United Nations, or arms control negotiations, or global energy affairs.

Consider Guatemala: Senators give windy speeches about stopping that country's migration of undocumented children. Yet for 86 days, they have stalled the nomination for a new ambassador to Guatemala, who could deliver the message in person.

Sometimes in Washington, you can say that the problem is everyone's fault, or nobody's fault. But that isn't the case here. This one belongs to the Senate Republican leadership. Apparently, they want to make Democrats pay a price for removing the filibuster power. Republicans on the Foreign Relations Committee, including Sen. Robert Corker, the ranking member, are said to favor a deal that could break the logjam. But no: It's payback time.

Ambassadors matter, even in the age of Twitter. They can open the door at a key ministry, or introduce a prominent business official. The State Department estimates that this year, U.S. businesses have sought embassy help in \$119 billion in contracts in countries where we have no ambassador (a list that includes France, Ireland, Norway and Finland).

The Obama administration is all but pleading for action. Officials have signaled

they would support a plan to allow the 40 career diplomats to be confirmed as a group, the way military promotions are, and save the partisan rancor for the political appointees. No deal, so far.

A wise move for the administration would be to pull nominations that were mistakes. Find a replacement for the fundraiser nominated to be ambassador to Oslo, for example, who described one of Norway's ruling parties as extremist. Withdraw the nomination of the money-bundler pegged for Argentina, a country he said he had never visited and whose language he barely speaks. Ask the soap opera producer waiting for a star turn in Budapest to find another way to serve her country.

Once the list is pared to nominees who are clearly qualified to represent America, this issue should be a no-brainer. The world is a mess these days, and nations need a diplomatic connection to a United States that values and respects them.

Yet when the world looks to Washington, what do they see? A capital in decay, whose embittered politicians can't even agree on ambassadors.

David Ignatius is a columnist for The Washington Post.