



VOTE NO ON GAINESVILLE MUNICIPAL REFERENDA 1

Busting Myths about the GRU Authority Referendum

The Alachua County NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice Committee (ECJC) focuses on community issues affecting the quality of life and economic equity for all citizens in Gainesville and Alachua County. Environmental Justice recognizes that environmental benefits and burdens are not shared equally among all residents. Consequently, Environmental Justice issues are also civil and human rights issues.

“Gainesville Municipal Referenda 1” is such an issue. If this referendum passes, Gainesville’s citizens would lose control of our utility, GRU. Our Gainesville city charter would be amended to pass control to an unpaid, unelected, governing Authority, operating under a new state law. All of our City Commissioners oppose this measure. Advocates of this assault on home rule speak glowingly of the benefits that would flow to the city’s citizens and businesses if voters turn over power to an Authority that would operate without having to answer to anyone-- even though the city is still the owner of GRU! These benefits are mythical.

Myth #1: Rates would go down if the new GRU Authority is created

FALSE: Nothing in the referendum requires or suggests lowering rates. Once appointed, its members can decide to raise or lower rates, or reduce transfers that currently cover over 30% of Gainesville’s general fund budget (paying for fire and police, transportation, social services, parks etc.). Reduced transfers would mean increased taxes or decreased services like programs that help low income residents lower their bills, provide more energy efficient, affordable housing, and support living wages.

Myth #2: The GRU Authority would be an “independent” board

FALSE: The GRU Authority would be controlled by a new state law with NO local checks and balances that we now have when we elect our City Commissioners, who appoint our Utility Advisory Board. Independent boards come in many forms, but leave certain powers for the city commission and require accountability to citizens. This Authority does neither. Currently, we can amend our Charter locally under Home Rule but the referendum would delete our power and transfer that control to state lawmakers instead.

Myth #3: GRU would be better-run by the GRU Authority

FALSE: GRU is the most diversified utility in Florida, providing not just electricity, but high quality, clean water, plus wastewater and natural gas. We have the highest percentage of renewable fuels including solar and biomass. Our existing Utility Advisory Board includes

diverse members with finance, law, conservation, business and engineering experience, who are developing a comprehensive Gainesville Energy Policy to lead GRU into the future. Other communities have stripped citizens of their power, leading to negative consequences. Flint, Michigan is an example of what can happen when unaccountable state mandated authorities take over local water systems.

Myth #4: Gainesville City Commissioners support this referendum

FALSE: Contrary to the claims made by Keith Perry's campaign advertising, all current City Commissioners are on record OPPOSING this referendum, which would take away local control over the future of our public utility as well as the largest part of our city budget, and leave us at the mercy of the new state law crafted in secret and passed by politicians in Tallahassee. This misleading information illustrates why we don't want state politicians determining the future for our Gainesville utility.

Our community needs to stop scapegoating GRU, and address current economic inequalities that are linked to unequal energy burdens. Compared to the average Alachua County household that spends 5.5% of income on home energy costs, low-income families spend an average of 14% of their annual income on utility expenditures, primarily because their homes are older and less efficient, and they do not make living wages. City commissioners have a responsibility for the well-being of the city, including GRU's obligations to the community, and must listen to citizen input or risk being voted out of office. Maintaining local control is the best way to guarantee government's responsiveness to the quality of life and equality issues affecting our community, including the availability of affordable, more efficient homes, and living wages for all members of our community.

Evelyn Foxx, President, NAACP Alachua County Branch

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For more information, and to read the full text of the referendum:

<http://www.gru.com/AboutGRU/DidYouKnow.aspx>

The NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice Committee meets every third Tuesday of the month at 5:30 pm at the Wilhelmina Johnson Center. For more information, or to learn more about our activities, contact us at: naacpecjcnv@gmail.com.