



Commissioner Bryan Eastman
200 E University Ave,
Gainesville, FL 32601

October 30, 2024

Speaker Pro Tempore Chuck Clemons,

I have received your letter and, as both a ratepayer and someone mentioned by name in it, I feel I have to respond.

On November 5th the ratepayers of GRU will have the opportunity that they were deprived of in 2023: to have their voices heard. Thousands emailed you, drove up to Tallahassee to beg you, and called your office pleading for you to put the HB 1645 to a vote of all GRU ratepayers, *including those in the unincorporated service territory*. You refused to do that.

Now they have that opportunity: By voting “yes” they will directly elect the people who control their utility, by voting “no” they keep the status quo of a GRU that answers only to the Governor.

It’s a question that will decide our community’s future for the next 100 years. There is nothing in your bill that stops the voters from that fundamental right. A judge has never ruled in Florida history that residents can’t alter their own charter via a vote just like this. Our Commission has worked diligently to both give the GRU Authority every tool they need while also giving our residents the right to decide their own future.

Last year the City Commission handed over \$2 billion in taxpayer owned assets to the GRU Authority, finalizing the “transition”. We handed the Authority an historic \$315 million debt reduction plan. We slashed the general fund transfer to one of the lowest in the United States.

It is surprising to read that you didn’t see this as a “viable plan”. It was praised as “very favorable” by bond ratings agencies and earned the city a bond rating upgrade as a result. Not only that, *but it went even further than your plan*: while your 2018 GRU Authority bill would have, at most, reduced the transfer to \$32 million by 2024, ours cut that in half to a mere \$15.3 million.

But the results have been heartwrenching. We’ve cut city expenditures by \$11.9 million and eliminated 161.5 positions in the past two years. Many good people lost their jobs, residents are getting less services, paying higher taxes, yet still not seeing any reduction in GRU rates.

We have tried to make your Charter amendment work. The former GRU Authority Chair called portions of HB 1645, "clear as mud". The Governor couldn't follow it, and appointed people that illegally lived outside the City, forcing a court ordered mass resignation in March. There have been 7 resignations from this board in less than a year - *a board of only 5 people*. Again we worked through it, but it has been a challenge for everyone involved.

This was not our fight. None of the current City Commission was in office during the biomass plant, and only one of us was in office during the period the Auditor General outlined in his report. Today there are more people that played a role in those mistakes in leadership at the GRU Authority than there are on the City Commission - a sad and ironic twist.

The "clashes" you reference aren't coming from the Commission but from GRU ratepayers themselves. They have watched their utility be taken from them without their consent. They've watched as programs they support, like solar net metering, support for small businesses, and veterans programs have been gutted. They were shocked to see governor appointed board members given lucrative jobs leading GRU without a public search. They've seen their ratepayer money be used illegally to influence the outcome of this election with inserts sent in their GRU bills. I hear from them everyday, they are passionate about this issue.

The lawsuits you refer to were almost entirely filed by these local ratepayers, not the City Commission. No lawsuits have been filed by the City since the Authority has been seated. The "Local Public Utilities" referendum was put on the ballot after dozens of ratepayers filled City Hall in April begging us to do so. This is not being driven by the City Commission, but by the people we both represent.

Instead of threatening the livelihoods of 2,000 police, firefighters, lineworkers, and engineers by "considering the dissolution" of the City of Gainesville, I would encourage you to come to Gainesville and make your case to the voters yourself. Gainesville isn't Tallahassee, bullying and threats don't work very well here, but conversations do. Meet with ratepayers, tell people why they should vote no, and hear from them directly.

We look forward to hearing from you, and anyone else in the legislative delegation who would like to come together to find solutions. While we may not always see eye-to-eye, our constituents are your constituents, and we can find solutions that work for everyone.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bryan Eastman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Bryan" and last name "Eastman" clearly distinguishable.

Bryan Eastman
City Commission, District 4