

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR - Thursday, April 20, 2017

1. There won't be a second chance Dear Editor, Preservation and protection of Cumberland Island has been a concern of mine for more than 40 years. From the early 1970s, when whole-scale development threatened, through the condemnation and eviction of early subdivision developers, to the government purchase of some large tracts of island land, the national park began to take shape. Obviously, it remains a work in progress. Development, which has claimed most other islands, has been an ongoing occurrence on Cumberland. One common misconception regarding the island is that all the landowners support the goals of the National Park Service (NPS) for protecting it. Even historian Mary Bullard, herself a Carnegie heir, pointed out that most Carnegie heirs — not all — supported NPS efforts to acquire the island. In 2004, in a step to weaken the protection of the seashore, one family got a congressman to remove the beach, north end and Main Road from wilderness designation protection so they could continue to drive their commercial vehicle tours, which had been curtailed. This time, the threat comes from a younger generation with property on the island. Developing these holdings would undermine the intent of the legislation creating the park. Cumberland Island is both a national park and a global biosphere reserve, elevating this threat of development to a national and international level. It is a local issue only in that county officials must make the decisions determining its fate. There is no satisfactory compromise possible between the park service mandate and private development. Rezoning and subsequent development would erode away the very thing that attracts more than 60,000 people a year to St. Marys and Camden County and would reduce the value of the island to humanity. After all the time and money invested in creating the national seashore, and its years of constituency, the public outcry will be enormous. We can only hope that the Camden County commissioners will listen and protect this goose that laid the golden egg for the county. There will be no second chance. Carol Ruckdeschel
2. Cumberland Island In-holdings don't belong to public Dear Editor, I read with interest the piece in the April 13 edition opinion section of the Tribune. I was glad to see landowners state their case and some useful information in support. It seems to me that any reasonable person would agree that owners of land, be it Cumberland or elsewhere in the county, should be afforded use of their own property to build homes for their children and grandchildren. I also learned from the letter that much of what has been reported in print and on social media has, in fact, been false or greatly exaggerated, apparently to incite public reaction. The families seeking rezoning had a long record of stewardship and this is what I believe they will continue to pass down from one generation to the next. I have a love of Cumberland like anyone who has experienced this island. I do not want the park endangered by overflowing development, but this is clearly not what the families seeking rezoning are considering. I hope that people who are on the fence on this issue, reasonable people, would educate themselves before entering blindly into the fray of opposition who have mounted a campaign often based on distorted facts. The national seashore belongs to all the people of the United States. The acreage in discussion does not. Ask yourselves, "How would I react if the fate of my 130- year owned family land was being debated by people I have never met?" I reached out to one of the authors of the piece. Maybe some of you should, too. Kathy E. Long

3. Kingsland Board shouldn't rezone island Dear Editor, Regarding the requested zoning change on Cumberland Island: The original stated intent was 87 acres and up to 10 home sites. Now it appears the entire north end of the island encompassing about 1,000 acres with an undefined number of home sites is under consideration. If bold action is not taken to protect this gem of a pristine barrier island, we risk losing this unique natural habitat for all generations to come. Current Cumberland Island land owners knew the restrictions and did not have an issue when they acquired the land. Additionally, they enjoyed little to no property tax liability for many years. Times do change and so do attitudes of subsequent generations and this is what makes zoning so important to help maintain Cumberland Island as it is today. Economic impact on St. Marys has not been defined, but over time there is no doubt there will be a decline of tourists passing through St. Marys. Getting solid information on this topic has not been easy. The more I read and hear on this topic, the more I believe this zoning request is another example of those of "means and influence" changing existing rules to suit their personal desires under threat of litigation. I too believe in personal property rights, but I also believe in the precept of the "greater good" of all citizens now and for generations to come. I know avoiding litigation is a primary goal of the board of commissioners, along with the potential of increased property tax revenue; but this should not cause the board to make a decision that is just not right for Camden County or the domestic and international tourists who travel here to enjoy Cumberland Island in its natural state. I respectfully request the board deny the zoning change request. Ricky A. Heidgerken St. Marys
4. Why ruin coast when there's a single trajectory? Dear Editor, In regard to the rezoning of 1,000 acres on Cumberland Island, is this an outrageous move that could result in this world-renowned local gem being ruined as a pristine wilderness, part of the spaceport scheme? Back in 2015, one of the industry's hired guns pushing the spaceport said to me, "What if Cumberland Island's residents weren't an issue?" Was this plan to sacrifice our island paradise in the works even back then? We have seen, from shenanigans at the capitol and elsewhere, that this project is being frantically pushed from the highest levels. An extremely influential group of people has quite a stake in having a spaceport here, despite the fact that there is only one economy-killing trajectory out of Harrietts Bluff, where attempted launches would close both waterways adjacent to Cumberland Island and our National Seashore. Not only that, but Kings Bay Naval Submarine Base is in the launch danger zone. Everyone should ask themselves: Why is it so important to have a spaceport here when there are many unused spaceports around the country costing their towns and states money they don't have? It is ridiculous. And why are some government officials willing to look the other way despite the fact a spaceport here is obviously a very bad idea? The answer could stop this spaceport and the damage to our beloved Cumberland Island in its tracks. Like many in Camden County, I have been doing a lot of research since 2015 on spaceport companies and will continue to do so. There are questions being raised about what they are actually doing, besides wasting taxpayers' and investors' money. What it is starting to look like, especially if you check out the videos of some of their launches, is a scam of epic proportions — with the scope of the deception being larger than anyone realizes. Why are the spaceport's out-of-town backers willing to ruin the largest wilderness on the entire eastern seaboard, when there is only one barely, if at all, viable trajectory? Is the idea of space travel

more important than the actual practice? The spaceport pushers thought they could roll into town and bamboozle us local yokels into accepting anything they offered (e.g., bankruptcy, ruined water and land, threatened wildlife). Like they were told back in December of 2015, “If (you) do come here, be aware that (your) every move will be minutely scrutinized, analyzed and reported on, as will any waste of taxpayer money. You will be under the microscope here in Camden.” To our county commissioners: I have defended you vigorously, in the press and personally, saying you were being led astray. Do not be fooled. Don’t be the emperors with no clothes, using our hard-earned tax dollars to pay for the invisible thread. You — and we — will starkly regret it in the long run if you fall for what is, in my opinion, a long-running swindle. And everyone else, please do your research. We can stop this debacle if we bring just the facts to the fore. Terri Keller Kingsland