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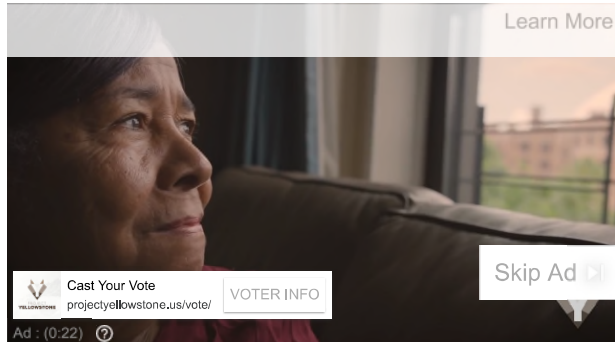
JEA interim CEO: 'I fully sit here intending to pursue the rol...

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JACKSONVILLE, Fla. -- JEA's interim CEO Aaron Zahn unveiled the utility's motto as "BE BOLD." He believes it's a motto that will help take JEA into the future by embracing technology and expanding its solar footprint.

After unseating interim CEO Melissa Dykes two weeks ago, Zahn says he is the best man for the job.



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"I was previously a CEO and a chairman of a water company," Zahn said. "I've also been on the board of a number of other companies."

However, he hasn't worked in electric yet, which he admits.

Despite his lack of experience, he insists he's prepared to be a leader in hurricane season, thanks to his team, namely Dykes.

As far as privatization goes, he says they are moving on.

"As far as I understand, the mayor and the city council have all come to an agreement on that," Zahn said.

Going forward, he'll be reporting to City Council and the Mayor, whom he plans to meet with regularly.

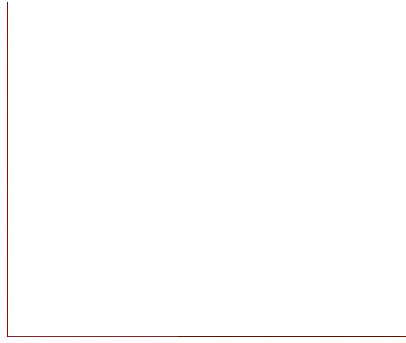
"A lot of people claim ownership of JEA and at the end of the day, what is a city but just a collection of all of us people?," he said. "So, as a philosophical question of who really owns it, the people of the city of Jacksonville own JEA, right? But the city is an institution that is run by an elected group of individuals and as a result they are the ones that dictate how the proceeds that we provide as contribution is distributed back to the people of Jacksonville."

As the search is on for a permanent leader for JEA, Zahn admits he wants the job.

"I fully sit here intending to pursue the role of permanent CEO because I believe that the next CEO will provide the skill sets that candidly I provide," he said.

Even as interim CEO, he can't shake the weight Plant Vogtle has placed on the company. With ongoing litigation, he can't say too much about the process, but he can say that they want out, which has never been a secret.

"Our belief is that our partners didn't live up to our side of the bargain, in terms of getting things done on time and on budget so certainly we will look at the best ways to hold them accountable to that," he said.



We asked Zahn, before he shifted into the top office, if he thought Dykes could handle being CEO? He said, "yes." So why challenge her position, especially as a newcomer?

"I would argue there's a lot of people who could handle the job of being CEO, my argument was a little bit more nuanced than that," Zahn said. "The job of CEO is now a two-person job, that when you are starting to look at the strategy of a large, multi-billion dollar company over a 5 or 10 year period in a changing market environment, you now need a CEO who thinks about strategic vision who can work with the media, the public stakeholders, city council, the mayor, and that's a full-time unto itself which requires a certain level of skill sets which I found myself readily suited for, and then there is another job which is the present COO, which maintains the focus on the customer and also takes care of our employees and the unbeatable team that serves them."

He says Dykes is happy and even brought First Coast News by her office to ask her in person.

"Melissa, are you happy?" Zahn asked.

"Yes," said Dykes. "We are partners and we have to work together to serve, ultimately serve the city who owns Jacksonville as well as serve our customers."

Zahn says the board will soon reveal her new contract, including her negotiated salary.

Zahn plans to meet more frequently with city leaders. He says even when he was interviewing for the job at the beginning of April he met with each board member for one to three hours privately to discuss his qualifications.

We asked how his meeting went with City Council President Anna Brosche.

"I think it went great actually. She is a smart and intelligent person that has a core belief of where she thinks the city should go. Candidly, I think our visions are very well-aligned," he said. "She certainly expressed some concerns, which I think some of the conversations and some of the decisions I've made over the last two weeks have started to alleviate."

We asked President Brosche how the meeting went with Zahn. She sent us this statement:

"Mr. Zahn and I had a one-on-one meeting the day after he was named Interim CEO; we were joined by Melissa Dykes. We had a 45-minute meeting in which he shared his perspective of his role as Interim CEO, and his message was very consistent with what he shared with the JEA Board in connection with his selection as Interim CEO. I thought we had a respectful meeting in which we both shared and listened. As it relates to the past and how we got to this point, he said he "could not unring the bell." I appreciated and accepted such a concept and said the same: I, too, could not unring the bell of my own experiences in the last months. I was very honest with Mr. Zahn and let him know that, in the context of the last months and how he was selected as Interim CEO, I did not trust him. He understood and said he would work to earn my trust."

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