



2020 FLORIDA HOUSE DISTRICT 11 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

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1. **About You:** What qualifications in terms of education, experience, and prior community service do you bring to your candidacy for public office? Please explain what motivates you to run for office at this time?

I am a fifth generation Floridian and Jacksonville native. My family has had a presence at the Beaches for over 100 years. Most of my family members graduated from Fletcher including my 96-year-old grandmother who was in the class of '42. I have a degree in political science and history from the University of North Florida and a law degree from the St. Thomas University School of Law. For the past 23+ years I have been licensed to practice in Florida and the federal courts. My work has varied from representing employers and claimants in workers' compensation cases, representing individuals in employment discrimination cases, restoration of civil rights, criminal defense, and constitutional law issues. Part of my practice includes appellate law. I have been successful in several cases of first impression in Florida which means my cases were the first on that issue to be decided by a court.

I provide pro bono legal advice and services to people who cannot afford an attorney. My pro bono work includes assisting the family of Elian Gonzalez to stay in our country, as his mother perished escaping communist Cuba. From 1998 through 2014 I volunteered in every election as an attorney poll watcher to ensure the integrity of our elections. I have assisted legal immigrants becoming American citizens. My entire life I have been an active member of my church and the charitable causes the church performs in the community.

I am motivated to serve in elected government to keep the government accountable to the people. Whether in a courthouse or the State House my one constant is upholding my oath to the Constitution. Sadly, too many who take the oath have no basic understanding of the limitations on government. It frustrates me greatly that people need to hire attorneys just to get government to do its job. Government should work for the people not the people for the government. Ultimately, when we people ask me why I run, I give them two numbers 6 and 17. These are the ages of our children. We have been blessed to grow up in a nation of economic opportunity, prosperity, security, and liberty. As my political hero President Reagan said, "Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do

the same, or one day we will spend our sunset years telling our children and our children's children what it was once like in the United States where men and women were free.”

2. **Priorities:** If elected, what will be the top three priorities for District 11 you plan to address?
 1. **Economic recovery in number one. The shutdown associated with the pandemic has been devastating to individuals and businesses. My office has assisted hundreds of constituents with receiving their benefits and helped scores of businesses reopen in some capacity. With economic recovery comes the need to diversify the state economy. Tourism is a large part of our revenue and is vital to District 11. The pandemic has shown that this reliance can be risky and that diversification into manufacturing is necessary.**
 2. **Our state and district are blessed with amazing shared natural resources. The legislature has made it a priority to preserve these resources by appropriating billions of dollars to restore, preserve and protect our beaches, waterways, wetlands, and forests. As our population continues to grow, we must be ever vigilant to be good stewards for future generations.**
 3. **As the district continues to grow, pressure is put on an aging infrastructure. I will continue to work with Senator Bean and our local partners to provide state resources to improve roads and water mitigation projects in the district.**
3. **Beaches Priorities:** If elected, what issues do you intend to address that will benefit our beaches communities?

The priorities are really not different from the answers in the previous question. The beaches are growing and changing. I have seen that change take place over the course of my entire life. Quality of life is why I raise my family here as do so many others. With proper planning, growth and quality of life are not mutually exclusive. The state is working hard to ensure that the coastal communities have the necessary infrastructure to support a growing population while protecting our shared natural resources.

St. Johns River: If elected, what will you do to protect the St. Johns River? What would you support to address any impacts to the St. Johns River caused by the dredging?

The same as with growth, economic activity and preservation of our natural resources are not mutually exclusive. Thousands of families in our region rely on the economic activity at the Port of Jacksonville and millions rely on the goods that flow through the port every year. The state works closely with our partners in the federal and local government to mitigate the impacts of dredging and commercial activity at the port.

One of the issues I have worked on in Tallahassee is the problem of biosolids entering the river in the central part of the state. Because the St. Johns flows north, those pollutants eventually make their way to our portion of the river. I will continue to fight to prevent biosolids being dumped in the river. I have also worked with fishermen and boaters on the issue of invasive

plant species in our waterways and the best way to limit their harmful impact. Some are concerned with the chemicals being used to kill the plants and I have addressed those concerns with the state DEP. The St. Johns Riverkeepers are a tremendous resource and I appreciate their willingness to help educate me on preserving the quality of the river.

4. **Home Rule:** In 1968, the people of Florida approved a new state constitution which expressly conferred “home rule” powers upon all Florida municipalities. With home rule powers, Florida’s 411 municipalities do not need to wait for legislative authorization to address local needs. Instead, municipalities can exercise any power for municipal purposes, except for local taxing authority and when expressly prohibited by state law.
 - a. Do you support continuation of broad Home Rule municipal powers to ensure that municipalities are responsive to the unique needs and preferences of their citizens?
Yes.
 - b. If re-elected, would you oppose efforts to preempt municipal Home Rule powers or otherwise limit the power of local citizens to govern themselves?
Yes, unless the power being exercised by the local government infringes on a constitutional right or is overly oppressive to constituents.
 - c. What have you done (or will you do) to either support and expand Home Rule or limit Home Rule?
Just as there is a natural tension between the state and federal government so there is between the state and local government. This will always be the case as long as we remain a republic. Fortunately, I have great local partners, not every one of my colleagues can say the same. The state gets involved when local governments attempt to exceed their authority. The best way to keep the state out of local business is for the League of Cities and the Association of Counties to rein in their overreaching members instead of trying to protect them.
5. **Vacation Rentals:** For several years, vacation rental lobbyists have been trying to pass a bill that would pre-empt all regulation of vacation rentals to the state. What is your position on the state taking away the ability for local governments to regulate vacation rentals?
During my time in Tallahassee I have opposed the proposed changes to the vacation rentals law. I have worked directly with Mayor Latham and constituents in Jax Beach to oppose harmful legislation and will continue to do so. We need a law that punishes the bad actors without harming the property rights of others.
6. **COVID-19:** What would you do (or have you done) to support beaches businesses and residents who have been impacted by COVID-19?
When the pandemic first hit, Esther sewed masks and we delivered them to people who couldn’t or had difficulty leaving the house. I have participated in conference calls with UF Health and other healthcare professionals during the pandemic to get the best information possible and then share that information with my constituents. I and my office have assisted hundreds of individuals and businesses to get assistance and navigate the shifting landscape of mandates and orders coming from state and local government. I’ve spoke with religious leaders concerned about the infringement on religious liberty and freedom to worship. I have and will continue to support additional financial resources for those impacted by the government-imposed shutdown. Lives and livelihoods both matter. We

have learned some tough lessons during this year. I will take that knowledge and the shared wisdom of all the people I have communicated with back to Tallahassee when I return next session.

7. **Unfunded Mandates:** Unfunded mandates have a major impact on our city budgets. What will you do to make sure our local governments will not be saddled with the cost and burdens of unfunded mandates from the state legislature?

Article VII, section 18 (the Unfunded Mandates Provision) affords constitutional protection and limits the ability of the Legislature to impose unfunded mandates on local government. The state constitution requires a 2/3 vote of both the House and Senate before an unfunded mandate can issue. This constitutional limit was designed not to hamstring the state Legislature but to require thoughtful and deliberate action, as well as overwhelming support, before the state can require a local government to pay for a state mandate. Currently neither party has a super majority therefore any mandate requires bi-partisan support in both chambers. Every bill analysis on a proposal with an economic impact on local government is required to have analysis on the local impact. Typically, these types of bills have important consequences impacting safety and welfare. For example, requiring building inspectors to do more when inspecting buildings in costal regions. I support the super majority requirement and will continue to do so.

8. **Right to Vote for Ex-Felons:** In 2018, Florida voters approved Amendment 4 that restored ex-felons with the right to vote. In 2019, Governor DeSantis signed a law restricting that right. Do you support the law the Governor signed? Why or why not?

It is an important part of my faith as a Christian to believe in redemption and second chances. I have put that belief into practice as an attorney by helping literally thousands of Floridians of every race, color, creed and faith to restore their civil and constitutional rights and once again become full participants in our society. Before Amendment 4 was ever put to the people I filed legislation that would have allowed felons the opportunity to petition a court for full restoration of their rights. I held a press conference in the capitol and was joined by Democrat colleagues and Black pastors who supported the legislation. This bill was modeled on what other states are now doing. I believe my approach was the better one and would have avoided the politicization of the issue.

But that is not the path the people of Florida chose when they passed Amendment 4. The proponents of the amendment told the Supreme Court of Florida that the amendment included a requirement to pay all fines, costs and restitution. This is a matter of public record and not up for debate. Justice Pariente, even asked the question about the importance of making victims whole before the ballot language was approved. The legislature passed an implementing bill that I supported that followed the language of the amendment based upon the testimony by the proponents before the Supreme Court of Florida. The courts now will decide the issue. I will continue to fight for restoration of ALL rights which Amendment 4 does not do.

9. **Charter Amendments:** What is your position on the following proposed Constitutional amendments that will be on the General Election ballot? Please explain why you support or oppose each amendment.

- a. **AMENDMENT 1: Citizenship Requirement to Vote in Florida Elections-Support**

- b. **AMENDMENT 2: Raising Florida's Minimum Wage- In politics, well-meaning people want to reach the same destination, but travel different paths to get there. Increasing wages is one of the prime examples. I want wages to rise but fear the unintended consequences on the people it purports to help, especially as we try to recover economically from the pandemic.**
 - c. **AMENDMENT 3: All Voters Vote in Primary Elections for State Legislature, Governor, and Cabinet- Oppose.**
 - d. **AMENDMENT 4: Voter Approval of Constitutional Amendments- I am still researching the mechanics of this proposal on the process and have not reached a final decision.**
 - e. **AMENDMENT 5: Limitation on Homestead Assessments-Support. This is an important amendment that extends from two to three years the Save-Our-Homes benefits which is a great benefit to our senior population.**
 - f. **AMENDMENT 6: Ad Valorem Tax Discount for Spouses of Certain Deceased Veterans Who Had Permanent, Combat-Related Disabilities-Support. Florida is the most veteran friendly state in the nation and this amendment bolsters this status by giving a homestead property tax discount to the surviving spouse of a veteran with permanent combat-related disabilities. This is a great benefit and is a recognition of the sacrifice made by military families to the defense of our state and country.**
10. Communication with Your Constituents: It is important that citizens are kept informed about State issues that impact our quality of life. In the past, it has been our experience that once elected, we never see or hear from our Tallahassee officials again. How will you change that precedent? Will you commit to regularly scheduled office hours at the beaches?

I can't speak to the practices of those who came before me but I can tell you that it was and is one of my priorities to have an office at the Beaches that is staffed full time. That has been my practice for the last four years. During my first term my legislative office was in the same building as my law office. During the most recent term I moved the office to save the taxpayers money and provide a more usable space for my staff. I am available for meetings both in the district and in Tallahassee and commit to doing so during the next two terms.

I have always enjoyed providing a legislative update and answering questions from constituents at a Beaches Watch meeting. This year was no different as I had my office reach out to BW during session to schedule a legislative update. Due to the pandemic the legislative update was cancelled. Instead, BW decided to have the Beaches mayors provide the legislative update. Even then I reached out to BW to offer to join the meeting or offer any information BW might need on what transpired in Tallahassee. I look forward to meeting with BW next year for a legislative update, hopefully in person.

11. Other Issues: Are there any other issues you would like to address if elected? Please explain.