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## Candidates for Florida Senate and House of Representatives speak out

**Rodney Long (D-Gainesville), a candidate qualified to face Keith Perry (R-Gainesville) in the Nov. 8 election for Florida Senate District 9, stands behind a table in Williston at the June 24 candidate forum. Perry did not attend the forum. Long mentioned there is no need to look for his name or Perry's name on the Aug. 23 primary ballot, because their election is in November.**



**By Jeff M. Hardison © June 28, 2022 at 7:12 a.m.**

**WILLISTON** – Among the many candidates at the candidate forum in Williston on June 24, candidates who want seats in the Florida Senate and Florida House of Representatives shared insight with listeners.

Rodney Long (D-Gainesville) is qualified to face Keith Perry (R-Gainesville) in the Nov. 8 election for Florida Senate District 9 (Alachua, Levy and Marion counties). Long spoke to the people. Perry sent his apology for not being able to attend, candidate forum emcee Pastor Johnnie Jones III said.

Brandon Peters (D-Williston) who has qualified to face Eva Olysha Magruder (D-Gainesville) in the Aug. 23 Democratic primary election for the Florida House of Representatives District 22 (Alachua, Gilchrist and Levy counties) presented his platform. Magruder was absent from this forum.

Also in the Florida House of Representatives District 22 (Alachua, Gilchrist and Levy counties) race and qualified for the Aug. 23 Republican Party primary are Ty Appiah (R-Bronson) and Chuck Clemons (R-Newberry). Neither Appiah nor Clemons were at this forum, either.

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## **Rodney Long**

### **Rodney Long speaks to the people.**

Rodney Long first shared with listeners a bit about his campaign revisions caused by the redistricting in Florida.



When he first began seeking election to the Florida Senate, it was District 8 where he would qualify, Long said. That included Alachua, Marion and Putnam counties. Redistricting changed his district to become Florida Senate District 9, which includes half of Alachua County, and all of both Levy and Marion counties, he added.

While the district lines have been revised, Long said, his commitment to service and his platform remains the same.

As he introduced himself, Long said he is the husband of Carol Martin. They have five adult children, three of their own and two adopted. They have 11 grandchildren, he said.

Long said he and his wife own a small business in Gainesville.

In regard to public service, Long has been on the Gainesville City Commission as mayor. Elected for three terms on the Alachua County Board of County Commissioners, Long served two terms as chairman.

Long was elected as president of the Florida Association of Counties and served two terms in that office. He served at the National Association of Counties as well, and he was chosen by colleagues to visit The White House to speak with President Barack Obama about issues affecting counties.

He then spoke about a couple of issues he believes are important to Levy County, where he could help if elected to the Florida Senate.

Long believes there must be a method so that the people of Levy County do not have to drive 45 minutes or longer to reach hospitals in Alachua or Marion counties for emergency care.

As a state senator, Long wants to work on finding what needs to be done for all of the infrastructure in this region of Florida, including emergency healthcare facilities able to treat people with trauma or needing surgery.

Another issue Long wants to tackle in the Florida Senate is to provide reliable, relatively inexpensive Internet access for the people in Florida Senate District 9, and in other rural communities where people are not served or they are underserved in contrast with more urban parts of the state.

The candidate said he has experienced cell service failures in this region of Florida as well.

He then spoke about more general ideals.

“I believe in local home rule authority,” Long said. “I do not believe that one size in Tallahassee fits all.”

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Long said he believes that Perry, the Republican he will face in the November election, is a one-size-fits-all type of Tallahassee politician.

“I will not take for granted that just because my opponent has an ‘R’ behind his name (as a Republican) that you are going to vote for him,” Long continued, “just like I will not assume that just because I have a ‘D’ behind my name (as a Democrat) that you are going to vote for me.”

Long said he is speaking to people of all political parties, or no political party.

“We may disagree on some issues,” Long said, “but I assure you that those issues we agree on – those are the issues we are going to work on. So, if you are a local elected official, you have my promise. I will push back on any attempt to preempt local government.”

Long pointed out specifically, too, that he opposes the state putting a toll road through Levy County.

“Do you want to know who voted for that bill?” Long asked. “He is not here tonight to defend himself, but when you see him, you ask him – Why did he vote for the toll road through Levy County? You need to ask him. His name is Keith Perry, in the event you have ever heard of him.”

## **Brandon Peters**

**Brandon Peters speaks to the people.**

Brandon Peters is extremely active in his campaign to be elected, making this at least the second appearance at a forum for



candidates to present themselves in Levy County, which is his home county.

As he opened his presentation, Peters shared that he and his wife Stacey Robertson Peters moved to Levy County in 2015 because they prefer rural Florida in contrast with urban Florida.

His core messages have remained the same. He wants to keep this district rural, and is especially against a toll road being built through the area. Another of his key messages is that he wants counties to have more say about what happens there, in contrast with having to bow to the whims of the majority of Florida Legislators, who have been known to impose unfunded mandates as well as to tell county residents what to do in a cookie-cutter one-size-fits-all approach to governing.

Beyond that, this attorney has explained his intent to work with every member of the Florida Legislature, regardless of party affiliation, to help Levy County and the other rural counties of Florida.

Peters said that Clemons voted on May 1, 2019, in favor of Senate Bill 7068, when Clemons

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was in the Florida House of Representatives. That bill created M-CORES, which is Multi-use Corridors of Regional Economic Significance.

This created a possible plan for toll roads connecting from Naples to the Georgia border with Florida, Peters said. The Georgia governor, Peters continued, asked the Florida leaders why they were sending 20 million hurricane evacuees from Florida to Georgia, when Georgia does not have enough motel rooms to house them.

Peters said that when Clemons first took office, he was a “small government guy,” meaning that the state representative “who believed, until he didn’t, that the best government is the government closest to the people.”

On April 27, 2021, Peters said, Clemons voted for Senate Bill 100, which did away with the toll roads from Naples to Georgia. This bill, Peters said, created a special toll road that goes through Sumter, Marion, Citrus and Levy counties.

Senate Bill 100 passed in the Florida House of Representatives, with Clemons voting in favor of it, Peters said, adding that Clemons promoted this bill, which “... will take away the life we want here” in rural Florida.

This coming vote in November, Peters said, given that he wins the Democratic nomination and that Clemons wins the Republican nomination, will be a choice about leadership. It will be a choice about policies.

Peters went on to say Clemons says he did not vote to build toll roads, but instead simply voted to study the idea of building toll roads.

“Well let me tell you about Chuck Clemons’ study,” Peters said. “The study, in Senate Bill 100, goes on for not one year, not three years -- 30 years. He wants to study the toll road for 30 years.”

Peters said M-CORES died in 2019, because the three groups studying this idea said there is no need for toll roads in Levy County.

“But they resurrected in it in what he (Clemons) calls a 30-year study,” Peters said. “Guess how much they need to study this toll road for 30 years – over one billion taxpayer dollars. That is after spending tens of millions of your dollars to study it the first time.”

Peters repeated that he is a man who believes the best government is the government that is closest to the people.

“When you have one party rule in a place like Tallahassee for 30 years, which we have had, what happens is you start getting elected officials who are no longer responsive to the needs and the interests, and preferences, of the voters they have the honor and the privilege to represent.

“That is who Chuck Clemons is,” Peters said. “He is bowing to the demands of the toll road builders, the asphalt-paving industry (and) the developers who want to come and tear this community apart.”

Instead of that, Peters said, people can vote for him, because he wants to preserve the power in the county commission, city councils and school boards because “We know what we need in our neighborhoods and we know it best.”

During the question and answer period, Peters said he welcomes the chance to work with Republicans.

He has been an attorney for 30 years, and a mediator for 15 of those 30 years.

“My stock in trade is cutting deals with people who normally don’t get along with each other,” Peters said. “They don’t necessarily see eye-to-eye on every issue. But, my goodness, my wonderful wife Stacy – there she is – we don’t see eye-to-eye on every issue, but she is my best friend in the world.”

Peters said he builds consensus. He spoke with Sheriff Bobby McCallum about the needs of

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the Levy County Sheriff's Office. He learned that the 9-1-1 Communications Center needs some work.

"I'm going to be the guy who goes to Tallahassee and fights for Levy County's needs," Peters said, "whether its for law enforcement, or grants to build affordable housing, or hospital money so that we can have a medical campus here. It is outrageous that a pregnant woman should have to drive for an hour and a half in a fetal emergency, to get emergency obstetrical care at Shands."

Peters said part of this choice by voters is a difference in style.

Some people deep in the heart of Gainesville, Peters said, think the best way to communicate with people is to shout at them through a megaphone, while they use labels and names.

"I think it's better to concede right out of the blocks that we're not going to agree on everything," Peters said. "But, instead, to find the common ground and work toward solutions that meet the most important needs of the most people."

As he concluded his presentation, Peters said he will serve the people of the district if he is elected. If not, he will return to his practice as a simple country lawyer.