

Florida Citizens for Social Reform (FCSR) Holds Judicial Candidate Forum to Educate Voters on Importance of Judicial Elections

Florida Citizens for Social Reform recently organized and held a forum designed to bring together over 200 local voters to hear directly from Pinellas/Polk County judicial candidates.

(Clearwater, FL) June 10, 2014 – As an organization which encourages citizens to actively participate in the political process and takes steps to educate them on how to change public policy, [Florida Citizens for Social Reform](#) (FCSR) recently held a judicial candidate forum to allow prospective voters the chance to meet extensively with 11 candidates running for five circuit court judicial seats to better understand their background, capabilities and community involvement. The event, held Saturday, May 31 at The Fort Harrison in Downtown Clearwater, was attended by over 200 citizens including community leaders, elected officials and candidates running for other offices in the area. The forum also featured keynote constitutional scholar and speaker, Jo Ann Palchak, whose honors include being recognized for her work in criminal defense and white collar crime; being designated as a “Leader in the Law” by the Florida Association of Women Lawyers; and twice honored as the Pro Bono Attorney of the Year in Hillsborough County.

Guests at the judicial forum were privy to a short briefing on the role of the U.S. Constitution as a guiding document for judges, presented by Palchak, as well opportunities to register to vote and meet with the following judicial candidates prior to the election:

- Laura Snell
- Susan St. John
- Kenneth Lark
- Alicia Polk
- Alan Scott Rosenthal
- Brian Battaglia
- Kimberly Sharpe
- Amanda Colon
- Philippe “Phil” Matthey
- Jon Newlon
- Bruce Boyer

During the two-part discussion following Palchak's presentation, each candidate was first given an opportunity to introduce themselves and speak briefly about their background before participating in a question-and-answer session in which the candidates were asked a question concerning a matter that relates to the law, the improvement of the legal system or the administration of justice.

While judicial candidates cannot take positions on various issues, [FCSR](#) co-founder Brett Miller maintains that it is important for voters to understand each candidate's background, capabilities and community involvement – which Miller says the knowledge of is severely lacking among voters with numerous national studies proving “most judicial races tend to be “low-information elections” that don't draw a lot of attention from voters.” (1)

“Historically, we've seen a limited number of seminars for judicial candidates to interact with voters and very little initiative to change that – but judges hold an enormous amount of power,” said Miller. “They make critical decisions that affect the economy, environment and the lives and freedom of members of the community – as such, every voter should make it a priority to familiarize themselves as much as possible with the candidates and let their voice be heard with the cast of a vote.”

In addition to allowing voters the opportunity to assess each candidate's qualifications, two other focuses of the forum were to provide overviews and information on two critical and controversial upcoming ballot initiatives: the legalization of marijuana for medical use and a proposal to radically change the funding and scope of public transportation in Pinellas County.

Legislative candidates, sitting judges and elected officials also attended and offered guests the opportunity to discuss various concerns, opinions and programs, several of whom offered positive feedback on the seminar:

“I believe attending forums for judicial candidates is so critical. They have the most difficult campaign to run since they cannot discuss their positions on issues. They represent the third tier of government and make decisions that impact many people daily.” - Representative Kathleen M. Peters, Florida House District 69

“Thank you for planning, organizing and hosting the FCSR Judicial Forum at the Ft. Harrison on May 31. It was a fabulous and very well-attended event! I really appreciate what a wonderful opportunity it was for me to personally meet people in the community and interact with voters. Thank you for all of the hard work you

and the other members of FCSR put into making this forum a success!"-Laura Snell, Judicial Candidate for Circuit Court, Sixth Circuit, Group 1

"The Judicial Candidate forum provided just the right amount of awareness of criteria to judge judges, and ability to hear values from each candidate. In addition to being the most professionally run forum it provided me with decision-making information to make a better informed choice on the ballot." - Don Ewing, President of Haruspex Business Software and Board Member Clearwater Regional Chamber of Commerce

"[It was a] great event and a great opportunity to make a decision on the judicial candidates." - Mark Weinkrantz – Candidate for County Commissioner, District 4 in the 2014 election cycle.

FCSR's primary function is to provide a forum where other non-profit groups, elected officials, candidates and community leaders can educate citizens, and in turn hear back from citizens.

"We strive to bring to light the issues that will impact our community and address them in a way that allows citizens to make valuable contributions," said Miller.

For more information about Florida Citizens for Social Reform, visit www.floridacsr.org.

About Florida Citizens for Social Reform (FCSR):

Founded by Brett Miller, Steve Sigal and Joanie Sigal, Florida Citizens for Social Reform (FCSR) is a non-profit, non-partisan advocacy organization founded in 2004 by individuals concerned with the potential for escalating social unrest caused by inadequate life skills. FCSR believes it holds a responsibility to take an active role within its surrounding communities and to support well-intentioned policy makers and administrators in their mission to raise the quality of life for all citizens. Through educational seminars, candidate forums, our website, events, lobby efforts and other forms of communication, FCSR seeks to influence public policy to create a better quality of life for us all. FCSR advocates for improvements in public policy and the implementation of effective programs which are designed to reduce dependency and increase competence and participation.

1. Landry, Melissa. "Judicial Elections Important: Don't Let Someone Else Speak for You on Election Day." N.p., 29 Oct. 2012. Web. 3 June 2014. thepelicanpost.org/2012/10/29/judicial-elections-important-dont-let-someone-else-speak-for-you-on-election-day/.