

Florida State Representative (District 76)
Candidate Question- 2024

Name: Jim Blue

Date: June 13, 2024

Why are you the right choice to be the State Representative for Charlotte County?

I am the right choice because I am committed to bringing new and fresh ideas to the legislature. I want to foster collaborations to effectively and efficiently bring forth best practices and programs, working with all levels of government and private and public enterprises to solve our pressing economic issues and build even better communities.

All of Florida is so dependent on the environment for our economy and lifestyles, especially in coastal and agricultural communities like District 76. I know that we can find better ways to grow our tourism, health care, and agricultural businesses while keeping environmental sustainability front and center. We have to recognize and face climate change head on. Babcock Ranch is a good example of the forward thinking and planning that Florida governance should be supporting in planning for rising sea levels and catastrophic weather events.

As the state representative for District 76, I will work to make sure we have strong public education systems, pre-K through higher education, that attract families, students, and the best educators. Education is fundamental to providing a strong workforce and attractive, safe communities. We are fortunate to have both FGSU and FSW in the district. I would support collaborating with these educational institutions at every opportunity.

Finally, I want to represent all the citizens of District 76 no matter what their party affiliation might be. Democrats, Independents, and Republicans—we are all in this together. If we blend our voices, we can thrive and grow.

What initiatives do you propose to improve access to affordable homeowners insurance for the residents with our district?

Florida has long been known for being an affordable place where business and people can thrive and District 76 citizens should have the freedom to know that if they work hard, they'll be able to afford a better life for their families. While the cost of housing, property and auto insurance, and utility bills in our state are out of control, the current governmental practices have been to give tax breaks and handouts to the same developers, insurance companies, and corporate utilities that are price gouging District 76 residents out of our homes.

Floridians deserve reforms right now to our property insurance market that put consumers first by providing coverage that is available, affordable, and accountable to the policyholder. We should be putting money back in the pockets of Floridians through direct subsidies from the state's budget surplus, capping premium increases in the short term, and increasing oversight of insurance companies.

To achieve affordability relief, the legislature will need to look at creative ways to incentivize partnerships with multiple levels of government, the private sector, and nonprofit organizations to address these concerns. These are complex issues that require both immediate action and long-term planning. We can't just hope that climate change and hurricanes go away and that somehow property insurance and hurricane damage won't be as bad as all the evidence predicts they will be.

How do you intend to support small businesses and foster economic growth within our community?

Access to funding remains a critical concern for entrepreneurs entering the marketplace. However, solutions such as low-interest loans, grants, and forums for angel investors are making significant strides in other regions. It's imperative that we adopt and expand these strategies locally.

To build a robust entrepreneurial ecosystem, collaboration is key. By partnering with local Chambers of Commerce and educational institutions, we can create a network that supports new businesses and avoids the pitfalls of isolated efforts.

Visibility and support for free business development programs like SCORE are essential. These federally-backed resources are available but often underutilized due to a lack of awareness. Local and state leaders must champion these programs, ensuring they reach those who need them most. Additionally, establishing a SBA Women's Business Center would provide crucial education and support, fostering greater inclusivity and empowerment.

Regular networking opportunities are another critical component. Governmental levels can collaborate by providing venues for these events and fostering connections that drive innovation and growth.

Diversification is the lifeblood of a healthy entrepreneurial ecosystem. We can draw inspiration from small cities like Savannah, which successfully attracted entrepreneurs by offering \$10,000 seed money and essential infrastructure. Given our district's demographics, we should also encourage and support "encore entrepreneurs" who have much talent to offer the business

community. These incentives and programs can be adapted at the community level to stimulate growth and attract new talent.

Furthermore, we should look to successful models like The Collaboratory in Fort Myers. This co-working space offers community, education, and essential resources such as internet access, creating an environment where new businesses can thrive.

By implementing these strategies, we can create a dynamic and supportive environment for entrepreneurs, driving economic growth and innovation in our community. By working together to make our region a beacon for entrepreneurial success.

Please answer each question in 300 words or less and email back to bwhite@charlottecountychamber.org on or before July 12, 2024.