

Transcript for file Collier County District 4 Candidate Forum – May 3, 2022
78 minutes in length

Speakers:

Daija Hinojosa

Daniel Kowal

Michelle McLeod

Penny Taylor

Moderator: Mike Lyster

<http://tv.colliergov.net/CablecastPublicSite/show/1506?channel=1>

[session begins 01:50:06]

Mike Lyster: Good evening. I'm Mike Lyster, president of the Collier Citizens Council. On behalf of the Collier Citizens Council, Greater Naples Leadership, Naples Better Government, and the League of Women Voters, I'd like to welcome you to District 4 County Commissioner Forum. Thank you for participating in this forum. This forum is being broadcast on Comcast 97 and Summit 98. It will also be available through the county's website. Thanks to the county for the use of the commission chambers and to Troy Miller for assisting with the broadcast.

A special thanks goes to Nancy Kerns, our Collier Citizens Council forum chairman, Ruth Prescott, and Bob Raymond who worked diligently to make this happen tonight. Tom McCann, our experienced moderator, has graciously agreed to be our moderator for the event, and Bob Raymond will be our timekeeper. I would ask those in attendance to silence their cell phones. Tom, it's all yours.

[01:51:12]

Tom McCann: Thank you, Michael. I would like to add one note of thanks, as well. Nancy Kerns has really been the force behind this forum. She found the venue, coordinated the plans with all the sponsors, drafted and published today's program, organized the volunteers, worked with all the candidates, and publicized the forums. So, I think we owe her a real thanks.

Let's review the ground rules, the details for the forum. There will be two minutes for all candidates to give an introduction. Following will be a series of rotating questions with up to two minutes to respond. So, you'll each be the first one to respond to the question as we rotate around. You'll take turns. Candidates will have two minutes for the closing comments. We welcome questions from the audience. Please fill out the index card, and it will be collected. And please refrain from applause until the end of the program.

As far as the timekeeping, Bob Raymond will be the timekeeper using the chambers' timekeeping system. The yellow card will indicate that you have 15 seconds remaining. Do you have a yellow card there to show them? Thank you. And the red card indicates the response time is up.

Unknown Male: [inaudible 01:52:33]

Tom McCann: Okay. So, the yellow card is 30 seconds. So, if there are no questions, why don't we begin with the **opening statements**. We're going to begin with-- now, wait a minute. I've got this right. Ms. **[mispronunciation 01:53:01]**.

Daija Hinojosa: It's Daija Hinojosa.

Tom McCann: All right. Daija. Ms.--. I had better not try for too much at once.

Daija Hinojosa: No problem. Good evening, everyone. My name is Daija Hinojosa, and I am running for Collier County commissioner here in District 4 because I believe we need authentic leadership in government. And that's what I plan to do as your county commissioner. We need a leader who has vision and is able to manage all of the change that we are facing in our county right now.

This is my first time running for elected office, and as a newcomer on the block, I've got a lot to learn. And I have to say that I've really been up to the task this last year and a half with being able to become knowledgeable about the issues that you care most about.

My background is in business management. I have a major in the retail industry. I've managed stores anywhere from \$600,000 to \$13 million. I have a wide range of experience in managing for women's fashion apparel brands. I know how to manage large budgets, I'm a director of operations, and I've played key roles in leadership development in pretty much every organization I've ever worked for.

My leadership style is best described as flipping the pyramid. I truly believe that as a leader, you become the servant, and that's what I do. So, as county commissioner, the citizens are the ones that call the shots. And as a paying customer, you are the one that calls the shots, and I'm here to serve you.

The three things that I will champion as commissioner are going to be the proactive approaches to improving our water quality, encouraging diverse economic development, and adhering to the community vision for balanced growth. I believe in government transparency, leading with character and casting vision, and I am passionate about encouraging broad citizen engagement, and I'm going to bring a fresh perspective to the county commission. Thank you.

[01:54:57]

Tom McCann: Thank you. Mr. Kowal.

Daniel Kowal: Good evening, everyone. I would like to thank Nancy for reaching out to me and the other leaders of these organizations to allow me to speak before you today. I especially thank everybody that came here tonight, because this is so important that you get to know who's running for your commission seat. My name is Daniel Kowal. I'm a U.S. Army veteran. I spent the last 28 years of my life in law enforcement. I've just recently retired from the Collier County Sheriff's Department this last September with 18 years' service here of the people of Collier County.

My whole family lives here in Collier County - my wife, our six children, my parents, my in-laws, and now my new grandson. So, I have a lot vested in this county for decades after and so on - way longer than I'm probably going to be here on this earth. So, it's very important to me that we bring back more conservative smaller county government that works directly for you, the people.

Not the special interests and not the appeasement of the loud voice out there, but the true silent majority like you that live in this county that deserves better.

So, I promise that I will bring that fight and that attitude to the county government to make sure these things are dealt with properly for you, the citizens of Collier County. Thank you.

[01:56:27]

Tom McCann: Thank you, sir. Ms. McLeod.

Michelle McLeod: Good evening, everyone. Again, my name is Michelle McLeod. And I'll tell you a little bit about me and what differentiates me from the other candidates. First of all, I'm a third generation Floridian, raised in Fort Meyers. And with that, I bring a unique historic perspective to the table. I like to tell the story of growing up in Fort Meyers that my family and I rarely came to Naples, because why would you? There was absolutely nothing here. The only reason why you would come to Naples was for the Fort Meyers-Naples high school football games. And I remember vividly cheering on their field-- I was a cheerleader for Fort Meyers High-- and looking up in the Naples football stadium and realizing they were completely surrounded by the woods.

That just goes to show you what Naples was like just a little over 40 years ago. So, not only do I bring a unique historic perspective to the table, but I also bring decades of experience in business in both hospitality management and in banking. I also bring to the table a graduate degree with a concentration in finance and local government and policy-making experience. I previously sat on the Naples City Council where I helped lead the efforts of three significant landmark projects - the design and construction of Baker Park, the design and reconstruction of the city dock, and the design and construction of the Naples Emergency Operation Center.

All three of those landmark projects were started and completed within my term, all under budget. And as we all know, to accomplish such a thing in government-- not just one landmark project, but three-- in less than four years, all under budget is a tremendous feat. I bring these accomplishments to your attention so you see my strong leadership skills in working well on a board to reach consensus to get things done. I'm very proud of those landmark projects that benefit all Collier County residents, and I look forward to even greater accomplishments as your next county commissioner.

[01:58:25]

Tom McCann: Thank you. Ms. Taylor.

Penny Taylor: Thank you very much. And thank you again for this forum. It's very important. My name is Penny Taylor. I'm a 44-year resident of Naples, Florida. I got married, raised my daughter here. She graduated from Naples High School. I have roots here. I also have been very active in my community, and I became president of my neighborhood association in the 1990s and was lucky enough to run and win a seat on the Naples City Council in the year 2000.

I like to think that I brought in, with the rest of the people that served at that time, the new generation, the new century. I served for 10 years. And then I was also re-elected in 2014 to this seat, and I have served here with a great deal of humbleness, and I feel honored that the people have put faith in me to carry out the intricate and difficult and challenging and wonderful task of growing with Collier County.

The three areas that I am very concerned about is water. I work locally, regionally, and statewide on water issues, especially about Lake Okeechobee, because Lake Okeechobee is the heart of the Everglades. And the health of Lake Okeechobee means the health of our area.

Another area that I'm concerned about is development, over development, crowding too many people in too small spaces. We're bordering that right now, and I have great concerns. And finally, economic diversity. Because if we've learned anything in 2008, we know that our economy must be diverse. Thank you.

[02:00:30]

Tom McCann: Thank you. Our next question will start with Mr. Kowal. **What issues are very specific to District 4, and what are your solutions?** And I might note that during the break before this forum, several people said is there a way for you to have someone describe what the geographical boundaries are for District 4? So, you could either take a try or some of the other--

Daniel Kowal: I can definitely do that, yes. I've been walking it. I must look like a thorn amongst roses up here. I want to apologize. The three big are always the same. Always, water quality is a big one in District 4. Now a lot of questions that I'm being asked when I'm out beating on doors is traffic, the congestion, and housing affordability, especially for our essential workers. We're kind of pricing out our essential workers like our law enforcement, our EMS, our fire fighters, our teachers. They're being priced out of the market, especially in District 4.

District 4 doesn't have quite as much room or space left to really grow. We're pretty much built out. Especially closer to the city, there's nowhere really to build. So, the county itself is looking to the east, of course, for these larger communities to be built to relieve some of these issues like the traffic issues and the ability for these essential personnel to live within the community that they actually serve.

I know my experience with the sheriff's department that Sheriff Rambosk had to do something for retention of our law enforcement officers to the point where he had to let them take the cars all the way out of the county, which we've never done before. And that's because we have people who live as far as Cape Coral, people who live out in Clewiston that are working in your county to protect you every day. And if we don't make this a better place for them or a possible place for them to put their roots, they're not going to stay here. They're going to be hired guns, they're going to come and go, and they're going to go to the highest bidder in whatever city out there they can afford to live in.

And if we don't understand that public safety is not one of the most important things to this county, just watch what will happen if we start to lose the manpower and the great law enforcement that we are used to having here and the service that they provide. I know in New York City, they defunded one unit out of the whole police department and their murder rate went up 500%. It doesn't take much. Once the bad guy realizes that you don't have that protection anymore, you become prey. Thank you.

[02:03:07]

Tom McCann: Thank you. Ms. McLeod, in addition to answering that question about District 4 issues, would you give us a hand and describe what the geographical boundaries are?

Daniel Kowal: Oh, I forgot to do that.

Michelle McLeod: Yes. District 4 encompasses the areas between Pine Ridge and the East Trail from the beach to Santa Barbara is how I describe it. Yes? So, the question is what are the issues prevalent in--

Tom McCann: What are the particular issues in District 4?

Michelle McLeod: Okay. I filed to run for this seat back last summer, and I started walking door to door immediately. I started in Bay Shore. There are many, many issues in all of the different neighborhoods, and every neighborhood has its unique needs and concerns. In Bay Shore, when I first started there, there was a big concern with mosquitos. The mosquitos there are so unbearable that they were asking that we do something to help relieve mosquito issues, especially during the summertime.

And then also going door to door, most of the concerns that I hear from residents are related to growth and traffic. But in these last several months, top of mind for everybody is affordable housing and workforce housing. Another big issue in various neighborhoods are related to flood and storm water issues. That's another area that we need to focus in on. The county has plans to address many of these, but there are more issues coming up that we need to focus in on.

Also in District 4, we're starting to see a lot defunct golf courses starting to pop up. So, that's definitely an issue that we're going to have to address, and we'll see more of it. Traffic is an issue as well and what we can do to remedy these kinds of things. Two minutes doesn't allow me to address some of these items, but those are typically what I hear from residents in District 4.

[02:05:20]

Tom McCann: Thank you. Ms. Taylor.

Penny Taylor: Can I give you the geography of the district?

Tom McCann: Sure.

Penny Taylor: The Gulf of Mexico to I-75, Pine Ridge Road south to north of Davis. I-75 goes over to Santa Barbara. At Davis Boulevard, it comes on the south side to County Barn Road, and then it sweeps over to Rattlesnake Hammock and heads south from there. It's a district that added, I think, about 6,000 new voters.

There are three or four areas for District 4, but I think when you put District 4 in the context of the rest of the county, it is the most urban part of Collier County. And what that does is the pressure for redevelopment is huge. But also, the space is very small. So, we've got a lot of in-fill going on. What used to be a vacant lot has now got building proposed or a car dealership right next to residential who always thought that this was a quiet place.

We also have issues of tourism, because the beaches are in District 4 as they are in District 2. And tourism is the major economy. The major push of our growth has always been that way. It's the number one economic motivator. And we like tourists, but too much has been too much. And so, I think the city council, to their credit, has limited the parking along the beaches to Collier County residents, because that's what you should do.

Then we've got the challenge of boat ramps, and it's the same thing. How can we balance the taxpayer use of their facilities with the growth of tourism and people wanting to visit our community?

And finally, and the one that has hit the headlines - and it is probably some of the worst example of developer greed - is the conversion of golf courses to residential. When someone spends their life savings and builds on a golf course, and this is what they have and their view is the green, and suddenly, the proposal is to make their view a brick wall, there's something wrong here. So, we've got some challenges, but I think we're up to it. Thank you.

[02:07:58]

Tom McCann: Thank you. Ms. Hinojosa.

Daija Hinojosa: The top three issues that I've definitely recognized just from door knocking and talking to a lot of residents and a lot of community leaders is, one, it's no question that affordable housing and workforce housing is on the top. The thing with affordable housing is that we honestly would not even be able to meet the demand that we have for the need right now. And I think that it gives a lot of people a lot of false hope to sit here and say that we're going to be able to develop all these complexes within the matter of time that they need it.

The second issue is the over development-- that's been a big one-- which then runs into a lot of traffic issues. And with over development, I really want to make sure that I champion balance and cohesive building, making sure that we're focusing on redevelopment and not necessarily new development. Because I think there are a lot of areas especially along the US 41 corridor that we could definitely redevelop, give it a little facelift, add some green space, make it look pretty.

And in conjunction with that, the traffic. With the traffic, it's going to take working with FDOT to see what we can do along the US 41 corridor through adding access roads and also some designated turn lanes is what I would say for the traffic. Thank you.

[02:09:22]

Tom McCann: Thank you. This next question, we'll start with Ms. McLeod. **How do you think county government should address rising home costs, or should it? Should county government address rising home costs? If so, how?**

Michelle McLeod: I'm a supporter of the free market system. So, if there is a supply and demand issue, then I say let the market prevail. It's as simple as that. I don't think that government should be involved in any kind of rent controls or any kind of controls that would affect free market.

[02:10:10]

Tom McCann: Thank you. Ms. Taylor.

Penny Taylor: We, as government, should not get involved in the private industry and start to regulate them. That is not what we're here to do. There is a market, and the market demand is such. There are a lot of reasons out there: supply chain, the fact that we closed for almost a year with Covid, the fact that people are fleeing the north areas for the free state of Florida. That is what is driving this current escalation of prices. But those who were here in government

before 2008, during that time period when it was a really hot market, have drawn eerie comparisons from then to now.

So, I think we have to allow the market to work and make sure that the building is safe, that we are prompt and responsive and professional in the way that we interact with the development community, and allow things to materialize. Because they will. Thank you.

[02:11:26]

Tom McCann: Thank you. Ms. Hinojosa.

Daija Hinojosa: As sad as the challenges have been for the people who are most affected by a lot of the increase in the rent, being displaced from their homes, as sad as it is and as compassionate as I am, through research, we've found that government really has no business in the free market. And so, like Michelle McLeod said, it's a no. I don't think government should be involved in the free market.

[02:11:55]

Tom McCann: Thank you. Mr. Kowal.

Daniel Kowal: I looked at this from the outside, in - from outside the box. We've got to understand, here in Collier County, our prices are not driven by us that live here or the people that have been here for 20 or 30 years. Our prices are driven up by the people that are moving here, like Commissioner Taylor had mentioned. It's the flow of these people coming from communities that work in places like New York City, Boston, Chicago, and even California now. And you've got to remember, these people come from areas, like an individual who works for a corporation that can work remotely in a flat in Manhattan paid \$1 million a year and \$1,200 a month to park their car in the street. When they have the opportunity to buy a \$700,000 or \$800,000 house at 27,000 square foot in Collier County, they've died and went to heaven. So, it's nothing for them to do that. And that's what's artificially inflating our housing market here.

Government should never get involved in the free market. I am a true believer in a free market. I'm kind of like a Milton Friedman groupie, if anybody knows who Milton Freeman was. He was an economist who talked about how the free market adjusts itself. But there is an issue with housing affordability for the essential people that we need in this county to function at the rate and the way we are used to. That's a problem we're all going to face, and we cannot ignore that problem.

I went to the county affordable housing committee meeting, and I sat and listened to them talk. They have \$20 million in the bank. The problem is, they're trying to figure out a way to become a developer, and that's not their duty as a government to become a developer. We leave those jobs to the developers. Like Ronald Reagan said, if anybody comes up to you and says, "I'm from the government. I'm here to help," run the other way. Because that's true. We leave that to the developers. This \$20 million is burning a hole in the pocket of the county government. It's not by becoming a developer. But we need to look at programs where we can get people into housing.

In Collier County itself, right now, a federally-backed loan, minimum, is \$552,000. That means 3% down from a customer, and that can't be done. Thank you.

[02:14:10]

Tom McCann: Thank you. Some of our questions were submitted by some of the sponsors of the forum, and others come from the audience. This is a question from the audience. Ms. Taylor, I believe you're the one who is up now. **What are your plans to reduce airport noise, particularly at night?**

Penny Taylor: Because the airport authority is a separate entity as established by the state of Florida, the airport operates independently from the city council. The members are appointed, but is its own entity. The plans to reduce the airport noise is left up to the airport and the citizens, especially within the city of Naples and also, the governing board (the airport authority).

Nighttime noise is not supposed to happen. There are restrictions. It has to be enforced. The daytime noise is part of the results of Covid, where folks could not fly, and so, they found out really quickly that it was more economical and a lot easier on them if they leased these jets. And so, we have a huge increase in airport traffic. They have been going back and forth with the city council. Again, as a commissioner, I can only listen. But I know that there are millions and millions and millions of dollars of grants in the airport that if, for some reason, that airport was closed, the citizens of the city of Naples would have to pay those back.

And so, we're kind of in a donnybrook, but I think the advocacy of the city council, I think the advocacy of the neighborhood have helped a lot. Because it keeps the issue of airport noise in front of the airport authority. And I think they're responding. Thank you.

[02:16:24]

Tom McCann: Thank you. Ms. Hinojosa.

Daija Hinojosa: This is actually a new issue that I honestly just learned about, and I actually have a meeting set up with the airport authority tomorrow morning. So, I'm actually looking forward to learning more about what the airport authority has to say about the issue and then being able to go back and speak to residents. I know that as commissioner, I would love to be able to work with the city and just find out how we can all find common ground. We know that the airport is a huge asset to our community, and although the noise bothers some, those who are most affected by it who live close to the airport-- I personally am not affected by the air noise-- but just because the majority are not affected by it, doesn't mean that we should ignore that it is an issue for some.

So, I would say that I'm excited for our meeting tomorrow. And as commissioner, I'm going to be very collaborative on finding a common ground for everybody.

[02:17:19]

Tom McCann: Thank you. Mr. Kowal.

Daniel Kowal: The airport itself is controlled by three entities actually. It's the FAA which controls all air traffic control and the ground control of all plane travel in the United States of America. And of course, you have the airport authority and their board that governs the operations of the airport itself. The problem is the airport has been here since 1945. It was a military training facility at that time. They trained on I don't know if it was B17s or B52s or whatever they used in there in and out at that airport. I believe in 1971 is when they turned it over to the citizens or to the board, the airport authority itself, and it opened to the public.

I get it. I live in a direct approach path in Grey Oaks. I think it's 28 right. I see the planes come over, and I really don't notice them as much as I would if I was maybe hanging out at Baker Park, sitting there eating my lunch, because you're right at the end of one of the most active runways in the United States of America for a private airport. We have to understand that. And this is where common sense comes into play in our government.

When you do certain things in our government, we have to have foresight and look forward. I love Baker Park. It's a beautiful place, but maybe we shouldn't have built it at the end of an active runway that's been there since 1945. And maybe we wouldn't get as many complaints as we get now about the airplane noise.

That airport is a product of our success of our citizens here in Collier County. It's not a downfall. It's going to be there. And I know for a fact that the average person just can't jump on a private jet. Just a business jet itself is about \$8,000 an hour to rent. So, it's not like you're getting on those instead of getting on a commercial flight just because you've got to wear a mask. Those jets are there, and they come and go because they have business running out of that airport. And I'm not going to stop their business. They have a right. That's part of being an American. Thank you.

[02:19:23]

Tom McCann: Ms. McLeod.

Penny Taylor: The Florida legislature, at the request of the city of Naples, created the Naples Airport Authority to manage the operations of the airport. Currently, the Naples Airport Authority is conducting a \$1.7 million study to address the community's concerns on noise. One hundred recommendations have been identified through the study. It is going to be ranked now and vetted with the FAA. And just as a point of reference, the FAA does control all air space. They have complete jurisdiction over air space. That means that they control the frequency, the timing, the flight patterns. And then also, as another point of reference with regards to the airport, the airport activities create an economic benefit for our community of over a half a billion dollars to our economic livelihood.

So, I have complete trust that the Naples authority will do whatever they can to present a well-developed case to the FAA as to the concerns that the community has with regards to noise. And then we hope that the FAA accepts the recommendations favorably.

[02:20:50]

Tom McCann: Thank you. The next question starts with Ms. Hinojosa. **Do you think being county commissioner is a fulltime job?**

Daija Hinojosa: 100%. I quit my job last year when I filed to run for county commissioner in April. I actually left my job in the summertime. I did that purposely because I knew that I wanted to devote 100% of my time to campaigning fulltime. My husband has also been extremely supportive in this endeavor as well. We've made a lot of life adjustments to make this happen, and I am 100% completely committed to being your fulltime commissioner because that's what I do, that's who I am, and that's what I'm here for.

[02:21:34]

Tom McCann: Thank you. Mr. Kowal.

Daniel Kowal: It's most definitely a fulltime job. We're looking at a \$2 billion budget that pretty much Collier County operates under. And I know in the past, we've had commissioners that took it as a parttime job. But I think, as we've been moving forward, it has been taken more seriously. It is definitely a fulltime job, and I plan on working it as fulltime job. I've been working as a fulltime candidate every day since I decided to run for this position. I retired in September from the sheriff's department. I took two weeks off, and I filed at the end of September to run for this commissioner seat. The biggest part of the job is listening, and the biggest part of the job is to be able to connect with the people out there.

Because a lot of times, the majority of the people in Collier County are not the ones to come to the commissioner meetings and use the three minutes every month to complain about something. That's the appeasement part that we have to get through. We have to be able to see through those weeds and see the true problems that the people of Collier County are suffering from - not the special interest groups that come up here every month, take their three minutes, and complain and become the squeaky wheel. And then the commissioners feel like they have to do something. I don't know if it's because they don't want to look bad or what, but that's not the way to run a government.

The way to run the government is for the people, and that's the majority of the people. You may be silent, but I'll be out there. I'll come to your community meetings, I'll come to your associations, and I will listen. The most important part of communication is listening. It's 90% of it. Thank you.

[02:23:07]

Tom McCann: Thank you. Ms. McLeod.

Michelle McLeod: On city council, I made it a fulltime job. You have to be dedicated to do this if you want to serve the community well. I love this stuff. I love being a part of government. I love all that it can do for the people. I love learning about every little detail about it. I make it a fulltime job because I am dedicated to it. And I will definitely make, as I did with the city council, this commission spot a fulltime job. Thank you.

[02:23:49]

Tom McCann: Ms. Taylor.

Penny Taylor: Well, take it from the one who has been up here almost eight years. It's a fulltime job-- there's no question about it-- if you want to do it right. You can do it as a parttime job, but if you want to respond to the needs of your constituency, understand the issues affecting Collier County, and do the research, it's a fulltime job. Thank you.

[2:24:14]

Tom McCann: Thanks. Okay. Our next question begins with Mr. Kowal, I believe. This is audience submitted. **Would you support a plan to eventually make all I-75 interchanges full cloverleaves to dramatically reduce traffic congestion?**

Daniel Kowal: You're talking about a big-ticket item there, and I-75 itself is a state interstate, which we would probably have to get a lot of state money to help us with that. When we talk about traffic issues, I do have plans to help with the traffic issues. Our biggest problems with the traffic issues are that we have three major roads that run east and west. And the majority of our

workforce comes in from outside of the county, which is about 45,000 people a day travel in and out of the county to work in our county. And the majority of our workforce comes from the east to the west, because that's where our industrial parks are along Airport Road, the ones by Pine Ridge.

We have a lot of people, and we're going to build a community out on the other side of Desoto here. It's like 3,500 homes. They're just going to pack more and more out there on the east. We have not roads that run south to exit out on I-75. The only exits we have on the I-75 are east-west running roads. Everglades Boulevard already runs underneath I-75. It wouldn't take much to go to the federal government and the state. My plan is to go to them under the grounds of evacuation routes. Because when the state comes to us and they put us under state of emergency, we have to evacuate, now, almost 400,000 people from this county. Myself, I never left for all the hurricanes I worked in the past, because I had to stay here. That was part of my job.

But to get the people out of this county, into a safe area, it takes a lot. And if we need to have two more exits, and if we can go to the state and Congress and fight for that money to have those exits added on the south, that will alleviate a lot of traffic running east and west, trying to get here. They can use the interstate instead of trying to use Immokalee Road, Livingston, and Golden Gate. That would alleviate a lot of traffic issues right off the bat.

And I think we can do that. If you have somebody strong enough that is going to fight for you and make that money happen just under the grounds of evacuation routes for emergency purposes, we can do it. We can work together and get that done a lot quicker than some of these plans that are 10 or 15 years down the road.

[02:26:35]

Tom McCann: Thank you. Ms. McLeod.

Michelle McLeod: Can you repeat the question?

Tom McCann: Sure. Would you support a plan to eventually make all I-75 interchanges full cloverleaves to dramatically reduce traffic congestion?

Michelle McLeod: I do not know that study well enough to be able to speak to it. I know that the county has a master plan to address traffic issues and growth. That is not something that has been talked, so again, I can't speak to it without really studying the issue.

[02:27:11]

Tom McCann: Thank you. Ms. Taylor.

Penny Taylor: I'm not aware that cloverleaves on every interchange on I-75 is going to alleviate the traffic problem. And by the way, that is a state road. They're going to be the ones that are going to decide to go forward with it. They understand the traffic problems. What they are talking about, of course, is more improvements to I-75 to get the traffic to flow back and forth. I am concerned about our traffic, but unfortunately, we are victims of growth and that is the way it is. Until we start building more income-restricted housing in Collier County so that folks that want to work here have a place to live here, I-75 is going to be one long traffic jam. Thank you.

[02:28:07]

Tom McCann: Thank you. Ms. Hinojosa.

Daija Hinojosa: It sounds a lot like Dallas, Texas when we start talking about cloverleaves and creating more freeways. And we need to remember this one thing. Naples is small, Naples is quiet, Naples is charming, and people come here to get away from the hustle and bustle. I think the more that we start accommodating more room for growth by trying to build more freeways and build more roads and build more accessways and overpasses, I think we're just inviting more people to continue to come and flood our area. So, I think we should maintain it small. Again, as all the other individuals had said, it is out of our jurisdiction to do that. But again, I think that we need to maintain Naples to be a small community.

[02:28:55]

Tom McCann: Our next question, I think, begins with Ms. McLeod. It was, again, submitted by the audience. **Would you support creative solutions to resolve this affordable housing crisis? For example, one, repurposing existing developments like strip malls or storage facilities; two, offering assistance to a homeowner willing to rent rooms in homes to eligible residents?** A different take on affordable housing.

Michelle McLeod: Can you repeat the question? It's quite long, detailed.

Tom McCann: Would you support creative solutions to resolve the affordable housing crisis? One is repurposing existing developments like empty strip malls or storage facilities. Two, offering assistance to homeowners willing to rent rooms to people who are eligible for affordable housing.

Michelle McLeod: I serve on three boards that are addressing affordable housing needs right now. The way we are successfully addressing these needs are through philanthropic means, public/private partnerships, and changes to the land development code. When we talk about creative solutions, absolutely. If it's a viable solution, then let's hear it. I am very much in favor of live-work spaces. There are have talks about if we're going to build retail facilities, why not have housing above it? Those live-work conditions are a creative method for affordable housing, and it helps with our traffic flows.

There are all sorts of different creative ways. Changes to the land development code would allow for various different housing opportunities, creative opportunities that we can look into. So, absolutely. I would be in favor of creative solutions.

[02:30:59]

Tom McCann: Thank you. Ms. Taylor.

Penny Taylor: Thank you. When I first was elected in 2014, around 2015, I assembled many people (stakeholders) in the community - schools and the sheriff's department and also the police department - to talk about affordable housing. And from those meetings came the concept of we own land. The county owns land; build this housing on our land. We don't have to worry about a developer coming and giving that land or deciding. We can do it. So, we started that process, and right now, there are two developments that are coming out of the ground that are strictly income-restricted affordable housing.

We did part of this discussion. We brought ULI in here. ULI had many different ideas and good suggestions. We're also going to bring them back. But we're caught in a crisis right now. So, I

would support repurposing vacant or not used strip malls. But they're owned by somebody else. So, that would have to be something that a developer would be interested in.

One thing that was very curious that we learned is that there are developers that develop market rate, and there are developers that develop affordable housing. We didn't have any developers here that would develop affordable housing. We went out for an RFP. We started bringing them in. So, now we're out there saying, "Yes, we're open for business."

We are a county that will not let this lie. This is something that is probably some of the most important infrastructure that we can address. That is affordable housing. And I am open to consider anything right now. It doesn't mean we're going to do it, but I'm open for suggestions. Thank you.

[02:33:00]

Tom McCann: Thank you. Ms. Hinojosa.

Daija Hinojosa: I'm 100% open to creative solutions for affordable housing. Again, if you find the willing developer and you find a willing owner of the land or the strip mall to be able to do something like that, I'm 100% in support of at least having the discussion and being able to cast a vision, if you will, and really see who wants to get behind it. There are a lot of great plans in the East Naples Community Development Plan along the US 41 corridor for a lot of mixed use. Because 79% of surveyors who took a survey on how they want their community to look, said they want mixed use. They're open for some creativity in the model. And so, I'm 100% open to being collaborative and creative.

[02:33:46]

Tom McCann: Thank you. Mr. Kowal.

Daniel Kowal: As a county commission, the state gives us the authority to look at these types of projects when people bring them forward and say, "We can either alter the zoning or take a vote on changing the density for these properties. But we have to look at the whole picture of this. If there's a private industry or a private investor wants to go ahead and take one of these old strip malls and repurpose it into living property, we also have to look at if it falls within the zoning area, if it fits the units per square acre. We do have rules that are already set for zoning in this county.

So, if that happens, we have to look at if it's a greater good for the community. We've got to look at the people who live around that strip mall. What's the impact of putting another 200 apartments or whatever they can squeeze into that old strip mall? What's that impact going to be on that community around them? Now these are all the things that have to be taken into consideration. But I don't think the governments use any money to subsidize any particular project for housing itself. It's just a slippery slope.

Once a government like ourselves, a county government, enters into that field, then these people become emboldened upon us to do it more and more often. So, it's not a simple, quick answer for this particular type of question. We talked about mixed-use properties. I spoke about this before. Mixed-use properties are nonconforming properties. They're not the typical property where you can go out and just get a home loan for. These are at higher rates. They determine the retail value of the properties underneath you.

These buildings that have retail properties underneath you require much more building codes when it comes to fire codes, the windows used. So, it's a much higher cost build than what you think just going in to repurpose some kind of property like this. And if a private investor wants to take that chance and you, the people that live around these communities, want to take that chance, we as a county commission should look at it, and see if it's viable or not to change those types of codes. Thank you.

[02:35:59]

Tom McCann: We'll begin the next question with Ms. Taylor. **What are your plans to correspond with and regularly connect with your constituents?**

Penny Taylor: I write a newsletter every two weeks. I send it out. I also take all phone calls. I also go to community meetings. I am someone who is available and has been accessible and continues to be. I don't just meet with people that agree with me. I'm always interested in meeting with people who have challenging questions. There are areas that I can help, and there are areas that I can't help in, and I'm aware of it. But I think that's the one thing about being in government is your openness for communication. Thank you.

[02:36:56]

Tom McCann: Thank you. Ms. Hinojosa.

Daija Hinojosa: With 18 years in business, working in customer service, being a team lead, training teams, building teams, working in business, there is nothing more that I love than to connect with people. That's who I am. I'm a team builder. I'm a gatherer of people. And so, what I'm going to really do as commissioner is the same thing I'm doing now. You're talking to your constituents, you're taking phone calls, you're doing meetings, you're going to their events, and just finding out what they're concerned about.

This job is customer service. And if you can have good customer service in a business, you can take those skills and directly apply it over here to county commission. Everyone knows that I'm probably one of the most open and easy-going people that you have ever met. And I'm more than happy to stay completely connected to the people.

[02:37:46]

Tom McCann: Thank you. Mr. Kowal.

Daniel Kowal: Like I said before, for 18 years, I served this county as a deputy sheriff in a multitude of different positions at the sheriff's department. As citizens of the county, typically your only contact you ever have with your government is usually your law enforcement or your fire fighter or your EMS worker that's out there amongst you, talking to you, responding to your home for 9-1-1 calls, emergencies. I've done that for the last 18 years in this community. I have no problem going out there amongst you and listening.

Like I said, 90% of communication is listening. I plan on going to everybody's association meetings in District 4. I plan to go to their events. I plan on being out there. I'm not going to sit in my office and tell you, you can come and see me. I will come and see you if I have to. I'm not afraid. I've knocked on many doors before that I didn't know what was on the other side of it, and I wasn't afraid to enter that room. And I won't be afraid to talk to a constituent. That's for sure. Thank you.

[02:38:52]

Tom McCann: Ms. McLeod.

Michelle McLeod: The people who know me know that I love going door to door. I love getting out into the neighborhoods. And as a city council person, I was always on the so-called streets. If there was a sidewalk issue that needed to be decided upon or speeding down particular roads or requests for speed tables, I was there with the residents listening to their concerns and observing for myself and coming up with solutions for them.

And as a candidate for county commissioner, I have continued on with those efforts. I'm going to MSTU meetings, CRA meetings. I am writing to the constituents, asking for their opinions. I really want to hear from the individuals so that I can help move forward their requests. I've heard from many of the neighborhoods. They consider it so refreshing to see me in their neighborhoods, at their meetings. They have said that they have never experienced a county commissioner who is as committed to hearing from them as I have been showing them to be. So, I will continue to do those kinds of measures as a county commissioner.

[02:40:12]

Tom McCann: Thank you. Ms. Hinojosa, you'll start the next set of questions.

Nancy Kerns: Wasn't it Ms. Taylor?

Tom McCann: No, she started [the last round].

Nancy Kerns: Okay, sorry. Go ahead.

Tom McCann: I've been wrong before.

Unknown Female: I know. Round and round we go.

Tom McCann: Water quality is a big issue in Collier County. What is your plan to deal with the large number of old and leaking septic tanks that create pollution that ultimately ends up in the Gordon River and in Naples Bay?

Daija Hinojosa: That's a great question. I'm actually still learning about septic tanks and the nuances with the subject. So, to be quite honest with you, it's not something that I would want to waste time just rambling on random things about. But I am going to be looking into it a little more. I do have some great connections with people that I can reach out to as resources, and I could actually give you guys a written response in 48 hours if you would like.

[02:41:06]

Tom McCann: Well, it's a great issue and one that doesn't get treated enough. Mr. Kowal.

Daniel Kowal: I'm very familiar with septic tanks. I have some rental properties in Golden Gate City, and a lot of people don't realize the majority of Golden Gate City is still on septic systems. I've personally had to dig them up for leaky drain fills and find lids and get them pumped out once a month. But that being said, we have to work strong, we have to find the money to get the infrastructure to get these people off of septic tanks.

There are other ways we can approach this where it won't cost us much money, which is through some PR. What I've found out from dealing with these people directly in their homes

and when these issues pop up, a lot of them just don't understand how a septic system works. A septic system is basically just two holding tanks, and eventually the runoff water has to go to the leach fill. And the leach fill has to percolate to the ground to basically clean the water as it percolates down naturally through the earth.

The problem is a lot of these people, they came from places like Guatemala and Mexico, and they're living in a lot of these rental properties that are still on septic tanks. They don't understand the concept. You can't use certain things when you have a septic tank. And one of them is pouring grease down a drain. They fry their food every night, and they pour a gallon of grease down the drain, it gets in the leach fill, and it blocks all the drainage holes. So, the water has nowhere to go but up. And then when we have a heavy rain, that takes that contaminated water, and it runs it into our canals and our storm drains, and it eventually winds up into our tributaries and causes the issues we have.

So, education would be the first thing I would try to do, some sort of program, get education to the people in the county. And however we do it, there are certain things you can't use like liquid detergent. You can't pour grease down these drains. And work towards getting them onto true infrastructure to get them off the septic systems. Because that's really the only fix. Thank you.

[02:43:02]

Tom McCann: Ms. McLeod.

Michelle McLeod: Septic systems do contribute tremendously to the contaminants that are going into our waterways. That's why the city of Naples, while I was on the city council, we helped advance the septic-to-sewer projects that are on the east side of US 41. If we could do all of them all at one time, I would definitely try to make those initiatives happen. However, there are funding issues. There are not enough funds to do all of the septic conversions. And you don't have the manpower to convert all of these. So, it has to be done in stages. And through city council and my initiatives in trying to advance these, we've been moving these along as quickly as we can.

But at the end of the day, too, we have to remember that the people who pay for this are the residents. And it's a big chunk of money. So, you have to work on getting grants for them to help reduce their cost. It's a complicated problem, but it is something that is a high priority in order to help relieve the contaminants that are going into our waterways.

[02:44:23]

Tom McCann: Thank you. Ms. Taylor.

Penny Taylor: Septic to sewer is probably one of the most important things we can do locally. My district has a partnership between the city of Naples and Collier County. We're doing the storm water. They're doing the septic to sewer, because that area is on septic. When I first was elected, I was cleaning out my office, and I saw a letter from a constituent that was sent to my predecessor. She was lamenting that she lived on Wisconsin, and she didn't understand why every time it rained, she couldn't drain her bathtub. She would have to take her kids over to the Publix across the street so that they could at least take care of everything before they went to bed.

Then as we moved on into this area and got more input from the residents, we announced, "This is what we are going to do." We got letters where they didn't understand, "Maybe that's the reason why, when it rains, there's a smell that goes through the neighborhood." This is critical. This goes right into the Gordon River and then goes into Naples Bay.

But I also have worked on this statewide, because I am a member of the Florida Association of Counties. And as a member of that, I'm on the water committee, and I advanced a policy that has been adopted - not quite yet - but it's the septic to sewer. And that's the governor's number two issue, to get septic to sewer. But also, I want it recurring because the bottom line for this is funding. The funding is important. We can do it, but it's going to take a lot of money. Thank you.

[02:46:16]

Tom McCann: Thank you. Our next question will be with Ms. Hinojosa, I believe. I'm sorry. Mr. Kowal. **What ideas do you have to address mental health issues in the county?**

Daniel Kowal: As a deputy sheriff, I went through the program in NAMI. I don't know if anybody is familiar with the organization. We were all put through, and we were trained in Critical Incident Training, which is the CIT program. It's to help first responders, because we're typically the ones that have the most contact and the first contact of people out in the streets, especially the ones that have mental health issues. And it's crucial.

Our sheriff's department has a great unit that's run by Lieutenant Weidenheimer, who is right on the job. Like I said, the government arm that has the most contact with these people every day is our sheriff's department. So, we have to make sure we keep that funded. We have to keep that moving forward and our deputies get that type of training with the CIT that NAMI gives out.

That said, we have to also understand there's a difference between drug addiction and mental health. A lot of times, people group them together. Now I'm not saying that drug addiction is not sometimes a mental health issue. But a lot of times, drug addiction is a voluntary thing. It's people making a decision to use drugs. And they get to a point in their lives that they have to chase that high the rest of their lives. And that's a totally different issue.

We do have at least one methadone clinic I do know of, unless another one has popped up in East Naples. I know where it is. It's not marked or anything, because that's the way it should be. But the people do go there, and they get their suboxone and anything else they need to help them with their addictions.

Veterans is another one. I know David Lawrence Center gets a ton of money from our community. Cars on 5th, in one day, raises about \$1 million every year and is given to David Lawrence Center. But the problem is our veterans go to David Lawrence Center, and if they're under VA care, they're there for a minute or two and they ship them up North, because they won't accept them there. And that's an issue. When we try to take someone to David Lawrence under the Baker Act, we expect a 72-hour observation on these people. And the next day, we see them back on the street.

So, it is an issue and we have to deal with it. But I think the private sector needs to get involved a little bit more overall. Thank you.

[02:48:47]

Tom McCann: Thank you. Ms. McLeod.

Michelle McLeod: The car show actually benefits Saint Matt's House. But in 2018, the Collier County residents had voted for a one-cent-sales surtax intended to raise \$490 million in seven years. Thankfully, a portion of those funds are set aside to address mental health issues. That same year that the one-cent sales tax was implemented, a Collier County mental health and substance use disorders ad hoc committee was created, of which I was a part of, Jerry was a part of. That committee came up with the very first ever five-year strategic plan to address mental health issues in our community.

In the strategic plan, we identified six priorities. The six priorities are: a centralized receiving center, data sharing, housing and supportive services, transportation of nonemergency Baker Act and Marchman Act people, increasing effectiveness in the judicial system, and prevention, education, and advocacy. \$25 million of the one-cent sales tax has been set aside to build the centralized receiving center for residents in our area who are in crisis. So, we are well on our way to achieving the six priorities set out in the strategic plan. And as a county commissioner, I will make sure that those efforts will continue to be top of mind for the county.

[02:50:18]

Tom McCann: Thank you. Ms. Taylor.

Penny Taylor: I think, with me, because I was there as it happened, I saw Commissioner Solis step up to the plate and say, "We need to deal with mental health." I saw the time and the energy he put into it, and I supported it as did my colleagues. I was on the board that voted for the issues, for the one-penny sales tax, and we voted to bring it to the public, which was, oh my goodness, tax. But we did it. I'll never forget sitting in the chambers room when those results came in, and you saw how close it was. But then you realized there was real money to deal with mental health.

Sheriff Rambosk has always been ahead of the curve about mental health. Because he's on the front line of everything, he realized that sometimes he had to incarcerate people that should never be incarcerated, that they had challenges mentally, and that they needed another treatment. He has been a champion as well as Judge Janeice, who has been a huge champion for rehabilitation, understanding where people who have these challenges should go, and for giving us the strength to go forward. This has been a true community effort, and I support it going forward. Thank you.

[02:51:59]

Tom McCann: Thank you. Ms. Hinojosa.

Daija Hinojosa: I am so compassionate towards mental health patients because it has affected siblings in my family. And one of the things that I've really dedicated my life service to is making sure that we don't just stick to the problem but we try to find a solution. Being compassionate towards mental health, I think that I would really support programs that would be driven by the community to help these people get some help. The nonprofit that I work with, Agents for Change, we focus on the self-discovery process. Because every single person who was born was born for leadership. And I think that a lot of people go through a lot of issues in their life. They lack a sense of identity, they lack a sense of self, they have no idea what it is that they want to do in their life. Maybe they've gone through some trauma, and I think that as compassionate people in the community, not necessarily in a government capacity, but as compassionate

people in the community, we could do a lot more to make sure that we have more programs to get people the help that they need and be able to actually flourish from it just like I've seen happen in my family.

[02:53:18]

Tom McCann: Thank you. Ms. McLeod, I think we start with you for the next question.

Immokalee is becoming a dangerous place; it's a third-world country. It's part of our county. It's certainly not part of District 4, but it's an important part of the county. What do you think could be done about it?

Michelle McLeod: There are lots of positive things happening, though, in Immokalee. There are lots of great resources for children and for adults and housing. We have two CRAs in Collier County. One CRA is in the Immokalee area, and that is intended to do just that. It's intended to relieve slum and blight, and it is doing a lot of great things, and it is something that needs to be supported so that we can see that area grow and thrive. So, I think the CRA is something that is good. A lot of people speak very negatively about Immokalee, but there are a lot of great things happening, and I support those initiatives.

[02:54:33]

Tom McCann: Thank you. Ms. Taylor.

Penny Taylor: Collier County is the safest urban county in Florida. The crime rate rivals 1971. That's how incredibly well we are managed by our sheriff's department. And that includes Immokalee. I would disagree with the person that created this question. Because it's a third-world country doesn't make it unsafe. You can be unsafe in Port Royal. You can be unsafe on 5th Avenue. You can be unsafe on the beach. In fact, talk to the folks in Miami about going to the beach.

Immokalee is a melting pot. Immokalee is a bubbling, wonderful, exciting area where people believe in the American dream. And they're working to achieve it. Immokalee is a place of diversity, Immokalee reminds us that we were, at one time, an agricultural community (majority). Immokalee is a place that people call home, and there's a reason for it.

We have a lot of change in our community and a lot of things going on. And I think that reminding us that about 40% or 42% of this county now is Hispanic is important. Immokalee does that. And frankly - and I learned this today - they're looking for economic development, and a Taco Bell opened up in Immokalee and had to close because there was no business. And there's a reason for that. Immokalee has the best tacos in the county. Thank you.

[02:56:38]

Tom McCann: Thank you. Ms. Hinojosa.

Daija Hinojosa: One thing that I've learned from business is that when you have something that's not working, like a team, you find new leadership. And I say this with all due respect. I've always asked myself, "Why is Immokalee in the situation that it's in? Why does it not have any life? It doesn't have any economic prosperity. There's not a lot of housing. People are living below the poverty line. Why is that? Why is it we have a part of our county that is attached to one of the wealthiest zip codes in America and yet it's impoverished?"

I really think that Immokalee needs us. And I think there are a lot of things that we could do as a community to really drive some economic diversity to really go out in Immokalee. I think affordable housing would be a great place for Immokalee. And I also think that we need to have a vision for our community. I understand that we have the CRA documents which is the vision for the community. But I don't think we're doing enough to really cast a vision for what we could do in Immokalee and what it could be like.

[02:57:45]

Tom McCann: Thank you very much. Mr. Kowal.

Daija Hinojosa: Thank you. Short and sweet.

Daniel Kowal: I kind of agree with Commissioner Taylor. I don't know that the crime rate in Immokalee has spiked to any higher level than it has ever been before. I've worked here, like I said, for 18 years. I worked on Vice and Narcotics for 10 years. I was in and out of Immokalee a lot. And I don't know that the crime rate is any greater than it was 10 or 15 years ago.

Immokalee has its issues. But we all must understand why Immokalee exists. Immokalee is a giant farm worker village. The industries in Immokalee are farm and ranching. These generations of people have been there because they work the farms, and the farms create the produce that we sell to other parts of the country. Their jobs don't pay a lot. And that shows by the way they live and the properties that they can afford to purchase or rent. That's what keeps Immokalee down. It's nothing that the government or any other things have done to hurt Immokalee like they have been overlooked.

Immokalee is exactly what it is. It has been a farm working village for 50 years. And that's the industry other than the casino going in there now with the Seminoles on their own property. They've hired some people and gave them a little better paying jobs, and there are some things picking up. If you go around Lake Trafford, there are some new housing developments going in. And that's because it's the economics.

Economics drives your community. It's just the way it is - supply and demand. The consumer drives up what you have or what you don't have. And we have to understand that. I go to Immokalee a lot. My wife and I, our foundation sponsored the Pace Group Organization. It takes young girls in Immokalee that don't have a whole lot or have been in trouble and it gets them through high school, it gets them places where they can get good jobs or go on to college and move on.

This is something we have dear to our heart. Every year, we go out and hand out Christmas gifts at the churches in Immokalee. That's what conservatives do. If you have the means and ability, you should go into Immokalee and do something to help the people. Thank you.

[03:00:02]

Tom McCann: Thank you very much. We're going to ask the last question now. And when we do so, you'll have two minutes to utilize. But we would ask you to point out **what distinguishes you from the other candidates in District 4?** We're going to start with Ms. Taylor.

Penny Taylor: Experience, track record, that's what distinguishes me. You know what you get with me. I'm consistent; I'm direct. If I've made a mistake, I'm not afraid to say I've made a

mistake. You know I'm a hard worker, because you've seen the results. And I think that's what distinguishes me against my esteemed colleagues up here.

I would like another four years. You always hear there's more work to do. Well, there is. There's a lot more work to do. And there will be more work to do in another four years and another four years. I enjoy what I do, and I think that I have done a job that warrants me to be re-elected by you.

District 4 is a very exciting place. It is unique from all the other districts. It needs a level hand. It needs a calm person that understands the issues. I've had almost 20 years in politics in Collier County to learn the issues, and it is important because of the changes that we're facing as a community. You need that frame of reference. You need that foundation by which you make decisions. And I think I've proven this to you. I'm not afraid to be the only vote that disagrees with four other commissioners up here. I'm not afraid to say no, and I'm not afraid to say yes.

So, I'm asking you as we go forward - the election is August the 23rd - that you vote for me for District 4 county commissioner. Thank you.

[03:02:28]

Tom McCann: Thank you. Ms. Hinojosa.

Daija Hinojosa: What distinguishes me from the other candidates is that I'm a team builder. I am someone who has vision, I'm a principled leader, I'm driven. I have so much drive it might make you sick. I love people, I love business, and I love getting people to work together. And I think the biggest thing that a county commissioner needs is they definitely need to have vision. They need to be able to cast a vision to find out, "What do I want my four years to look like? What do I want my community to look like? How can I leave my community better than when I found it?" That is my drive. That is what I do.

So, if you're looking to elect someone who is not a career politician, someone who came from the business world who understands customer service, who understands people, that person is me. And I would really love to have your vote on August 23rd. Thank you very much.

[03:03:26]

Tom McCann: Thank you. Mr. Kowal.

Daniel Kowal: I think the most important thing is a person's life story. Their life story tells who they really are and what kind of person they are and the values they live by. I didn't come from much. There was actually a time that I slept in the car with my mother at night when I was a child. But I've been lucky. For whatever reason, God smiled down on me, and the last decade of my life, I was lucky enough to be pretty successful. My wife is an extremely successful person. I've been asked, on the job, from some of my colleagues in the past, "Dan, why do you do this job? Why are you still on the sheriff's department? Why are you on a motorcycle, the most dangerous job in law enforcement? You did five years on motors during, your last five years in Collier County Sheriff's Department."

With some people, I just say, "If I have to explain it, you wouldn't understand." I don't do it because I need a paycheck. I'm not doing it because I need a title. And I'm not going to do this job because I need a paycheck and that I need a title. I'm doing this job for you. Everyone in this audience, you are my bosses. This is a job interview, and I'm interviewing for this job to be your

next county commissioner in District 4. I will bring back conservative smaller government, controlled spending, because I've learned so much on this campaign about how much money is spent of your tax dollars, that you've built things for millions and millions of dollars that probably don't even exist in this county. Because you didn't even know about it. But your money built them.

And I want to make sure I'm the champion to make sure those types of things don't happen anymore. There's a park out east that's \$163 million they spent to build a park that nobody wants to use next to a garbage dump. They can't even do Fourth of July out there this year, because it's too dangerous. It might be catastrophic. If a firework lands in the wrong area, the methane gas will destroy everybody. So, guess what? The Fourth of July is going to be in Sugden Park this year - not the new \$163 million park that your county commissioners built with your money. These are the kinds of things we need to stop doing in this county. Thank you.

[03:05:39]

Tom McCann: Ms. McLeod.

Michelle McLeod: In my introduction, I pretty much mentioned what distinguishes me from the other candidates, so I'm going to use this opportunity to actually share with everyone my top five priorities for the county as a county commissioner.

First of all, we have to stop excessive spending on projects like what we're seeing with the Paradise Coast Sports Complex, which is currently \$67 million over budget. As a county commissioner, I will bring my sharp budgeting skills to the table so that those kinds of things don't happen in the future.

Secondly, we have to stop subsidizing companies that bring low-wage jobs to our area. Like, when the county gave \$15 million to the Great Wolf Lodge. As a county commissioner, I will lead the efforts in developing an economic development plan that brings diversity to our economy, high-wage jobs, and a direct benefit to our residents.

We have to keep a strong focus, a sharp focus on affordable housing. Like I mentioned, I serve on three boards that are addressing these issues. And as a county commissioner, I will continue to make housing solutions, for the different housing needs that we have in our community, a top priority.

Another priority of mine is with mental health. As I mentioned before, I was part of the ad hoc committee that came up with a strategic plan that addresses mental health issues. This will continue to be a top priority for me, and I will do everything that I can to help individuals and families who are struggling with these life threatening, heartbreaking illnesses.

My fifth priority is in supporting smart-growth policies. Because we absolutely have to do this to avoid further urban sprawl and negative impacts to our environment. As a county commissioner, I will make sure that I carefully review projects to make sure that they benefit both our health and our environment and create a strong sense of place.

I believe that I have the background, the education, and the experience to help set us on a course that will serve us well in the next 40 to 60 years, and I ask for your vote - Michelle McLeod for county commissioner.

[03:07:47]

Tom McCann: Thank you. Before we wind up, there are a couple of facts that I wanted to share with you. The primary election is August 23rd. Early voting is set for August 13th to 20th. The general election is November 8th. Early voting is October 27th to November 5th. We thank the candidates for participating in this public forum. We appreciate your candor. Thank you.

[applause]

[session ends 03:08:19]

Professional transcript by Patricia Wilson via [Upwork](#).