



Candidate Questionnaire – County Commissioner August 2024 Primary Election

Your name: Richard Conover

Your email address: RichardLConover@aol.com

Your phone number: 973-222-8197

Your age: 60

Today's date: 06/10/24

What year did you move to Collier County and where did you live previously?

My wife Jessica moved from Sparta NJ to Naples in 2007. We met in the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania and “we tied the knot” in 1992. We came to Naples to open our business, a State Farm Insurance Agency. The Agency opened in August of 2007 at 11725 Collier Blvd and that’s still where it operates. Through 2 hurricanes, thousands of Home and Auto claims and my share of Life Insurance claims, we never left Naples...I live like a good neighbor.

Where did you go to high school, and if you received any post-secondary education, where did you go, what degree(s) did you receive, and when?

I graduated from Phillipsburg Catholic High School in Phillipsburg NJ in 1981.

In 2007 I received the State of Florida Agent 2-20 License and Life Insurance License.

Please summarize your work experience, including employers and dates.

I have 45 years of work experience...I'll go back 25 years or so.

February 2007 to Present, Owner Richard Conover Insurance Agency, State Farm

Agent, 11725 Collier Blvd, Naples Florida

March 2005 to January 2007 General Manager, INFOUSA NY Metro Division, Woodcliff Lake, NJ

January 1999 to January 2005 Vice President of Sales Pitney Bowes, Clifton NJ

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Describe your community activities, either in elective office or as a volunteer, in the last five years.

One of my interests is music. I am SWFL only one-armed Bassist. Music has a wonderful power to bring people together. Since Hurricane Irma struck in 2017 I have used music to help our neighbors recover from many devastating circumstances. In October of 2017 I launched a music venture called JamFest. JamFest brings hundreds of musicians together to jam! Our First JamFest raised thousands of dollars for the Everglades School district, which was struggling to recover from Irma. Since that first JamFest we have combined music with food drives for Harry Chapin Food and in 2021 MusicFest. Music Fest raised money for the forgotten musicians that bore the brunt of the Covid closures of bars and music venues. In the Aftermath of Hurricane Ian I worked to establish MusicAlive SWFL. A relief fund that is dedicated to musicians and the music industry that was wiped out by Ian. Through my affiliation with our School of Rock in Ft. Myers, we support the Louis P. Tabarrini Youth Musical Outreach Foundation. This Foundation purchases musical instruments and provides music scholarships to underprivileged young people. I also work with the Rally for Good, Ultimate Garages and the Salvation Army of Collier on the annual Fran Cohen Youth Center Fund Raiser, providing live music and PA system for this important community event. Jessica and I both love animals and have 4 rescues of our own. Through my music I support animal rescues by performing free of charge to animal related events and charities, like our May 5th fundraiser at the Fraternal Order of Eagles, of which I am a member, for Fur and Tails Animal Rescue. I will bring an Anti-Animal Cruelty Task force, like Lee County's to Collier County. My office condominium building hosts the Golden Gate Farmers Market each Sunday at 11725 Collier Blvd, in front of Ace Hardware. I worked closely with Joe Rackow to bring this community market to the Golden City neighborhood. We fought together to keep it open. This diverse market is part of the vital fabric of the Golden Gate City community.

What is THE most important issue facing the Board of County Commissioners today and how will you address it?

The most pressing issue facing the county today is the deleterious effects of residential rezoning and a lack of funding for crucial roadway projects. These two factors are choking our roads with increased traffic, driving up insurance rates due to more frequent and more serious accidents, ruining neighborhoods and eroding the quality of life in Collier County. We stand at around 400,000 residents in the County and projections show the County topping out at around one million. If the BCC continues allowing residential rezoning and continues underfunding roadway projects our County will look like "West Miami". I pledge to build consensus with the other 4 Commissioners to end this practice and fund our roadway projects.

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Name one past policy decision of the Board of County Commissioners that you disagree with that you would like to change if elected. Why?

Recently the Board of County Commissioners adopted an animal Abuse Registry, which is the 3rd leg of my Anti-Animal Cruelty Task Force, Cell Dog Program and Animal Abuser Registry. While I am happy to see some progress made with the adoption of the Animal Abuser Registry, the Board fell woefully short of doing anything that will make a real difference. We need a Task Force that will actively investigate reports of animal cruelty and prosecute these crimes. We need penalties that include jail time. My Task Force will closely mirror that of Lee County and include community outreach and education. The Cell Dog program is not only a great tool for preparing dogs that need training to be adopted but has been extremely effective in rehabilitating prison inmates. While I'm happy about the adoption of an Abuser Registry, I believe it was a political move by the Commissioner in District #3.

"As a survivor of a near-fatal accident, I understand the value of life and the power of second chances. It's time we extend that compassion to all members of our community, especially those without a voice," Conover added, referencing his personal journey and resilience. This initiative not only aims to protect animals but also to foster a culture of care and responsibility in Collier County. We need my full Anti-Animal Cruelty Task Force and Cell Dog Program because those that harm animals move on to hurting humans.

What actions, if any, should the County take to address the need for affordable housing? What actions should the County not take with respect to providing housing?

In general, I don't believe the County should be in the land development business, there are projects underway that I believe should continue, however, the County can and should do things to help, like reducing property taxes. Everyone who lives in a home pays property taxes, young families, Seniors, Professionals, First Responders, Working Poor and Renters. Reducing property taxes helps all of us. The average rental rate as of March 2024 in Collier is \$4600+ for a 3/2, the average first responder salary in Collier County is \$69,000/yr. Do the math. I Supported Ryan Chamberlains effort to pass a bill to explore eliminating property taxes in Florida and believe we can explore something similar here in Collier and bridge the gap with a consumption tax. We currently have a teacher shortage and new schools opening without Teachers. If we pay Teachers and First Responders enough to afford to live here, we will see those open roles filled by qualified candidates. I would also vote for and encourage residential construction above commercial and retail units. I believe better solutions for affordable housing exist that do not include residential rezoning. Commercial areas that are ready for renewal and are prepared for the ingress/egress, can bring affordable housing to the County while breathing new life into these areas.

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What are your views about the role of government as they relate to the policies and actions of the Board of County Commissioners? How would these views influence your actions and decisions as a commissioner?

I believe local government should be laser focused on the tasks at hand...maintaining our roadways and government buildings and providing basic services, police, fire, education, budgeting, filling vacancies...most importantly long-term land use and planning.

These all are the duties of an administrator and truly non-partisan. While a person has a righty to their own personal ideals, beliefs and political leanings, we must leave them "at the door" and follow the will of our constituents.

The issue of long-term land use and planning is so critical at this juncture in the County's future that we cannot ignore what has been happening. Developers have been able to influence this current Board as evidenced by the recent admission by both Burt Sauders and Bill McDaniels that they accept support from developers. Many believe this must certainly weigh on their decisions to approve 200 applications to change residential low-density lands into apartments and commercial uses. When asked how this could happen at the January 23rd Board meeting, Burt Sauders replied "we approved these one at a time and they just sneaked up on us", a failure of leadership. I will not accept money from developers, I will follow our Growth Management Plan and the Golden Gate Estates Master Plan to ensure that in Collier County does not become "West Miami". I will listen to and respect the will of the Residents of Collier County, regardless of politics or influence from developers. I will bring courage and bold leadership to our Board of Commissioners.

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