



MONTHLY MEETING SUMMARY

Members: Rachel Stempler, Bentonne Snay, Janet Stearns, Elizabeth Newman, Julie Samkoff, Arun Ravindran, Linda Fernandez, Martha Schoolman, Madeleine Shirley, Maria Elena Lopez, Marjorie Wilkoff, Patricia Barbetta, Sheryl Gold, Esther De Varona, Betsy Mullins, Ally Easley, Cindy Lerner, Jane Moscovitz, Beatriz Portela, Gaston Fernandez, Victoria Olson, John Tillson, Fäde Zu Grau, Ulrich Merten, Patricia Barbetta, Carl Muller, Richard Thurer

Guests: Bonnie Daniels, Cecilia Tavera-Webman, Jacqueline Gross Kellogg, Nancy Sittig, Rob Piper, Steven Wetstein, Valerie Bunge, Dawn Grayson, Aaron Dubitsky, Cristina Albright, Diana Udel, Kira W, JC Planas, JoAnn Guyton, Kate Friedman, Lucia Huete Suarez, Nic Zantop, Chakeia Andrews, Jan Domlesky, Nikola Patterson-Molina, Sandra Saint-Hilaire, Marcelo Salup, Dorothy Parker, Randy Grice, Gordon Fales, Anthony Bonamy, Franzella Guido Chacon, Mary Estime-Irvin, Francis Morra, Diana Udel, Nic Zanton, Chakela Andrews, Lorenzo Canizares, George Darden, Etta Gold, Stacey Wiley, Travis Henville.

Speakers: James Lewis (Candidate for Attorney General); Naomi Esther Blemur (Candidate for Commissioner of Agriculture), Adam Hattersley (Candidate for Florida CFO), JR Gaillot (Candidate for Commissioner of Agriculture), Aramis Ayala (Candidate for Attorney General), Ryan Morales (Candidate for Commissioner of Agriculture) and Maribel Balbin (Candidate for MDC School Board, District 4)

Other Candidates Victor Vazquez (member and Candidate for County Commission District 6)

I. Welcome, Co-Host Recognition, Special Guest Introductions & Zoom Rules President Bentonne Snay

- Bentonne recognizes meeting co-hosts: Key Biscayne Democrats, Peoples Progressive Caucus, Kendell Democrats, Coral Way Democrats, Flamingo Democrats, Blue Wave Coalition Miami-Dade (BWC), Northeast Miami Democrats, Labor Community Alliance
- Shoutout to Betsy Mullins, immediate-past president of UM Dems; working with the Annette Taddeo campaign, they need canvassers and phone callers; bmullins@floridadems.org
- CG Dems has CG Dems Merch for sale plus free Val Demings & Annette Taddeo Yard Signs, please contact Richard Thurer at rjthurer@gmail.com
- Advised the meeting will go later than the usual 8:00pm due to presenting seven candidates

II. CG Dems Business

a. Finance Committee & Treasurer's Report Bentonne for Treasurer Richard Thurer

- Current Account Balance - \$8,575; with \$1,000 to be sent to BWC for slates (see below)
- Plan to Invest in Voter Slates for General Election – most of the budget will be spent on printing, fulfilling and mailing out approx. 10,000 General Election Democratic candidate slates to all Coral Gables “warm Dems” (don’t vote all the time) and Dem leaning NPAs; we will coordinate with and support the Blue Wave Coalition’s sending similar slates to all BWC priority precinct voters
- It is possible that Miami-Dade Dems will send slates to remaining MDC voters

b. Membership Committee

Chair Elizabeth Newman



- Update on Membership - Renewals since July 1 will be good through 8-31-23; we are midway in our membership campaign, membership years starts 9/1/22 and ends 8/31/23
- New Members since May 1 will be good until 8-31-23
- Join or renew here: <https://www.coralgablesdems.org/membership-renewal>

c. **Volunteer Committee**

Co-chair Jane Moscovitz

- Role of Canvassing in Electing Democrats in 2022; Canvassers Needed: August 28, September 11 & 25 and October 9 & 23 – all are Sunday afternoon when people are most likely to respond
- 8/28 Canvass Sign up Link: <https://forms.gle/Lu9SCKKHJLsUJLvW6>

III. **Upcoming Meeting Information**

VP Jane Moscovitz

- **September 13th** – Live Meeting; possibly interactive/social event; will seek co-hosts & would like to discuss plans for our precincts and for campaigning; there will be refreshments
- **Sept 13 & Upcoming Meetings** - hope to meet at Gables Congregational Church Fellowship Hall

IV. **Candidate Presentations and Q & A** Introductions/Moderation by Janet Stearns and Arun Ravindran

▪ **Florida Commissioner of Agriculture Candidate Naomi Blemur**

- 20 years experience in retail, commercial and non-profit management; serves on city planning committee and CRA advisory board
- Stands by her previous statement on allegations about her anti-LGBT and anti-choice views; has always been and will always be pro-choice; her previous Facebook postings were about her personal faith and conviction; always an ally of marginalized groups including the LGBT community; her opponents are trying to hurt her campaign
- Key priorities: increase access for small farmers to get capital; expand school nutrition programs; ensure that concealed carry holders “understand their responsibility” (who is in their household (children, teenagers, mentally ill persons); landlord and tenant issues, safety for farmworkers to include heat sheds & compensation reform so not based on amount of produce picked
- Consumer protection priorities – will advocate for a tenant bill of rights

▪ **Florida Commissioner of Agriculture Candidate JR Gaillot**

- Professional legislative director; grew up in various countries because of father’s service in Haitian foreign service; the Ag. Commissioner job is 2nd most powerful job in Florida
- Key priorities: food pricing – will continue a class action lawsuit against major food companies for “shrinkflation” e.g., making quantities smaller for same amount paid; rent cap for one year – will use executive powers to declare state of emergency and cap rent, which will cause the governor to call a special session to address the issue; will require gun owners to have liability insurance
- Ag Background: raised money in Haiti to bring back the agriculture sector in Haiti post-earthquake; Consumer Protection – has worked as a crisis manager for companies, will “flip that to other side to protect the public”
- Feasibility of requiring insurance for gun owners – the plan does not infringe on the second amendment; the insurance lobby will determine the requirements
- Environmental priorities – we need to enforce current laws; increase # of environmental inspectors
- Support for farmworkers – need to change pay scheme so workers take mandatory water breaks; need to expand Medicaid to farm workers; better identification for farm workers



- Affirmative Action re: Marijuana cultivation licensing – is in favor of working with the legislature to make licenses cheaper and more available
- Path to Victory – need to flip Republican voters; knows how to reach these voters

▪ **Florida Attorney General Candidate Ayala Aramis**

- Former public defender and prosecutor; first black state attorney elected in Florida; refused to pursue the death penalty in cases
- Priorities: protection of constitutional rights; public safety; fight fraud and take on corporations
- Prosecutorial independence: Said suspension of Andrew Warren was an attack on voting rights & democracy; need to suspend licenses of legislators passing unconstitutional laws
- Death penalty: resources should be used to support victims and the death penalty is not a deterrent; we spend \$51M annually to sustain the death penalty; there are racial disparities in death penalty convictions and Florida leads the nation in death row exonerations; will advocate for statewide conviction integrity as attorney general
- Advocates for no cash bail for marijuana possession, non-violent crimes likely to get probation or time-served
- Distinction from other Dem. AG candidate – experience as public defender, prosecutor, and elected state attorney; service as a state attorney is important during ‘culture wars’
- <https://www.aramisayalafl.com/>

▪ **Florida CFO Candidate Adam Hattersley**

- 8 years as an officer in the Navy; small business owner; former member of state house
- Key priorities: address the property insurance crisis; the current CFO is rubber stamping everything the insurance lobby wants; we need a commissioner that will follow state law and analyze why so many insurance companies have become insolvent; close loopholes for insurance companies; we should also look at other states; require insurance companies to keep premium payments in state
- Other Priorities: divest state pensions investments in Russian companies; increase audits of state spending
- Tort reform – the real issue with insurance is companies taking premiums out of the state
- Affordable housing – he will protect the Sadowski affordable housing trust fund
- Running unopposed so no primary; <https://www.Adamforflorida.com>

• **Miami-Dade School Board District 4 Candidate Maribel Balbin**

- Business owner/administrator; involved with national League of Women Voters; the only Democrat in the race; daughter is public school teacher; 2 grandchildren in public school
- The incumbent voted for mask mandates and was forced out of her seat
- Believes her business background will be an asset to the Board
- Key priorities: recruiting and retaining teachers; reform of cost differential formula for teacher compensation, this will keep the Board from seeking a millage increase
- DeSantis’ proposal to put veterans in the classroom will result in unqualified teachers

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• **Florida Commissioner of Agriculture Candidate Ryan Morales**

- Owns small hemp farm; main goal is environmental protection



- Lawn to garden program – advocates for precision agriculture; monthly subscription box to teach people how to grow their own food
 - Concealed carry weapon program – proposes adding layers to background checks – next of kin/spousal approval and social media checks; is suing the government to expand the right of medical marijuana patients to get concealed carry permits
 - Marijuana as an agricultural product – should be branded as Fresh from Florida
 - Key priorities: efficiency in licensing; expand the role of ag. Commissioner with rent control; has confirmed that with Nikki Fried
 - Re his 2007 DV arrest – says he is pro woman; was defending his mother from his wife who was suffering from depression
 - Key distinction from other ag commission candidates – most knowledgeable about position and the only farmer in the race
 - Consumer protection – will bring better technology to the field such as use of drones; these technologies will improve yields and efficiencies
 - Says we have a labor shortage, especially with immigration uncertainties
 - Food security – would work with the federal government to address price gouging and unfair trade practices
 - <https://ryanforflorida.com/>
- **Florida Attorney General Candidate Jim Lewis**
 - Criminal defense attorney from Ft. Lauderdale; previously state-wide prosecutor under Bob Graham and Bob Butterworth
 - Says Ashley Moody must be removed; she is wasting state resources aggressively pursuing DeSantis' agenda
 - Key Priorities: Pro-choice, wants to ban assault rifles, wants to crack down on corporate corruption; wants to use the office to protect the environment
 - Will not spend over \$25,000 in the primary
 - Favors the death penalty in the most extreme cases
 - Believes the path to victory is to win NPA votes by running on a moderate platform
 - Environmental proposals – pair the office of statewide prosecutor with the FDLE to go after public corruption
 - Website is: <https://www.jimlewis4florida.com>

V. **Adjourn**
8:25pm

Bentonne Snay