

**Candidates for County Commission – District 2**

**Responses to League of Women Voters of Collier County Education Fund / eBella Magazine Survey  
June 2010**

<p><b>Question 1:</b> Collier County is working to diversify its economic base by attracting high paying jobs. What role do you see for county government and the Collier County taxpayer in offering financial incentives to attract these businesses? Be specific.</p>		
<p align="center"><b>Gina Downs</b></p> <p>It is estimated that state and local spending to attract jobs exceeds \$50 billion per year nationwide. States, on average, offer more than 30 assorted financial incentives to attract businesses. The quest is to identify the right amount of incentive that makes fiscal sense and safeguards the public interests concurrently. Impacts of potential economic incentive programs are best evaluated using sophisticated REMI or IMPLAN models. Every case must be evaluated on its own merit. As a general rule, whenever tax revenues are ‘given away’, benchmarks must be set. Many strings ought to be attached ... legally enforceable strings.</p>	<p align="center"><b>Joe Foster</b></p> <p>The most important role for the county government with regards to diversifying our economic base is to get out of the way of private enterprise. The Commission must reverse the negative policies and practices of the past decade and put out a “Business is Welcome” sign. The Commission can incentivize job growth with tools like tax increment financing, right sizing of impact fees, and a reasonable permitting process. They can also promote business with a strong “buy local” program. When the county spends its billion dollar budget locally it employs local people who support local businesses and pay local taxes.</p>	<p align="center"><b>Georgia Hiller</b></p> <p>The current economic recession has demonstrated that we are too dependent upon the real estate, tourism, and agricultural industries.</p> <p>We must broaden our economic base. The first thing we must do is eliminate costly, needless regulation and fees, a deterrent to business recruitment and development. Secondly, we should provide incentives, such as benchmark-linked impact fee deferrals/waivers, favorably termed loans, and expedited permitting. We should support economic gardening to assist existing businesses in our community.</p> <p>Finally, we need to avoid concentration risk, the risk of material public investment in any single business or industry. Diversification is the key to our future.</p>
<p><b>Question 2:</b> With the current state of the economy, Collier County government continues to face severe budget constraints. Where do you feel that there are additional opportunities to be more efficient? Assuming that there are no more opportunities for efficiency, what are your priorities for reduction in services?</p>		
<p align="center"><b>Gina Downs</b></p> <p>I KNOW there are opportunities for better efficiencies within local government. As a member of the advisory productivity committee, with a relatively quick review of proposed budgets for every department within the county, I helped to identify \$22 million in recommended cuts in the current budget. In prior years, I was given complete discretion to fully review a single county government department and was able to identify more than \$6 million in proposed cuts for that one department alone.</p> <p>Priorities must be and will always be to provide sufficient health, safety and welfare services to the public.</p>	<p align="center"><b>Joe Foster</b></p> <p>First, our staffing levels, which increased over the past ten years more than three times the level of our population growth, need to be realigned with revenue projections which will also eliminate associated costs due to insurance, retirement, car fleets, office space leases, equipment and supplies. Next, programs need to be prioritized and pared back. Government’s primary role is the health, safety and welfare of its population. Non-essential services should be reduced or eliminated to align with revenue expectations if the first two measures are not sufficient. We must stop the gold plated approach to growing the county budget.</p>	<p align="center"><b>Georgia Hiller</b></p> <p>Florida law mandates that our county has a balanced budget. We are not allowed to accrue budget deficits like the federal government. We must continue to find ways to reduce costs. Increasing tax rates and fees are not the answer. As a former CPA experienced in government auditing, I would propose reducing expenditures in a fashion that is balanced between capital improvements and services, decreasing services on a pro-rata basis, where possible, and eliminating waste.</p> <p>We also need to continue to reduce our dependence on volatile impact fees. Growth can’t pay for growth when there is no growth.</p>

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<b>Question 3:</b> What are your two top priorities as County Commissioner? Be specific.		
<b>Gina Downs</b>	<b>Joe Foster</b>	<b>Georgia Hiller</b>
<p>Priority one is to continue with what I do best ... being a vocal advocate for good public policy. This is achieved by stressing full disclosure of how public dollars are allocated and spent. By demanding comprehensive cost-benefit analysis for all capital projects. By providing relevant and honest information in a timely manner to the taxpayers.</p> <p>Priority two is to help bring the county through this crippling recession. When the economy was strong, most of us favored high-end public improvements and public amenities that surrounded us. Now, we must focus on paying down our debt while using tax dollars prudently.</p>	<p>As a fiscal conservative my first priority will be to bring responsibility back to government budgeting and spending. Over the past decade the budget had been doubling every four years and as taxpayers we have been burdened with \$1 Billion in debt. Another priority will be to get government at the local, regional, state and national level working together to save precious tax funds and reduce government intrusion into our lives. The millions of dollars wasted on duplicative programs, regulations and lawsuits must end immediately and I will fight to accomplish both of these priorities starting from day one.</p>	<p>As a fiscal conservative, my top priority will be to reduce taxes and spending. We cannot continue to spend at the rate that county government has in the past. My professional experiences as a former CPA and as an attorney, as well as my volunteer service with the Collier County Clerk of Courts and the Productivity Advisory Committee, make me well suited for this position. My other top priority is to bring accountability and total transparency in county government. It is my pledge to keep our constituents informed in an honest, straightforward manner on all activities in government.</p>