

District 101 candidates miles apart but not on leasing of Alligator Alley

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NAPLES — Friday night was all about the issues during the District 101 forum at the Board of County Commission Chambers.

About 15 residents, including candidate supporters, attended the nearly hour-long event hosted by the League of Women Voters of Collier County.

League president Chris Straton moderated the session between Rep. Matt Hudson, R-Naples, and his democratic challenger Maria Jimenez who are both vying for the District 101 seat.

District 101 encompasses eastern Collier and western Broward counties.

Topics covered included education, Florida's budget issues and the environment.

The candidates found some common ground on their shared stance when it came to Alligator Alley.

Both opposed the leasing of the roadway, but for different reasons.

Hudson said he believed that the leasing of Interstate 75 went against the original intent the legislation proposed and that it needed to be revised.

Jimenez, on the other hand, said she would favor legislation barring such a lease agreement from taking place.

Overall, the candidates said they liked the opportunity provided by the forum to reach out to voters.

"I think that it was very fair," Jimenez said after the event. "I think it was a very good opportunity to compare and contrast our views, and compare and contrast what we represent."

Jimenez said that both she and Hudson have two very different perspectives on the issues and that it's up to the voters to choose who they want to represent them.

Hudson agreed and said he was very pleased with the format and how it was presented.

"I think it (the forum) was great," said Hudson adding that he was also pleased with how many residents turned out. "I think that's what the purpose of these things (forums) is to try and educated the voter. Because an informed voter is a great voter."

For first time, forum attendee Darrin Brooks said the event provided necessary access to the candidates.

"I thought it (the forum) was very good," said District 101 resident Brooks, 44, after the forum.

The 10-year Golden Gate resident, who is also the secretary and legislative trustee for the Gator Alley chapter of Abate Florida, said the forum gave him a better understanding of where each candidate stood on the issues and that he'd be going to the early voting polls within the next few days to cast his ballot.

"It's something that you have to do," said Brooks.

For those that missed the forum Friday, the event is slated to be rebroadcast through Collier County TV and will also be available on the county's Web site www.colliergov.net.