



# THE INFORMED DEMOCRAT OF SWFL



## From the Chair

By Kari Lerner

Although the Lee County 2022 election did not produce the results we had hoped for, we did have some very bright spots. Congratulations to **Debbie Jordan, Teresa Watkins-Brown, Mike Bonacolta, Lucia Gomez Sherman, and Terolyn Watson** for winning re-election to their seats. Well done!



In the coming weeks we will be making a thorough assessment of the activities of the Democratic Party of Lee County (DPLC) to determine what worked and what

didn't in order to formulate our plan for 2024.

But for now it is important to pause and reflect on the relationships forged and the community built through our combined efforts. To that end, I would like to thank the following volunteers for their countless hours of service to the DPLC:

Voter Protection Team – Mike McHenry Chair

Finance Committee – Michael Schwartz Chair

Young Democrats Committee – Gustavo Hernandez Chair

Grievance Committee – Joshua Lopez Chair

Diversity & Inclusion Committee –

Chris Thompkins Chair

2022 Candidate Recruitment Committee – Todd Truax Chair  
Volunteer Coordinator – Ellie Rubenstein

Informed Democrat Newsletter Editor – Melissa Butler

Data Director – Dave Waks  
Interim Data Director – Dan Rotigel  
VAT Administrator – Marian Frane  
VAT and other Tools Developer – Renard Biltgen

Phone Bank Team Lead – Garry Weiss

Texting Team Lead – Edith Hunt  
Interim Texting Team Lead – Kathy Chumley

Postcarding Team Lead – Nancy Terreri

Communications Team Lead – Kathy Fanny

Hispanic Outreach – Carmen Lopez-Negron

Webmaster – Jennifer Sandler

Graphic Design Artist – Jan Sommer  
Poll Visibility Team Lead – Eileen McHenry

Souls to the Polls Coordinator – Marian Frane

School Board Advocacy Lead – Jan Manarite

Voter Registration Team Leads – Eileen McHenry, Lori Berkowitz, Ellie Rubenstein, and Gloria McComas

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### DEMOCRATS FIGHT FOR



VOTING RIGHTS

Equality & Justice



Economic Opportunity

Affordable Healthcare



Clean Water

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## Democrats Surprise at the National Level

By Wayne Swanson

Occasionally American elections turn out differently than projected. That was the case nationally in recent midterms. All signs pointed to a Republican wave that the GOP and most media outlets predicted. The truth is that the President's party normally loses support in Congress. In the last four midterms, Presidents lost an average of 38 seats in the House of Representative and 4 in the Senate. President Biden's popularity was struggling to reach 40%. Inflationary economic indicators, usually a reliable indicator of voting trends, suggested the electorate wanted change.

However, early on election night, Democrat John Fetterman defeated Mehmet Oz in the Pennsylvania Senate contest, taking a seat that had been Republican. This proved to be a good

omen for Democrats. Final results gave Democrats control of the Senate with either 50 or 51 votes, depending on a December 6 runoff in Georgia. (If Democrat Raphael Warnock retains his seat, it would solidify the Party's support and make things easier to control the workings of the Senate).

After a lengthy period of voting counts for the 435 seats in the House of Representatives, Republicans have a narrow 9 seat majority. With 2 seats still undecided, it appears that they will have a 222-213 majority, far fewer than they expected.

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## ...But Disappoint in Florida

By Melissa Butler

So, despite good news on the national level, the election was fairly bleak here in Lee County in particular and Florida in general. Locally, of course, we are heavily outnumbered in terms of voter registration, 44% of Lee County voters are Republicans and **25%** Democrats with NPAs accounting for 31%. This Republican advantage over Democrats increased by 3% from 2020.



While Democrats might not win here, (as Barack Obama and John Fetterman have shown) losing-by-less in red counties can improve the chances of victory statewide. In Lee County, this year, our statewide

candidates--e.g. Demings, Crist--did 8-10 points worse than statewide candidates in 2018 and 2020. In 2020, Democrats in Lee County

overperformed. Not so in 2022. Complicating matters though may be a different "elephant in the room" namely "Ian." Turnout in Lee County this year was down--53% compared with 66% in 2018 (and 81% in 2020). Did Ian disproportionately affect Democrats in Lee County? That would be an interesting question for follow up.

There were a few bright spots in non-partisan local elections, where several Democrats did win. (See box, page 4) In addition, Kathy Fanny ran a strong campaign, and did much better than most Democrats, narrowly losing out on a school board seat 52%-48% with her real areas of strength, Sanibel and Pine Island, heavily damaged by the storm. In a victory for freedom, Sanibel voters rejected candidates who wanted to restrict access to materials and elected candidates who supporting the First Amendment's value of access to diverse information.

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## In Gratitude

Dems gathered at the Broadway Palm on Nov. 28 for a (short) face-to-face meeting led by our County Chair followed by a potluck with entertainment! Our Democratic candidates revealed themselves to be multi-talented. Chris Proia's comedy routine was followed by musical selections from Annie Wenz assisted by Howard Sapp.



Kari Lerner at the podium



Chris Proia



Howard Sapp and Annie Wenz

## From the Chair

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Special thanks to our outgoing officers who are not seeking another term. These individuals have executed their offices with professionalism and dedication, and we wish them all the best as they move into different roles:

Recording Secretary - Ron Szarenski  
Treasurer - Pat Tiberi

Special thanks to Sierra Thomas for her dedicated leadership as our Coordinated Campaign Regional Organizer and to Sarah Wilson as the Political Director for SWFL for the Charlie Crist campaign.

**Sincerest thanks to ALL of our dedicated volunteers. Rest now, the fight begins again in January with renewed purpose and fresh perspectives for 2024.**

## Caucus of the Month

### Lee County Democratic Black Caucus

By Carolyn Norris

Nationally, Democrats have defied the odds and impeded the imagined "red wave" in the recent elections. Woohoo! Unfortunately, Florida became even more "red." Statewide, registered Republicans now outnumber registered Democrats. Equally important at the local level, the lone referendum on the ballot ushered in the process of electing the superintendent for Lee County Schools. This process opens the door to electing "unqualified" candidates to run our school district, without being accountable to the School Board. This is where the members of the School Board are crucial; here is where caucuses and clubs can increase visibility at school board meetings and must educate the voting public as to why failing to vote is not an option and why their votes count.

In the new year, several changes in Lee County Democratic Black Caucus' (LCDBC) activities may occur, including the elections of officers scheduled for our March General Meeting and recently revised

Bylaws. Regardless of the election outcomes, our 2023 agenda must remain intact. LCDBC intends to provide bimonthly voter education workshops with a target audience of newly registered voters and eligible unregistered voters. Our goal is to increase outreach to the 18 to 45 age group, who reportedly saved the Party in the recent elections. While we plan to appeal to the younger audience, we are grateful for our "seasoned" voters and will always acknowledge those "who dependably brought us to the dance!"

This is a clarion call to join our Caucus and collaborate in these endeavors! Let us continue to defy the odds and turn Florida blue!

LCDBC meets the 3rd Tuesday of each month from 6:30-8:00 p.m. Register at [www.LeeBlackDems.org](http://www.LeeBlackDems.org) to attend. Currently, our meetings are virtual; however, we have plans to introduce one in-person meeting each quarter. Keep an eye out for the announcement of our in-person meetings.



# Election 2022

## National Election

*Continued from page 2*

Given 470 congressional elections among a diverse and divided population, it is difficult to fathom the exact reasons for a national trend. However, four factors are helpful. First, large numbers of voters are tired of Donald Trump, his “lies,” and election denials. Several of his handpicked candidates went down to defeat, cutting into GOP gains. Second, Democrats were aided by the Supreme Court’s abortion decision, which overturned a 50 year Supreme Court precedent guaranteeing a woman’s right to choose. Third, younger voters came out for Democrats in far greater numbers than in recent mid-term elections, a trend which the Party needs to consolidate in 2024 and beyond. Finally, in several competitive elections, “65 and older” voters put aside inflation concerns to defeat extremist Republicans.

The results of the midterms have already affected both parties as 2024 looms. Donald Trump’s declaration that he is a candidate for President has elevated the question of his ability to lead. The results of the last three elections show that he damaged his party’s fortunes. Several Republicans, including former Vice-President Mike Pence and Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, appear likely to challenge. A contest between Trump detractors and what remains of his considerable political base will severely complicate the Party’s deliberations and agenda.

Democrats also heard the call for new leadership in Washington. Losing control of the House of Representatives precipitated change. Despite winning reelections, both Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, who have been in top leadership positions for over 20 years, are stepping down. New leaders will have 2 short years to lead Democrats in the House to project a new or modified Party image to the nation.

Senate elections in 2024 will pose a serious challenge for Democrats. Of the 33 seats to be contested, 23 are currently held by Democrats (Independent Senators Bernie Sanders (VT) and Angus King (ME) who vote with Democrats to organize the Senate are part of the group).

Also of concern, what does the future hold for President Biden? His support among Democrats has been boosted in the wake of midterm results. A majority of Democratic voters believe he could win in 2024 particularly if positive momentum continues. However, his age is a concern among a significant group of party loyalists, including some in Congress who have urged him not to run. At 80 years he is already the nation’s oldest President. He would be 87 if elected and served another full term. Will the President’s incumbent status and extensive experience work for him if younger popular candidates challenge him at each stage of the election process?

At a time when neither party is content to operate with close margins at best, and when deadlock is more likely than action, national politics over the next two years will be just as loud, controversial, and divisive as both parties seek to break the logjam.

*Wayne Swanson is Connecticut College Professor Emeritus of Political Science*

## Democrats elected In Non-Partisan Elections

### School Board

Debbie Jordan

### Fort Myers City Council

Teresa Watkins Brown

Terolyn Watson

### Lehigh Acres Municipal Services Improvement District

Mike Bonacolta

### Lehigh Acres Fire Control and Rescue District

Cia Gomez-Sherman

### Paseo-Community Development District

Debra Johnson

### Tice Fire Protection and Rescue Service Dist.

James Burgess

### Sanibel Public Library Board

Susan Holly, Barbara Ruben, Roy Gibson



## State & Local Elections

*Continued from page 2*

Not only did Republicans sweep all state-wide offices but Florida is also pretty much single-handedly responsible for handing the gavel to Kevin McCarthy--or whoever becomes speaker! In 2020, Florida elected 16 Republicans and 11 Democrats to Congress. This year, Florida elected 20 Republicans and 8 Democrats to Congress, thanks to DeSantis's (probably unconstitutional) map. The state legislature now has supermajorities in both chambers. Republicans upset 2 incumbent Senators, 2 incumbent State Representatives and won 3 open Senate and 5 open House seats. The legislature will have 28 Republicans and 12 Democrats in the Senate and 85 Republicans and 35 Democrats in the House.

Why is this? In a post-election letter, State Party Chair Manny Diaz claimed it was a result of a long term trend that will take more than one cycle to reverse. "We've lost ground to Republicans that can't be made up in a single cycle. We've lost 16 of the last 17 statewide elections since 2012 and our party has had five different Chairs in the past 10 years."

Compounding the problem, the national Democratic organization has largely written off Florida. As Diaz noted, "Funding and resources that have helped keep our state competitive were zeroed out and redirected elsewhere this cycle. While in the 2018 midterm elections, the national organizations invested nearly \$60 million to Florida Democratic efforts, in 2022 their investments plummeted to \$1.3 million, barely 2% of what we got in 2018."

Going forward, Diaz warned that Florida Democrats need to face the reality that "there's no cavalry coming. We are the cavalry." Charging

ahead, then, in his view, will mean "tough conversations about how we move forward. . . . We need to determine why our get out the vote efforts were unsuccessful and how we work together to build the county-by-county infrastructure necessary to compete statewide.... If we want to win in a large and diverse state, we've got to have conversations with Floridians in their communities and at their doors. And that will require all of us, across the broad tent our party encompasses, marshaling our resources and working together."

Now there's something that Manny Diaz didn't explicitly address that many have wondered about --namely the shift in the Latino vote in Florida. Once reliably Democratic, now no longer so. Last month, speaking to the Democratic Club of Southwest Fort Myers, Tim Padgett, NPR's Miami-based Americas' correspondent, offered some insights into why things have gone so badly awry for Dems in Miami. Padgett pointed out that, unlike Democrats who've walked away, Republicans have invested in Florida. They've labelled Democrats as leftist, Communists, socialistas and frightened away Cubans, Colombians, and Venezuelans. So successful was their branding that Colombian-born Annette Taddeo could be linked to hated left wing authoritarian regimes and soundly defeated in a race for a Congressional seat held by Democrats as recently as 2 years ago. In addition, Republicans have done a better job of recognizing the diversity of the Latino population in Miami and targeting messages to specific groups--for example, ads on a Venezuelan radio station would be voiced by speakers with Venezuelan accents. Clearly, the conversations Diaz envisions are going to have to address these issues.

*Melissa Butler is Wabash College Professor Emerita of Political Science*

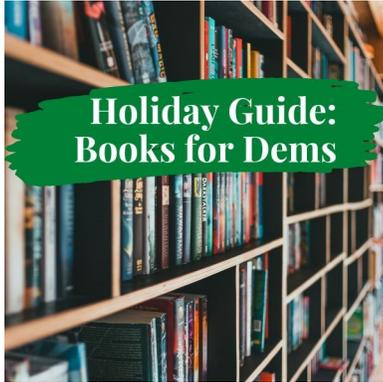


### *Why are you a Democrat?*

Let us know. The Informed Democrat wants to hear from folks who represent the great diversity of our Party. Share you story with our readers (up to 300 words) to [Informeddemocrat@gmail.com](mailto:Informeddemocrat@gmail.com).

## Books for Democrats

Need some gift ideas for Democratic friends? Try these:



John A. Farrell, *Ted Kennedy: A Life.* "An enthralling and groundbreaking new biography of one of modern America's most fascinating and consequential political figures, drawing on important new sources, by an award-winning

biographer who covered Kennedy closely for many years."

Anand Giridharadas, *The Persuaders.* Read about dissenters who continue to champion persuasion in an age of polarization. Learn about progressives including Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez as well as a leader of Black Lives Matter and those who fight disinformation.

Cody Keenan, *Grace: President Obama and Ten Days in the Battle for America.* "At a time when the meaning of America is up for grabs, Cody Keenan's new book chronicles ten days that tested us and ultimately showed us at our best. It's a captivating story about what's worth fighting for, an antidote to cynicism that will make you believe again."—President Barack Obama, via Twitter

Ezra Klein, *Why We're Polarized.* "Neither a polemic nor a lament, this book offers a clear framework for understanding everything from Trump's rise to the Democratic Party's leftward shift to the politicization of everyday culture."

Michelle Obama, *The Light We Carry: Overcoming in Uncertain Times.* The former First Lady enlists readers in a dialogue, considering the questions many of us wrestle with: How do we build enduring and honest relationships? How can we discover strength and community inside our differences? What tools do we use to address feelings of self-doubt or helplessness? What do we do when it all starts to feel like too much?

Nina Totenberg, *Dinners with Ruth.* An extraordinary account of two women (Nina Totenberg and Ruth Bader Ginsburg) who paved the way for future generations by tearing down

professional and legal barriers. It is also an intimate memoir of the power of friendships as women began to pry open career doors and transform the workplace. At the story's heart is one, special relationship: Ruth and Nina saw each other not only through personal joys, but also illness, loss, and widowhood.

Raphael G. Warnock, *A Way Out of No Way.* Called by The New York Times Book Review "a narrative of an extraordinary life, from impoverished beginnings in Savannah to his arrival on Capitol Hill. Along the way, he reflects with considerable candor and insight on the meaning and importance of faith, truth-telling and political and social redemption."

Sheldon Whitehouse, *The Scheme: How the Right Wing Used Dark Money to Capture the Supreme Court.* Senator Sheldon Whitehouse examines the right-wing scheme to capture the courts, and how it influenced the Trump administration's appointment of over 230 "business-friendly" judges, including the last three justices of the United States Supreme Court.

Democratic Women's Club of Lee County

### Annual Holiday Meeting

**Saturday, December 10, 2022**  
Social 10:00 A.M Meeting 10:30 A.M

**Quality Life Center of SWFL**  
3210 Dr. Martin Luther King Blvd.  
Fort Myers, Florida 33916

**Bring an item to auction off to help needy girls go to summer camp at the Quality Life Center. It could be a spa basket, pet treat basket, baked goods, used paintings, weekend retreat or new golf umbrella, for example.**

**Help decorate by bringing a pretty candle or ceramic Santa, a tiny tree or your favorite holiday decoration**

**Bring some snacks to munch on such as holiday cookies, cheese & crackers, or chips & dip, etc.**

**Renew membership dues by holiday meeting and get your name in lottery for \$50 gift card**

**Sign up for Book Club**

For more information, please contact  
1<sup>st</sup> Vice-President Beatrice Jacquet-Castor, Phone: 239-878-5898