



from the desk of **SHERIFF RICK STALY**

What Voters Might Want to Know About the Flagler County Commission District 4 Election

Up until now I have chosen to make no public comment or endorsements in the Flagler County Commission District 4 election. But, after listening to the two remaining candidates debate at various forums, I now feel compelled to provide my thoughts to the community as the voters have two very different candidates – one candidate that is thoughtful, articulate and understands the issues and the other candidate that has spewed the defund the police mantra and philosophy. The “defund the police” candidate is NPA Jane Gentile-Youd.

Based on her comments at these forums she believes that your safety is best served by taking money from law enforcement and giving it to another public safety entity. The better solution and public policy would be to properly fund all public safety. The Florida Legislature understood this and as a result recently changed Florida law so that Florida’s 67 Sheriffs have the budget autonomy to respond quickly to public safety matters. Commissioner O’Brien got it right when he and other members of the County Commission forced a millage rate reduction but kept public safety whole. They know the Sheriffs of Florida know how to deliver law enforcement services to their communities better than any politician!

Despite personally meeting with candidate Gentile-Youd, answering her questions, providing her reams of documents, she instead chooses to listen to failed law enforcement officials and some current and former county staff. She knows that as Sheriff I have delivered full-service law enforcement services at the lowest cost per capita in our region and of agencies our size. When I was elected Sheriff, I took over a demoralized agency that had been underfunded and understaffed for decades; was using old technology, worn out vehicles, working out of a mold infested building and suffered from scandal after scandal. It was not a proactive agency but instead was a reactive agency. The persons responsible for this at all levels of government are gone. I worked with the County Administrators and the County Commissioners to develop solutions together. This has resulted in a 54% reduction in crime and today, FCSO is a proactive Agency and a leader in law enforcement.

Candidate Gentile-Youd believes that because of our success we should be defunded and the money shifted to other county departments. Just look around the country and see how well that has worked out for cities and counties that followed this mantra. Crime has skyrocketed and they are now playing catch-up and re-funding their police by millions and millions of dollars.

I do agree that Flagler County Fire Rescue needs help and if they worked for me, like they do in some Florida counties, I would fight for them too. They too have been neglected for decades but not because of better funding the Sheriff’s Office but instead because of poor FCFR leadership and County Administrators not recommending FCFR be funded better to the Board of County Commissioners. There was no vision or strategic planning for FCFR. Thankfully, that is all starting to change under the current Fire Chief, County Administrator, and County Commissioners.

Candidate Gentile-Youd also believes the FCSO is over managed and supervised which is proof she has no clue how law enforcement operates and is listening to the wrong people. Deputies are entrusted with significant power and authority, the power of arrest ending someone’s freedom and the power of making a split-second decision that could end someone’s life. That is why proper and adequate supervision and management is critically important. This is why I require all sworn managers to serve as watch commanders. It is why I go out on my Friday night patrols. That is why we do significant training and our policies are on the cutting edge of professional law enforcement. That is why FCSO holds four accreditations while most agencies have none. We hold our employees accountable; and, in the rare occasion when they let us down, they are disciplined.

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Candidate Gentile-Youd's rhetoric is thoughtless and threatening to our community. At best, it's foolish and naïve. At the worst, it's dangerous and reckless public policy. She wants to return FCSO to the scandalous years that would result in rising crime and I won't let that happen. These irresponsible comments hurt FCSO's recruiting and retention.

Candidate Gentile-Youd says she wants to listen to and represent the community. She must be listening to a different community. What I hear from our community, and I am in the community all the time, is our community supports our deputies, they are enjoying the lowest crime rate in the area and in Flagler County in over 25 years and they appreciate it and feel safe. They support the changes and vision I have implemented in your FCSO.

So, you have two choices. While I will not make an endorsement in the County Commission race for District 4, I highly encourage you to do your research on Leann Pennington. We did and that is why my wife and I will be voting for Leann Pennington.

Rick Staly

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Sheriff