

Crist to hit town to raise campaign funds

Schedules bipartisan event in Fort Myers

By Betty Parker • June 12, 2010

1:10 A.M. — Gov. Charlie Crist, running for the U.S. Senate as an independent, has acknowledged it's harder to raise money without the donors who traditionally focus on a major party candidate.

But with Crist leading in most polls and checks still do come in, he's scheduled to be in Fort Myers to collect more at a June 27 fundraiser with a bipartisan host list. The event is at the home of Wayne and Rachelle Isaacson, who've also co-hosted an event for GOP state House candidate Jason Moon.

Others on the initial host list, which organizers say is still forming, include Bruce Strayhorn, who helps both Republican and Democratic candidates; John and Liz Kagan; Adam Corey; Gordon and Denise Corey; Ryan Huxtable; and Ryan and Angie Tewis and Lee County commissioners Frank Mann and Tammy Hall.

Crist has stayed in the headlines as oil washes up on Panhandle beaches, and the governor still says he wants a special session to put a constitutional amendment on the ballot that would keep oil drilling far away from Florida's shoreline.

Republican legislative leaders, however, turn thumbs down on the idea, saying Florida already has laws that do the same thing. Nor do they look favorably on giving Crist a platform to push something polls indicate would be popular with most Floridians.

But proponents for the special session point out that laws can be changed. House members voted last year to allow drilling much closer - as near as four miles from Florida's shoreline. In what turned out to be a remarkably prescient move, Rep. Gary Aubuchon, R-Cape Coral, was one of the few Republicans who voted against letting the rigs come closer. That bill ultimately failed when the Senate refused to take it up. But the bill's sponsor is slated to be the next House Speaker, and until the recent catastrophic spill, a renewed effort to allow closer

drilling was expected.

Crist and others support the constitutional amendment because that would be more difficult for future legislatures to change.

But unless legislative leaders signal some hope of success, calling a

special session would likely be painted as a waste of time and money.

House candidates

Republican candidates for state House 73 - Matt Caldwell, Deanna Casalino, Jason Moon and John Schultz - appeared this week at the Lee Republican Women's Club, giving a first glance at relative newcomers to the race: Schultz, who just retired after 20 years with Florida Highway Patrol and providing security for the lieutenant governor; and Casalino, a Realtor from San Carlos Park.

The candidates agreed on many issues, and cited their backgrounds as useful experience. Casalino said her work with the actors' union and the San Carlos Chamber of Commerce shows she can see both the workers' and the business sides.

Schultz pointed to his career in law enforcement and time spent in Tallahassee for expertise with the Legislature and public safety matters.

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Moon, an administrator for 21st Century Oncology with 180 offices in 15 states, said that gives him insight into the issues of small businesses. And Caldwell, who has been active in GOP and community issues for several years, said he has community insight and has worked to let people know who he is, how he operates, and that he's someone who can be trusted.

Another difference resulted from a question asking how long each had been a Republican. Schultz, Caldwell and Moon said since they first registered to vote. Casalino said she was a Democrat "many years ago," and later explained that she switched during Sheriff Mike Scott's first campaign in 2004.

Thousands of Lee Democrats switched then to vote for Scott in the GOP primary, but Casalino said it was more a matter that her views had changed to be more Republican.

The primary winner will face Democratic businessman Cole Peacock, who this week won the endorsement of the Florida Education Association, Teachers Association of Lee County and Support Personnel Association of Lee County.

Aronberg gets cash

State Sen. Dave Aronberg, who faces a tough Democratic primary race for attorney general with Sen. Dan Gelber of Miami, said he had the biggest fundraiser of his political career in heavily Republican Lee County last week.

"There were more than 150 people there," Aronberg said of the event at the Broadway Palm Dinner Theater. "I'm especially honored that so many people turned out in an area that everyone says is a Republican stronghold."

He collected about \$12,000, with checks still coming in, but added the crowd number meant more to him than the dollar amount.

The 18-person host list included Todd Gates, Betty Gissandanner, Bill and Stephanie Keyes, Karen Nathan, Michael Reitman, Bruce Strayhorn, Howard Wheeler, Rod Cooper, Kenny Erickson and Guy and Ilene Whitesman.

Republicans vying for the same office include Lt. Gov. Jeff Kottkamp, who this week won the endorsement for the primary of the Florida Police

Benevolent Association. Others in that race include former legislator Holly Benson and Tampa prosecutor Pam Bondi.

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