All responses come directly from the candidates and are unedited by LWV. The League does not support or oppose any candidates or parties.

State Senate District 21

District 21 spans all of Manatee County and part of Hillsborough county. Two Republican candidates are running. The winner will face Democrat Amanada Linton in the November general election. Only registered Republicans may vote.

- Jim Boyd
  Candidate declined participation in voters’ guide and candidate forums. Candidate staff referred voters to Representative Boyd’s voting record.
- John Manners Houman

State Representative District 70

District 70 is an open seat and spans parts of Manatee, Hillsborough and Pinellas counties. As there is no Republican opposition in this race, it will be an open primary and all registered voters will be able to vote. Four candidates are running, and the winner will be final, even if the winner has less than 50% of the vote.

- Keisha Bell
- Michelle Grimsley
- Mark Oliver
- Michele Rayner

Videos of candidate forums are available at:
https://lwvmanatee.org/videos/

Complete voting information is available at
https://www.vote411.org/
What Legislative actions would you propose to ensure ballot security, improve voter access, and promote voter participation in elections?

Ballot security is being handled extremely well by each County Division of Election. By improving ease of access also promote voter participation. This sounds like a simplistic answer but the easier it is to register and find the polling place the more likely a person is to vote.

What additional actions, if any, should the Legislature take to recover Florida’s jobs, small businesses, and the state’s economy impacted by COVID19 virus? Please explain your position.

The coronavirus is like having an old-fashioned Florida hurricane party expecting an E1 or E2 and half way through the party someone tells you it’s an E5 and all you can say oh S***. Now that we’ve pulled our pants up, it’s time for the state to step up and help in any way it can through grants, loans and unemployment compensation. Set up a central database on the same basis is hurricane preparedness the state set up for all County and city in Florida to distribute needed medical supplies to places where they’re needed the most and to reallocate these medical necessities as the virus shifts to different areas of the state.

What policies and/or legislation would you introduce to best address racial inequity in Florida’s criminal justice system?

Changes to Our Criminal Justice System that treat the Rich and Guilty better than the Poor and Innocent. "Bryan Stevenson" DWB . Decriminalizing non-violent crimes. A small minority of our residents are bad people and there is only one place for them. The majority with a criminal history are good people that made bad decisions, and need to be pointed in the right direction. Afterthought: College is cheaper than Prison. Florida’s has an outstanding Law Enforcement Community and we need to provide them with the money, tools and Education they deserve. Changes in state law regarding police misconduct and the union practice of arbitration after a person has been fired. Gray areas: Laws that don't take into account extenuating circumstances.

What legislation and/or policies should the state pursue in respect to healthcare access for all Floridians? Please address access to reproductive healthcare as well in your answer.

Obama care, the original idea was sound! The only problem is it was designed to fail.
The legislators, healthcare industry, insurance industry and any other person’s of interest that had a hand in crafting this legislation should be ashamed of themselves. It almost verges on criminal!
After it passed, I help my son to enroll and I was appalled by how bad the plan is. Other states have adopted their own version of this plan that worked extremely well and Florida should do the same thing fixing all what I would call malpractice in the plan.

**What steps should the State take, if any, to protect Florida’s ecosystems, water resources, and coastal communities?**

The Protection of our Society: Long range planning for Agriculture, Algae Bloom, Beach Erosion, Infrastructure, Natural Habitat, Safe Drinking Water, and Salt Water Intrusion.

**What changes to Florida’s public education system, pre-K through grade 12, would you support if any?**

I’ve been away from the educational system for so long, I can truthfully say I’m not current on this topic. Once in office I would consult with the educational professionals on the best way to proceed. Two of my main concerns is:
1. All school systems should be treated equally no matter if there from a rich neighborhood or a poor neighborhood.
2. Change the environment in our schools where teachers enjoy teaching and students enjoyed learning instead of feeling that they are being punished.

**Do you oppose or support state laws that ban assault-style weapons and high capacity magazines for civilian use?**

Neither support nor oppose

**What are the two most important challenges facing Florida and, if elected, what actions will you take to address them within your first six months in office? (Your response may expand on a previous answer or relate to a new topic)**

I think our highest priority is getting Florida back to normal. The coronavirus and our economy is a moving target. What works today will not work in two weeks or six months. The only answer I can give is when in office talk to the professionals in each field that is affected by the coronavirus from health, education and industry.
Keisha Bell  (Dem) Attorney

Address  PO BOX 530102, Saint Petersburg, Florida 33747

Campaign Website http://votekeishabell.com

Facebook https://www.facebook.com/VoteKeishaBell
Twitter @bellforflorida
Instagram https://www.instagram.com/bellforflorida

contactphone (727)282-4235

Age 45

Education Juris Doctorate (JD) Florida State University – College of Law – Tallahassee, Florida; Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Psychology University of Central Florida – Orlando, Florida

Hometown Saint Petersburg, Florida  County PIN

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**What Legislative actions would you propose to ensure ballot security, improve voter access, and promote voter participation in elections?**

To ensure security, access, and participation in our elections, we need to expand mail-in ballots, increase the number of polling locations, allow for same-day voter registration, and provide more voter education. Voting is one of the most vital rights the people in our nation possess and guaranteeing free and fair elections for everyone should always be considered a top priority by our Legislature. During this particular time, the Legislature should also be focused on ensuring that people can vote safely with minimal risk of contracting Coronavirus. I will propose and strongly support any measure that achieves this goal that do not have the effect of limiting voter access.

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**What additional actions, if any, should the Legislature take to recover Florida’s jobs, small businesses, and the state’s economy impacted by COVID19 virus? Please explain your position.**

At this point, the full economic impact of the Coronavirus is yet unknown, and likely will be for years to come. In an ideal world, our Legislature would have already held a special session in order to address this issue and alleviate the growing pressures on our business community. Unfortunately, at this point, there will be substantial delay before we are truly able to examine and tackle these concerns and we won’t know the steps that are required until then. However, it is fair to assume there will need to be difficult discussions made regarding our budget and policy priorities in the next fiscal year and beyond.

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**What policies and/or legislation would you introduce to best address racial inequity in Florida’s criminal justice system?**

One of the simplest ways to rectify this would be to focus on training more reform-minded prosecutors who are more likely to exercise greater discretion when approaching cases in order to help combat discriminatory policing, excessively punitive bail requirements, and the epidemic of mass incarceration in our state and our country. In order for this to be a part of a long-term solution, we must also implement reforms to the budget and funding of our police and sheriff’s departments. To foster a responsible, effective police force, we must provide adequate funding and training to our officers and properly fund other community-based alternatives.
What legislation and/or policies should the state pursue in respect to healthcare access for all Floridians? Please address access to reproductive healthcare as well in your answer.

Medicaid expansion and reform needs to be a top priority for our Legislature during the next session. The fact that we are ignoring federal funds at the expense of our residents’ health and quality of life is unconscionable, and it has only become more egregious in the wake of the Coronavirus pandemic. Similarly, there is no reason that a woman receiving Medicaid should be barred from using her benefits to receive an abortion. Women should not be punished by our healthcare system and government simply for being women.

What steps should the State take, if any, to protect Florida’s ecosystems, water resources, and coastal communities?

As a longtime advocate for environmental justice, I believe there are a number of steps our state should take to better protect our environment. Namely – increasing our emphasis on green energy throughout our state, improving science education so we can better communicate the issue to our residents, and implementing a ban on offshore drilling off the Florida coast. As a Pinellas native, it is abundantly clear the importance of our ecosystem in terms of not only our economy, but the lives and wellbeing of our residents. Climate change is already seriously threatening many of our coastal communities, and we must focus on improving their environmental resiliency and preventing additional damage to the rest of our state before it can occur.

What changes to Florida’s public education system, pre-K through grade 12, would you support if any?

First, Florida public school teachers must start receiving adequate compensation for their work. Current salaries and benefits for teachers are not reflective of the transformative, life changing work they are tasked with doing, and the bonus incentives offered are not consistent enough to take the place of a pay raise. Additionally, more funding must be directed towards ensuring our public schools have the tools necessary to meet the evolving needs of individual students. We must also reevaluate the role of standardized testing in our education system. Finally, and perhaps less frequently considered than some solutions, is the need to address gerrymandering in our school districts.

Do you oppose or support state laws that ban assault-style weapons and high capacity magazines for civilian use?

Strongly support

What are the two most important challenges facing Florida and, if elected, what actions will you take to address them within your first six months in office? (Your response may expand on a previous answer or relate to a new topic)

I believe the two most pressing challenges facing our state are healthcare and education. By fighting to adequately fund a quality education system for our residents, we can be sure that the next generation is prepared to handle the shifting landscape of our economy and have the opportunity to work in well-paid, high-skilled positions. Additionally, our healthcare system a driving force in our economy and also helps to determine nearly every aspect of a person’s life. I will fight for medicaid expansion and reform.
What Legislative actions would you propose to ensure ballot security, improve voter access, and promote voter participation in elections?

I would propose legislation modeled after Nevada AB 345 which establishes same day registration during early voting and on election day; authorizes clerk to establish polling places where any voter in the county can vote; requires provisional ballots to include all offices and extends absentee ballot receipt deadline for ballots sent by mail and require notification to voter of absentee ballot signature deficiency.

What additional actions, if any, should the Legislature take to recover Florida’s jobs, small businesses, and the state’s economy impacted by COVID19 virus? Please explain your position.

We will need a comprehensive COVID-19 Revitalization Package. This legislation will need to include funding for the expansion of low-cost small business loans, COVID-19 research and treatment for our state universities, funding for our hospitals and personal protective equipment, funding to purchase more technology for our K-12 schools, more funding to our local governments and to expand virus testing and tracing.

What policies and/or legislation would you introduce to best address racial inequity in Florida’s criminal justice system?

We need criminal justice reform legislation that will overhaul our ineffective criminal justice system. We currently incarcerate over 100,000 people and between our failed death penalty system, harsh mandatory minimum sentencing, lengthy prison terms for drug possession, over-incarceration of non-violent offenders and zero-tolerance school policies the need for reform is long overdue. I look forward to working with and supporting organizations that have already done great work in this area.

What legislation and/or policies should the state pursue in respect to healthcare access for all Floridians? Please address access to reproductive healthcare as well in your answer.

I think we should pursue legislation that refocuses our health care on primary care. I would like to see a pluralistic health care system approach. Because women's reproductive rights is a partisan issue, this will definitely be a fight, but not including reproductive health care is not an option.
**What steps should the State take, if any, to protect Florida’s ecosystems, water resources, and coastal communities?**

I would support legislation for a statewide ban on hydraulic fracturing. Close to 93% of Floridians depend on groundwater for drinking water. Our aquifers are vulnerable to contamination and fracturing is extremely concerning to me.

**What changes to Florida’s public education system, pre-K through grade 12, would you support if any?**

Our state constitution calls for a "uniform, efficient, safe, secure, and high quality system of free public schools." We have failed our constitution in many of these areas. We need to look at a new funding formula and more accountability after funding is sent to the local school districts.

**Do you oppose or support state laws that ban assault-style weapons and high capacity magazines for civilian use?**

Strongly support

**What are the two most important challenges facing Florida and, if elected, what actions will you take to address them within your first six months in office? (Your response may expand on a previous answer or relate to a new topic)**

The pandemic that we are currently facing has shed more light on issues that we have already been facing. Access and equity in health care is an issue that I would dive into immediately as well as addressing putting an end to the school-to-prison pipeline.
Mark Oliver (Dem) CEO-Non Profit

Address Post Office Box 531394, Saint Petersburg, FL 33747
Campaign Website http://markforflorida.com
Facebook https://www.facebook.com/markforflorida
Twitter @markforflorida
Instagram @makrforflorida
contactphone 727-831-2829
Phone 727-831-2829

Age 28
Education Bachelors of Arts
Hometown Saint Petersburg County PIN

What Legislative actions would you propose to ensure ballot security, improve voter access, and promote voter participation in elections?

Before Amendment 4, Florida was one of only four states that placed a lifetime voting ban on anyone with a felony conviction. Almost 65% of Floridians who voted on Amendment 4 supported this measure. The people of Florida have spoken and I intend to be sure they are heard, and the Florida Legislature honors this decision from voters. Current lawmakers are considering legislation that undermines Amendment 4. I will be a bold supported of returning citizens by opposing legislation, like HB 7089 and SB 7086 that threaten to restore their rights as citizens. Instead, I will support legislation to provide support to returning citizens to help them become reacclimated into society and a fair process to get their rights back.

What additional actions, if any, should the Legislature take to recover Florida’s jobs, small businesses, and the state’s economy impacted by COVID19 virus? Please explain your position.

COVID-19 has had devastating effects on the state budget. The legislature set aside approximately $300 million in the proposed 2020-21 Budget to respond to potential impacts of COVID-19. As our future become more uncertain with disproportionate impacts on minority communities and businesses, we must begin planning now to ensure future response and recovery. I would support tax increases on some of the state’s largest companies and corporations who already receive millions/billions of dollars in tax cuts while smaller businesses struggle to stay afloat during the pandemic. I oppose any cuts to education, affordable housing, or healthcare which are critical resources for vulnerable residents.

What policies and/or legislation would you introduce to best address racial inequity in Florida’s criminal justice system?

Current cases of police and civilian negative interactions have started conversations across the US about police brutality, police accountability, and the lack of resources that minority communities have when they feel that the police have acted with excessive force. Communities across the state and country are thinking creatively about how to strengthen the relationship between law enforcement and residents while managing a consistent increase in officers.
What legislation and/or policies should the state pursue in respect to healthcare access for all Floridians? Please address access to reproductive healthcare as well in your answer.

I will advocate for mental health funding, prioritize the complete drug epidemic and not only concentrate on opioids, but work to expand access to affordable healthcare for all Floridians. Health care is not a priority it is a human right, “The truth, of course, is that Americans now have little “choice” when it comes to managing their health care. Most can’t choose their own plan or how long they retain it, or even use it to select the doctor or hospital they prefer. But some reforms being discussed which I support such as “Medicare for all,” would provide these basic freedoms to users. I trust women to make their own healthcare decisions with their doctor – not politicians – and I oppose any attempt to make it harder for women,

What steps should the State take, if any, to protect Florida’s ecosystems, water resources, and coastal communities?

I fully support banning offshore drilling. As a state surrounded by water, it is so important that we are intentional about protecting our environment. Healthy oceans are critical to marine life and coastal communities like Florida who rely on tourism and fishing. Risking oil spills would result in catastrophic impacts to marine life and devastating losses for local businesses. I will work to reenact environmental protections by protecting our beaches from soil erosion, maintaining the health of our aquifers, banning offshore drilling off Florida’s Gulf Coast, and passing climate policies that safeguard our environment and communities. I am also in support of the legislation, Protecting and Securing Florida’s Coastline.

What changes to Florida’s public education system, pre-K through grade 12, would you support if any?

I am a product of Pinellas County Public Schools and a Tampa Bay College, the University of South Florida. Under the “Fair Share for Florida’s Future” plan, I support adjusting the corporate income tax to generate $1 billion of new revenue to invest in public schools, from top to bottom. This plan would invest in a pay raise for teachers so they make a starting salary of $50,000; increased investments in early childhood education so that children get the development they need in their most formative years; more SHOP 2.0 vocational training so that public school students can train for a career and are ready to join the 21st Century workforce when they graduate.

Do you oppose or support state laws that ban assault-style weapons and high capacity magazines for civilian use?

Strongly support

What are the two most important challenges facing Florida and, if elected, what actions will you take to address them within your first six months in office? (Your response may expand on a previous answer or relate to a new topic)

Florida currently ranks 50th in the nation when it comes to Special Needs Funding. I will lead the fight to keep iBudget, fully fund Home and Community Based Service Waivers, expedite Medical Waivers, and expand successful support programs. I will champion regional infrastructure that expands transportation choices, incorporates smart technologies, prioritizes sustainability, and better connects urban cores with suburban and rural communities, while protecting wildlife corridors. Tampa and St. Petersburg rank amongst the lowest in the State of Florida for transportation options. Tampa ranks #98 and St. Petersburg falls at #99, out of 101. Our failure to adequately invest in public transportation infrastructure holds back our economy.
What Legislative actions would you propose to ensure ballot security, improve voter access, and promote voter participation in elections?

We have seen time and time again the dysfunction and mismanagement of our elections and security in Florida. In addition to protecting Amendment 4, I will advocate for quality cyber security, transparency from our state and local officials, and proper vetting and testing of any third party applications or services used by our SOE’s. These technical issues can not be ignored and need a thorough overview. As we prepare for redistricting, I commit to being a fierce advocate during this process and fight any attempts to redistrict our state to favor any one party.

What additional actions, if any, should the Legislature take to recover Florida’s jobs, small businesses, and the state’s economy impacted by COVID19 virus? Please explain your position.

The COVID-19 pandemic placed a floodlight on the disparities for Floridians and proved that our unemployment benefits system is broken. When Floridians needed to access the system, our state failed to act. As state representative, I plan to conduct a full assessment of Florida Department of Economic Opportunity to identify the pitfalls in our system like any potential budget limitations that prevented timely monetary disbursements and constituent communication programs, and would put forth legislation reforming our unemployment benefits system. We must first address the over 900,000 Floridians with unpaid benefits claims, and we must work with the private sector to develop programs that leads to job creation to stimulate our economy.

What policies and/or legislation would you introduce to best address racial inequity in Florida’s criminal justice system?

As an attorney, I’ve fought to ensure second chances for our most vulnerable. In 2018, more than 60 percent of Floridians voted for Amendment 4 to restore the right to vote to 1.4 million returning citizens. Returning citizens who have paid their debt to society deserve equal access to democracy and the right to vote, and I am committed to protecting Amendment 4. District 70 has one of the highest rates of youth incarceration in the state, and I will file legislation that addresses youth incarceration and diversion programs to ensure that our children are being given every chance to thrive and reach their potential.
What legislation and/or policies should the state pursue in respect to healthcare access for all Floridians? Please address access to reproductive healthcare as well in your answer.

It is a right for all Floridians to have equitable access to affordable and quality healthcare, and the constituents in HD70 are at the epicenter of the need for affordable healthcare. It’s time this district had a champion in the legislature leading on policies like Medicaid that would provide coverage for nearly 1 million additional Floridians, public health clinic expansion, and tackling exorbitant prescription drug costs. I am a staunch advocate for women’s right to choose. Specifically, I am active in Planned Parenthood’s cohort- Stand With Black Women. This is a collective addressing reproductive justice, access to safe abortions, and maternal health specifically targeting Black women, women of color, and poor women.

What steps should the State take, if any, to protect Florida’s ecosystems, water resources, and coastal communities?

Our waterways are vital to our state’s largest industries: agriculture and tourism and any threats to Florida’s coasts would be harmful to our economy. I’ve dedicated my career to ensuring the civil rights and liberties of all including equitable access to clean air and water. Our state is in a pivotal moment where we need to address our growing environmental issues like climate change and our growing sea levels, and it is critically important that we prioritize preserving our planet for future generations to come. As State Representative, I will work to ensure that our environmental protection programs are fully funded so that our waterways are protected, potential drinking water is safe, and that our livestock and our communities are safe.

What changes to Florida’s public education system, pre-K through grade 12, would you support if any?

The Legislature has consistently deprioritized public education in Florida by failing to adequately invest our schools. As State Representative, I will advocate for an annual state budget that does not divert funds from public schools to charter schools and supports increased teacher salaries & benefits. Our failure to equitably invest in public schools is part in parcel to the proliferation of the school-to prison-pipeline because of the lack of access to resources and zero-tolerance policies which disproportionately impacts students of color. We need equitable investments into our public schools, along with wrap around services to address the intersectional needs of our students and their families.

Do you oppose or support state laws that ban assault-style weapons and high capacity magazines for civilian use?

Strongly support

What are the two most important challenges facing Florida and, if elected, what actions will you take to address them within your first six months in office? (Your response may expand on a previous answer or relate to a new topic)

Housing Equity: In District 70, more than half of the residents use up to 30 percent of their income on housing. This makes it increasingly difficult for people, at varying income levels, to access affordable housing consistently. I am committed to passing legislation to repeal the outdated anti-tenant statutes and to ensure the Sadowski Trust Fund is fully-funded and I will vote against appropriating those monies to any other area. Minimum wage: Access to good paying jobs is a critical need in District 70. As the cost of living increases, adjustments should be considered for wages to ensure every Floridian has the financial capacity to cover quality of life needs like housing, transportation, and healthcare to lead healthy, stable lives.