



**League of Women Voters
of Manatee County**

**Voters' Guide to Candidates in the
General Election, November 3, 2020**
Judicial Elections

**Featuring the background of candidates in these
Judicial District elections:**

- ✓ **Manatee County Judges**
Retention votes:
- ✓ **Florida Supreme Court**
- ✓ **Florida 2d District Court of Appeals**



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The League of Women Voters, a non-partisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, and works to increase understanding of major public policy issues.

Manatee County Court Judge Group 4



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What makes you the best qualified person for this judgeship?

The people of our community have entrusted me as an Assistant State Attorney with prosecuting a wide range of crimes including Domestic Battery, Child Abuse, Burglary, Driving Under the Influence, Selling Narcotics, Exploitation of the Elderly and Animal Cruelty. I also regularly educate local law enforcement officials, attorneys and the public. Prior to becoming an Assistant State Attorney, I worked in civil litigation. I have also taught university courses in the areas of Judicial Process, Evidence, Constitutional Law and Family Law. I have the trusted service and proven leadership to be the next Manatee County Court Judge. As an attorney, wife, mother and neighbor, I am ready to serve with integrity, impartiality and compassion.

Why are you running for this position?

I've had a strong appreciation of the critical role of the judiciary ever since law school when I interned for a New York State Supreme Court Judge. At this point in my career, I want to bring my legal skills and courtroom experience to the bench with the goal of working with others to significantly enhance the judicial system. I'm committed to ensuring that those people coming before the court are treated fairly. My husband, Ryan Jawitz grew up here, my children were born in the area and attend public school and Manatee County is my forever home. I am running to be the next Manatee County Court Judge because I am passionate about this great community.

Changes need to be made to our county court system - Support.

If you support this statement, how would you go about making those changes? If not, why do you oppose it?

The impact of COVID-19 has created new problems for everyone, in our courts and elsewhere. We need strategic thinking and innovative ideas to deal with the new challenges we're confronting. I know there are problem-solving initiatives that are being used in other jurisdictions that could potentially work in Manatee County. I would like to explore these programs and the potential for bringing them here to potentially enhance our justice system.



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What makes you the best qualified person for this judgeship?

I have had thousands of cases in the County Court of Manatee County. Not only have I had great experience in the very courtroom for which I seek election, that experience is incredibly diverse. As a lawyer, I have practiced in every position possible within the County Court. I've been a prosecutor for the State Attorney's Office, an Assistant Public Defender, a private criminal defense attorney, and a civil litigator for both plaintiff's and defendant's sides. I am extremely fluent and experienced with both the rules of criminal procedure and rules of civil procedure and therefore I am able to hit the ground running if elected.

Why are you running for this position?

I am greatly invested in my community. I have lived and worked in this county since elementary school. When my husband, also a lifelong resident of Manatee County, died in 2018 from cancer, the outpouring of support that I received from the citizens of Manatee County was so very humbling. Without being asked, people showed up and mowed my lawn, pressured washed my house, and brought so many foods and meals. Everyone wanted to do what they could to help my daughters and myself in our time of grief. The list of support we received is endless and could never be fully repaid. I very much want to give back. I love my home and the people in it and they deserve a public servant who cares and is greatly invested in the well-being of this county.

Changes need to be made to our county court system - Support.

If you support this statement, how would you go about making those changes? If not, why do you oppose it?

We have an excellent county court system, however I believe it could be improved by the addition of specialty courts. When I was an attorney for the Public Defender's Office, I was their attorney representative for the Manatee County DUI Court. Back then, Judge Douglas Henderson ran DUI Court. That was around 2011-2013. It is no longer in existence and Judge Henderson has since retired. Sarasota County still operates a DUI Court and I would love to bring this back to Manatee County to help reduce the recidivism rate of drunk driving in our community. If elected, I will do everything in my power to reestablish this specialty court within our County, including seeking grants and volunteering my time for the management of such a court.

Circuit Court: no judicial elections, as none of the 8 seats in our district have a challenger.

Retention elections

Merit retention is a vote of the public to retain or not retain justices who have been appointed by the governor. If the voters vote to retain, they will serve a six year term, then face another retention vote.

Florida Supreme Court

Carlos Muniz

Education

Muñiz obtained a B.A. with high honors from the University of Virginia in 1991. He received a J.D. from Yale Law School in 1997. During his legal studies, Muñiz served as an editor of the *Yale Law Journal*.

Career

He began serving on the court on January 22, 2019. Prior to his judicial appointment, Muñiz was the general counsel to the U.S. Department of Education. He was appointed to the position by President Donald Trump and confirmed by the U.S. Senate in 2018. Muñiz worked as the deputy attorney general and chief of staff in the Office of the Attorney General of Florida, under Attorney General Pam Bondi, from 2011 to 2014. In 2001, he began working as deputy general counsel for the Jeb Bush gubernatorial administration. He also served as general counsel for the state Department of Financial Services and as deputy chief of staff and counsel in the Florida House of Representatives for then-Speaker Marco Rubio.



He additionally worked in private practice, including the law firms of Hogan & Hartson in Washington, D.C., Gray Robinson, P.A., and McGuire Woods. After graduating from law school, Muñiz was a law clerk to Judge Thomas Flannery on the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia and to Judge Jose Cabranes on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit.

Florida 2d District Court of Appeals

Judge Drew Atkinson

J. Andrew "Drew" Atkinson received a B.A. from Florida State University and a J.D. with honors from Nova Southeastern University. He began his legal career at the Florida Office of the Attorney General, working in the Criminal Appeals Division before serving as a Deputy Solicitor General.

After clerking for the Honorable Melanie G. May of the Fourth District Court of Appeal, he served as Assistant General Counsel to the Governor before entering private practice at a statewide law firm. He later served as General Counsel for both the Florida Department of State and the Florida Department of Management Services. He was appointed to the Second District Court of Appeal in 2018.



Judge Atkinson is a veteran of the United States Army. He was born in Gainesville and raised in Bradenton, where he graduated from Manatee High School. He is a member of the William Reece Smith, Jr., Litigation Inn of Court.

Judge Morris Silberman

Judge Silberman received his undergraduate degree from Tulane University, majoring in philosophy and political science. He received his J.D. degree from the University of Florida College of Law in 1982.

Following law school, he served as a law clerk to Judge Herboth S. Ryder at the Second District Court of Appeal. He then worked with law firms in Sarasota and Clearwater. In 1988, he formed his own firm in Clearwater. Judge Silberman had a general civil litigation and appellate practice, with an emphasis on business and contract disputes.

Judge Silberman was appointed by Gov. Jeb Bush to the Second District Court of Appeal for a term beginning in January 2001. He served as chief judge of the court from July 1, 2011 to June 30, 2013. He has been active in a variety of professional and legal organizations.



Judge Silberman served as Chairman of the Florida Judicial Qualifications Commission and was a member of the JQC from 2003 to 2012. He was a member of The Florida Bar Board of Governors from 1996 to 2000 and served two terms on the Executive Committee and chaired the Budget Committee, the Election Reform Special Committee, and other committees. He was President of the Clearwater Bar Association from 1993 to 1994 and on its Board of Directors for several years. He has lectured on numerous occasions on matters relating to appellate practice, litigation, ethics, judicial discipline, and professionalism and has been an author and co-editor for *Business Litigation in Florida*, published by The Florida Bar, along with a variety of seminar materials.

Judge Andrea Teves Smith

Judge Andrea Teves Smith received her B.S. degree in Business Administration from the University of Florida in 1991. In 1994, she earned her J.D. from Stetson University College of Law, where she was Research Editor of the *Stetson Law Journal*, a member of Phi Delta Phi and Stetson Moot Court Board (President 1993-1994), and a Research and Writing II, teaching fellow.

Upon graduating from law school, Judge Smith entered private practice in Lakeland, Florida, joining the law firm of Peterson & Myers, P.A., and later becoming a shareholder of the firm. In June 2013, Governor Rick Scott appointed Judge Smith to the circuit bench of the Tenth Judicial Circuit Court. In 2014, she was retained by election without opposition.



She served over 5 years as a circuit judge in the felony, family and civil divisions. As a circuit judge, Judge Smith held several leadership positions including Administrative Judge of the Civil Division for 2 years, Chair of the Tenth Circuit Fairness & Diversity Team, and Second District Court of Appeal Representative of the Florida Conference of Circuit Judges Executive Committee. She also served on the Florida Bar's Eminent Domain Committee and co-authored the Jury Instructions of the Florida Eminent Domain Practice and Procedure (10th Ed.).

On January 7, 2019, Governor Rick Scott appointed Judge Smith to the Second District Court of Appeal. She began her service on February 1, 2019.

Judge Daniel Sleet

Judge Sleet earned a B.A. degree in History from Furman University in 1984. He received his J.D. degree from Cumberland School of Law in 1987 where he was awarded a scholarship his third year as Director of Trial Advocacy.

Following law school, Judge Sleet served as an assistant state attorney for the Hillsborough County State Attorney's Office from 1987-1991. During his tenure as an assistant state attorney, he tried over fifty (50) jury trials including capital murders, RICO, drug trafficking, and violent felonies.



In 1991, Judge Sleet joined the Tampa law firm of Barr, Murman, & Tonelli as an associate attorney practicing in the area of personal injury defense. He tried over thirty (30) jury trials. In 1998, he was unanimously admitted to partnership. Judge Sleet practiced law for nineteen (19) years before being appointed to the 13th Judicial Circuit Court in 2005 by Governor Jeb Bush. He was reelected to the circuit court without opposition in 2008 and served until December 2012, when Governor Rick Scott appointed him to the appellate bench.

Judge Sleet has been a member of the American Board of Trial Advocates (A.B.O.T.A.) since 2003. In 2015, he was selected Jurist of the Year by the Tampa Bay ABOTA Chapter. In 2017, he served as president of the Tampa Bay ABOTA Chapter. He served as an Adjunct Professor of Trial Advocacy at Stetson University College of Law for seven years. Since 2016, he has served as an Adjunct Professor of Trial Advocacy at the University of Tampa.

For more information on judicial elections, visit:
<https://www.floridabar.org/public/faircts/votes010/>