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DVCF Leadership Change

From the Desk of Elena McCullough

For the past 3 years, I had the honor of serving as president of the DVCF. It has been an amazing and rewarding experience. We have a great caucus because of the energy, dedication, and hard work of our members, board of directors, and leadership. Due to personal issues, I will be unable to continue as president of the DVCF. I will be forever grateful for all the support and guidance I have received from all of you, and especially VP Danny Fuqua, Marian Williams, Hazel Gillis and Lynne Fish. It has been an exciting and wonderful experience!! All my support goes to incoming president, Danny Fuqua.

Thank you for your service, then and now,
H. Elena McCullough, President
Democratic Veterans Caucus of Florida

A Message from the new President

Dear Members of the Democratic Veterans Caucus of Florida,

I am honored to assume the role of president for this esteemed organization, succeeding the dedicated leadership of Elena McCullough. I extend my sincere gratitude to her for three years of service. Additionally, I welcome Elena and her husband, Ray, to continue serving on the Board of Directors. Reflecting on the recent holiday festivities conducted via Zoom, I express my appreciation to all who participated in celebrating together. As we enter the pivotal year of 2024, a presidential election year, we recognize the substantial work ahead. In these challenging and uncertain times, I am confident that, by maintaining high hopes and working cohesively as a caucus, we can successfully endorse Democratic candidates and advocate for our presidential nominee. In the upcoming eleven months, our collective efforts must include door-to-door outreach, email campaigns, text messaging, and phone calls. Our focus is on expanding voter registration, promoting mail-in voting, and encouraging active participation at the polls. As your new president of the Democratic Veterans Caucus of Florida, I urge you to lend your support and to contribute innovative ideas for our shared objectives. Let us continue to uphold the vision set forth by our previous president, Elena.

The DVCF will hold an election as early as possible in 2024 to fill the empty Vice-Presidential seat. Additional details are forthcoming. Gender balance is preferred, though it is not a requirement. Please consider running for this seat. Current paid members will be eligible to run and/or vote in this election. In conclusion, I extend warm holiday wishes to you and your loved ones. May this festive season bring joy, peace, happiness, and a prosperous New Year.

Your steadfast leader,
Danny Fuqua
President, Democratic Veterans Caucus of Florida
SFC, US Army (ret.), MBA

Democratic Veterans Caucus of Florida

Newsletter

October - December 2023

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Tom Keen emerges as Democratic nominee in HD 35 Special Election



Businessman Tom Keen has pulled a surprising victory off in the Democratic Primary in House District 35. He now will be the Democratic nominee in a critical Special Election in January despite raising less money than two other candidates in the race. Unofficial final election results, with all Orange County and Osceola County counted, show Keen winning 35.8% of the vote to lawyer Rishi Bagga's 33.8%, with Latino Leadership Executive Director Marucci Guzmán in third with 30.4%.

“Thanks to the incredible support and dedication of our team of supporters and volunteers, we are so pleased to emerge victorious in the Florida House District 35 Special Primary Election,” Keen said. “This hard-won victory is not only a testament to our collective commitment but also to the power of hope and unity. Our team will continue to build momentum, engage with our community, and spread our message of inclusivity, compassion, and progress. There is much work to be done, and I am more determined than ever to be the strong voice that our district needs.”

The newly minted nominee now advances to a Jan. 16 Special General Election against Republican candidate Erika Booth.

The Florida Democratic Party quickly endorsed Keen in that contest. “Florida Democrats are ready to stand behind Tom Keen,” said FDP Chair Nikki Fried. “Tom has worked tirelessly to prove himself to voters in House District 35, and I have confidence in his ability to win this seat in January. Taking back House District 35 — a district that President Biden won by 5 points — is a top priority for the Florida Democratic Party. We’ll be joining Tom on the ground to knock on doors, register new voters, and show the people of Central Florida that Democrats are serious about changing the way things work in Tallahassee.”

Florida Politics #FlaPol by Jacob Ogles November 8, 2023

Dr. Robert LeWayne Johnson, Attorney and Veteran, Enters Florida House Race

KISSIMMEE, Fla. (FNN) – Dr. Robert LeWayne Johnson, an attorney, retired military officer, and president and CEO of the Florida Coalition to Prevent Veteran Homelessness filed paperwork Monday to run for the Florida House District 46 open seat in 2024, according to the Florida Division of Elections website. Dr. Johnson will join fellow Democrat Jacqueline Centeno and Republican candidates Michael Cruz and Christian R. De La Torre — to add his name to the District 46 race to replace Democratic State Representative Kristina Arrington, who’s running for State Senator Victor Torres’ District 25 seat who has reached his term limit.

Dr. Johnson is a Deputy Assistant Program Manager of Logistics at the Naval Air Warfare Center Training Systems Division (NAWCTSD) and President-Founder of the Osceola County Democratic Veterans Caucus of Florida. Through the Library of Congress in 2022, Dr. Johnson was recognized in the 2023 edition of WHO’s Who in America and inducted in the US Congressional Records 116th, 2nd Edition 2020. He is also a retired military officer, Bronze Star recipient, combat veteran, and the recipient of the Lloyd Burton, Jr. Service Award.

The Florida primary election is August 20, 2024 and the general election is November 5, 2024.

Florida National News Central Florida News Published September 13, 2023

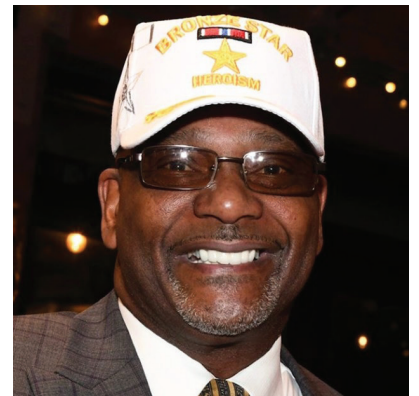


Photo Credit: 24-7pressrelease.com

MORE VETERANS CURRENTLY RUNNING FOR OFFICE OF WHOM WE ARE AWARE

(Listing here does not indicate endorsement by the DVCF)



Stanley Campbell: filed for US Senate

Former US Navy pilot, worked for NASA, multi-millionaire computer programmer with patents in AI software, including that used to help pharmacies detect Medicare and Medicaid fraud, golf-course owner. See: stanleyforflorida.com



Rod Joseph: filed for US Senate

US Army Combat Veteran, Purple Heart Recipient, author with a Masters in Diplomacy and Military Studies. DVCF member. See: rodjosephforussenate.com



Phil Ehr: filed for US Congress FL – District 28

US Navy Commander (ret.) after 26 years of active-duty service, president of the George Washington Initiative, an anti-misinformation nonprofit. Ran for Congress in 2020 against Matt Gaetz. DVCF member & sponsor. See: ehrforcongress.us



Keith Abel: filed for State House District 98

US Army (ret.), President of Broward County Democratic Veterans Caucus, Board Member on Board of Adjustment, Oakland Park, FL. See: facebook.com/AbelForFlorida/



Vernon Anderson: filed for State House District 33

US Air Force (ret.) after 22 years of service. With a master's in Aeronautical Science, he has developed fiscal acumen at an Aerospace and Defense Space Coast company. Married to a veteran for 35 years and father of three. DVCF member. See: andersoncampaign2024.com

Take Back Florida State Convention

The weekend of October 27 – 29, 2024, nearly 1,000 Florida Democrats converged on Orlando's Rosen Hotel to prepare for the 2024 elections. The weekend featured a series of training sessions, committee meetings, and receptions, as well as a fundraising dinner and a prayer breakfast. Friday afternoon began with registration and a vendor expo hall where delegates signed in, picked up their credentials, and browsed the many exhibitors booths. There were caucus meetings for the Labor, Environmental, and Muslim Caucuses. The Legislative Committee reported on actions by the State Legislature and the Diversity and Inclusion Committee also met.

Congressional District Chairs provided training for its members on how to run their election for the DNC Delegate Selection Process, which will be different from past DNC Delegate Selection Processes due to changes required by the National Party to the way that Florida previously picked delegates.

Activists helped phone bank for two special elections to be held in January in District 35 in Orange and Osceola Counties and District 118 in Miami. Just a reminder that our member Tom Keen was victorious in the Democratic Primary for District 35 and will need our support to win in January. You may contact him at tom@KeenForFL.com or 407-436-9656. Send your contributions to PO Box 782193, Orlando, FL 32878. He appreciates any help you can provide.

On Saturday morning the State Democratic Party held a general session for all delegates on how we are working to Take Back Florida in 2024. Bye, bye, Rick Scott!! Saturday afternoon, other caucuses met including the Hispanic, Progressive, and Veterans Caucus and the Campaign Committee ran a session on how to qualify by Petition when running for office in Florida. The FDP provides many great tools on their website to help would-be candidates and make the job of running easier. Check out their website at: [Campaign Blueprint - Florida Democratic Party \(floridadems.org\)](https://floridadems.org) and also [Run for Office - Florida Democratic Party \(floridadems.org\)](https://floridadems.org) for more information and to register with FDP so that these tools will be available to you and your campaign. By using these tools, you can unleash the power of neighborhood organizing through our DECs and Precinct Captain structure.

Also Saturday afternoon, the FDP Communications team presented a general session on best practices for engaging with reporters, how to prepare for an interview, tips and checklists for organizing your own press conference. In addition, a Hispanic Messaging training was led by Lisa Zayas of Florida Watch and a session was held on how to become a delegate to the National Convention. The Democratic Committee Chair Association (DCCA) Chair Ione Townsend gave an introduction on principles of fundraising and guidelines on what to do and not do. Later in the day, the FDP staff and key state leaders discussed the new State Committee structure that will go into effect next year and attendees learned about innovative ways that counties are going about implementing these changes. Saturday night was the highlight of the convention with Take Back Florida reception and dinner, where the FDP raises a large amount of the money needed to run the 2024 election activities. Sunday concluded the Convention with a Prayer Breakfast with the title *Unified Call to Action: Empowering Your Faith to Take Back Florida*. This was the 3rd annual breakfast organized by the Statewide Faith-Based Leadership Coalition. The State Central Committee met after the Prayer Breakfast.

Veterans Day with the Pinellas County Veterans

On Saturday November 11, 2023, the Pinellas County Democratic Veterans Caucus of Florida held a Veterans Day Picnic/Fundraiser at Veterans Memorial Park, 9600 Bay Pines Blvd. in Pinellas County from 11:30 AM through 2 PM. It was a great opportunity to have fun while honoring those who have served, to meet elected officials and candidates, enjoy good food, and learn more about the caucus. There was a good turnout and DVCF President Elena McCullough and her husband Ray were very happy to attend. Thank you to the Pinellas County DVCF for stepping up and holding this fantastic event.



*DVCF President Elena McCullough
with husband Ray*



*DVCF President Elena McCullough with
Pinellas County DVCF President James Grayshaw (l)
and VP Jay Alexander (r).*



*Pinellas DEC Chair Jennifer Griffith
addresses the crowd.*



Candidates were given the opportunity to speak.

Democratic Veterans Caucus at the FDP Take Back Florida Convention

The Democratic Veterans Caucus of Florida had a very active weekend at the FDP Convention. We fielded a delegation of 23 activists who support veteran interests at the General Session of the Convention on Saturday morning. We provided each delegate with a DVCF t-shirt and button for a unified appearance on the convention floor. We were treated to an inspiring array of speakers, including FDP Chair Nikki Fried, discussing how we are going to Take Back Florida in 2024!

The General Session was followed by an afternoon of trainings and caucus meetings, including the DVCF quarterly meeting at 1 PM. President Elena McCullough opened the meeting and turned it over to Vice President Danny Fuqua. He asked Lt. Col. Jeffrey Wilkinson (US Army, ret.) to lead the Pledge of Allegiance. After a brief business meeting, the audience was stirred up by a speech by FDP Chair Nikki Fried as well as an introduction to two candidates in the Florida Democratic Primary for the US Senate, Debbie Mucarsel-Powell and Rod Joseph. Several other candidates were given the opportunity to speak. The DVCF further supported the FDP by purchasing a table at the “Mission: Take Back Florida” Dinner on Saturday night, where Democrats enjoyed a stirring speech by US Congressman Maxwell Frost (FL-D10).

On Sunday, the State Executive Committee and Central Committee met and voted to approve the certification and recertification of clubs and caucuses throughout the state. The State DVCF caucus was recertified along with county caucuses in: Brevard County (reorganized under Ken McDonald, President); Hernando County (Ocey Holland, President); Lake County (Richard Lockette, President); Osceola County (Dr. R. LeWayne Johnson, President); Palm Beach County (Carlton Cartwright, President); Pinellas County (James Grayshaw, President); Seminole County (Marian Williams, President); Volusia County (Phil Giorno, President); and a new caucus in Broward County (Keith Abel, President). The Alachua County caucus recertification is pending. We thank all those who represented the DVCF at this Convention and all who attended.



DVCF Delegates on the floor of the FDP Convention General Session



DVCF President Elena McCullough and VP Danny Fuqua at the DVCF Meeting at the FDP Convention, Orlando, October 28, 2023



At the DVCF Meeting: (r-l) DVCF President Elena McCullough, DVCF Treasurer Marian Williams, FDP Chair Nikki Fried, FL House D89 Cand. Debra Tendrich



DVCF President Elena McCullough and husband Ray head the DVCF table at the FDP Dinner

DVCF Reception/Mixer at the FDP Leadership Blue

The officers of the Democratic Veterans Caucus of Florida welcomed guests to a reception in the Tresor Tower of the Fontainebleau Miami Beach from 8:30 – 10:30 PM on July 7th. This was after the Friday events of the FDP Leadership Blue Weekend. The event was sponsored by Platinum Sponsor David McDonald, Jr. (Colonel, US Army, ret.) and Gold Sponsors Phil Ehr (Commander, US Navy, ret.), Tom Keen (Commander, US Navy, ret.), Danielle Neetz (Volusia DEC), M. Claudette Wells (CAPT, JAG Corps, US Navy, ret.), and the Richey Cadillac Dealership of Daytona Beach. There was also a host of Silver Sponsors who helped make this event a great success. Many candidates stopped by to rub elbows with the veterans and the caucus received additional donations. A good time was had by all. Kudos go to VP Danny Fuqua and Treasurer Marian Williams for all their hard work in reaching out to sign up sponsors and coordinating supplies and decorations. Additional thanks to sponsor David McDonald, Jr. for his help procuring refreshments and Media Chair Carlton Cartwright for help with pictures and promotion.



Secretary Hazel Gillis & Board Member George Gillis



Treasurer Marian Williams



Past President Phil Giorno (with hat) speaks. Sponsor Phil Ehr is on far right.



VP Danny Fuqua addresses the attendees.



FDP Vice Chair Karen Green addresses the crowd.



DVCF Sponsor and endorsed candidate speaks.



DVCF Sponsor David McDonald, Jr., (Colonel, US Army, ret.)



VP Danny Fuqua (l) with new Broward County Caucus President Keith Abel

“A tribute to Dr. Jeffrey Wilkinson (Lt. Col., US Army, Ret.)”

It is with a heavy heart that we must inform members and friends of the Democratic Veterans Caucus of Florida (DVCF), that Dr. Jeffrey Wilkinson (PhD), Lt. Col. US Army retired, passed away suddenly Friday, November 3, due to a massive stroke. He was a former Chair and current State Committee Man of the Seminole County Democratic Party as well as a longtime member and former Director of both the Seminole County and State DVCF. He served as a DNC delegate for President Obama in 2012. He was also formerly a research scientist at Texas A&M and chief scientist and Chief Technology Officer at MYMIC LLC.

Jeff was at the DVCF meeting at the Rosen Center during the FDP Convention in October, and, at the request of Vice President Fuqua, led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance.



(l-r) VP Danny Fuqua and Dr. Jeffrey Wilkinson

DVCF HOLIDAY CELEBRATION

On December 16th, the DVCF held a virtual holiday celebration by Zoom, with an ugly sweater contest. At the start of the gathering, DVCF President Elena McCullough read a statement saying that she was stepping down as president for personal reasons, but that she and her husband Ray would continue as Board members. VP Danny Fuqua is stepping up to finish President McCullough's term, which runs through 2024 until elections in early 2025. Lynne Fish made a toast in honor of Elena and all in attendance raised their glasses and thanked her for her three years of service as president. An election will be held early in the New Year to fill the vacancy in the vice president position.

President Danny Fuqua presided over the rest of the event. Several candidates were in attendance and were given the opportunity to speak. Tom Keen, a veteran and DVCF-endorsed Democratic nominee for the Special Election in Florida House District 35, spoke about his priorities and his election on January 16th. Information for how to donate and volunteer was provided. Other candidates (with the offices they are running for) included Dr. R. LeWayne Johnson (FL House D46), Susan Khoury (Sheriff of Miami-Dade), and John Navarra (FL House D28).

The attendees spent time discussing the upcoming year and the many challenges our country faces. We discussed what we can do to help secure the future of our democracy. We were reminded by John Navarra to accentuate the positive and remember and talk about all the positive changes President Joe Biden has accomplished during his presidency. Marian Williams discussed plans for a DVCF Retreat in early 2024 (date TBA), with opportunities for candidates to hobnob and discuss programs for veterans.

Over ten members competed in our ugly sweater (or other attire) contest, with the voting being accomplished by a Zoom poll of the attendees. Elena McCullough was voted the winner with an adorable Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer sweater and Dr. R. LeWayne Johnson won second place with his Santa suit, with a lighted hat and belt. Thank you to all who participated.

DVCF HOLIDAY CELEBRATION AND UGLY SWEATER CONTEST

Saturday, December 16, 2023 by Zoom @ 7 PM EST
 First Prize \$100 Gift Card; Second Prize \$50 Gift Card
 Winners will be determined by a poll of the attendees.

OR AND

Wear your ugly sweater or other crazy holiday attire to compete for the prizes.* Make a toast, with a drink of your choice, to the Holidays and discuss plans for the New Year.
 *ONLY CURRENT DVCF MEMBERS MAY PARTICIPATE IN THE CONTEST!