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Little-known U.S. Senate candidate Marielena Stuart wins Pinellas GOP straw poll



Katie Sanders, PolitiFact Florida Staff Writer

Monday, June 11, 2012 10:30pm

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On Monday, Stuart nabbed 110 votes, former Sen. George LeMieux took 69 and frontrunner U.S. Rep. Connie Mack — who didn't show for the poll — took 12. Former Rep. Dave Weldon got five votes, and retired Army Col. Mike McCalister, who also didn't attend, got four.

LeMieux attacked Mack for bowing out of the straw poll and other appearances. Mack, the four-term congressman who received a slew of recent big-time endorsements from the GOP establishment, has declared himself the clear choice to face Nelson but has not fared well in straw polls. The other candidates are polling in single digits, but they're not ready to concede.

"He won't come before you because he wants to just be crowned for this election. Well, we're not going to have a coronation in Florida. We're going to have an election," LeMieux said.

Mack has declined to participate in a July 26 debate co-sponsored by the *Tampa Bay Times*, *Bay News 9* and Florida PBS, saying a primary fight would only help Nelson. He couldn't make the straw poll, his spokesman said, because of a previously scheduled private event.

His recent endorsements include former Gov. Jeb Bush and presumptive Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney, with whom he will appear in Orlando today.

LeMieux suggested Mack's well-known father, former Sen. Connie Mack III, was responsible for the widespread support.

"I think the father has a tremendous amount of good will," he told the *Times* editorial board Monday.

Stuart, a linguist and conservative online columnist, spoke of an occasion in which she was beaten and abandoned in a field in Cuba by the communists, "and it is America who saved my life." She called herself the daughter of a former political prisoner. She described the country's open borders with Mexico and Canada as the beginnings of a one-world government.

"America has become a socialist nation. And socialism is nothing but phase one of communism," she said.

Her speech brought most of the crowd to its feet. Stuart has no formal campaign staff, relying on her husband Thomas, daughter Elena, 14, and son John Paul, 12, to take pictures and pass out fliers. She said she has been campaigning since the fall.

She's a "female Ronald Reagan," said Kevin Thornhill, a member of the Pinellas Patriots, a 9-12 Project group.

All of the Republican candidates trail Nelson's \$9.5 million campaign account. Mack comes closest with \$1.38 million, though LeMieux isn't far behind at \$1.19 million. Stuart had \$6,500 in hand as of March 31. Weldon, who just entered the race in May, has not yet reported his fundraising.

"I know the odds are stacked against me," he said during a separate Monday meeting with the *Times* editorial board.

A 14-year former congressman and doctor from the Space Coast, Weldon painted himself as the most "authentic" social conservative in the race. He pointed to efforts to ban human cloning and fetal farming and co-sponsoring a federal "conscience clause" that prevents discrimination against health care providers who do not provide abortions.

"I had a friend in Washington say to me, 'I'd love for you to run, I'd love for you to win because since Rick Santorum and Sam Brownback left the Senate, we really haven't had a champion in the Senate,' " Weldon said.

Comment selected for this archive:

stuffyduffy 384 days ago

I have had the pleasure of hearing Mrs. Stuart speak...without notes for about 45 minutes each time and each a different speech...at two meetings of northern Pinellas County Republican Clubs in recent months.

This woman NEEDS to be heard. She is fighting two battles, one to become our next U.S.Senator and two to be allowed to participate in election debates and forums with the "good ole boy" candidates in the Florida Republican Party. She WILL be on the ballot on August 14th.

If you can not hear her in person, listen and see her speeches via Video on her web site. I promise you she will blow your socks off and you will cheer at the end.

America needs this woman in some position of power to get us back on tract. FOX News, she would be a fantastic guest on Huckabee...please give her a chance at National exposure.

And, shame on the Florida media for not showcasing her and giving Floridians a intelligent, brave and strong woman, mother and wife to represent and lead us....

