

## Mack just one of three from Southwest Florida seeking U.S. Senate seat

By JENNA BUZZACCO-FOERSTER

Posted July 30, 2012 at 7:30 a.m.



NAPLES — Connie Mack isn't the only Southwest Florida candidate running for U.S. Senate.

The Fort Myers Republican is one of three candidates with ties to Southwest Florida hoping to make it to the November general election.



Glenn Burkett

The two others — Marielena Stuart, a Republican from Ave Maria, and Glenn Burkett, a Democrat and owner of natural health stores in Collier and Lee counties — are hoping a little hard work, and a lot of time on the road, will land them in the top spot on election day.

Four Republicans — including Mack and Stuart — are vying for their party's nomination, while Burkett will face incumbent Sen. Bill Nelson in the primary. The winner of both primaries will go on to the general election, when they battle a host of no party affiliation and write-in candidates.

It was a chance meeting with Nelson at Southwest Florida International Airport that prompted Burkett, who ran for Senate in 2010 and governor in 2006, to throw his hat in the race.

The two men were in the same terminal when Burkett said he approached the two-term senator to ask him some questions.

"He couldn't have a conversation. It was just me and him, but he couldn't just have a conversation," Burkett said. "I thought we'd have unity. Had he convinced me, said 'I'm the better man,' I wouldn't have run."

But don't think that just because Burkett is a Democrat, he will vote lockstep with his party if he's elected. Burkett calls himself a hybrid Democrat, and said he would vote for the best idea before him, regardless of which side of the aisle it comes from.

Burkett may be somewhere in the middle when it comes to his politics, but Stuart is squarely in the conservative column.

Stuart declined recent requests to be interviewed, but in a July 16 response to a Daily News candidate questionnaire, she described herself as candidate in the tradition of former President Ronald Reagan.

The Ave Maria resident was born and raised in Cuba where, according to a biography she provided to the Daily News, her family suffered because they opposed Fidel Castro.

"None of my opponents have a background like mine. I never ran for office before. I am a citizen candidate in the tradition of Ronald Reagan. I am an authentic social and fiscal conservative. I did not

come up the ranks of the GOP and I am not willing to go along with the moderate GOP approach," she said in her questionnaire.

"I have the ability to communicate in other languages, including French and Spanish, a great advantage during discussions of treaties and agreements with leaders and representatives of other nations, including every nation in the Western Hemisphere."

Stuart said the first task she would tackle if elected would "dismantle the socialist programs and entities that are destroying the American economy."

Tops on Stuart's list: Repealing the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, often called Obamacare by opponents. Stuart, in a June 28 email to reporters about the Supreme Court ruling upholding most of the act, called the health-care law socialism and said she would immediately lead the effort to repeal it.

Stuart may want to repeal the health-care law, but Burkett — who has made it his life's work to make sure people are living healthy lifestyles — is all about keeping the law in place.

Burkett said the key to the health-care law is education. People, he said, need to understand how it will affect them.

The two may be political opposites, but there is one major similarity. Each is running a unique campaign.

Burkett, who is self-financing his campaign, has pledged that he would donate any money given to his campaign to charity after the election. He said he doesn't want to waste money on campaign signs or mailers. Instead, he plans to hop in his red

convertible — plastered with a 'Vote for Glenn Burkett' sign — and make stops in cities throughout the state, visiting food banks and tossing cash out his car window.

"It's a different campaign," he said. "I'm not going to spend and waste money the typical way politicians do."

His event in Miami on Monday will be one of his first campaign stops since announcing plans to run for office.



Connie Mack IV

Stuart, on the other hand, has been traveling to mid-sized and small Florida towns since Sept. 11, according to the Tampa Bay Times political blog.

And while Burkett is taking to the road alone, Stuart has her family in tow. The Tampa Bay Times reported that during a June campaign stop Stuart's daughter took pictures of her mother with supporters, her son passed out campaign packets and business cards, and her husband was in charge of video.

Burkett and Stuart are both expected to be on the campaign trail in the days leading up to the Aug. 14 primary. Burkett said he's excited to meet people and is hopeful his goodwill tour will help people realize he's the right person for the job.

"People say you have a lot of courage," he said. "It takes courage, but I'm not going to talk out of this mouth without the info to back it up."