

OPPOSITION TO CHANGING THE CITY ELECTION DATE WHITE PAPER

Change the Date is a bold attempt to gain control of our city government. The entire campaign to pass the amendment changing our city election date has been funded by Chamber of Commerce with \$28,000, Argus with \$28,000, Gulfcoast Builders Exchange, Realtor PAC, and others to the tune of 108,274. These organizations have never shown interest or concern for citizen voter turn-out before. One of the reasons we live in our city is to enjoy our own form of governance. We citizens will lose the ability to control our elections and to check their validity through the canvassing board. This is a purely political move by business special interests to take over our city.

- **Is this referendum a grass roots effort?** NO. Signatures were gathered by paid signature collectors who told people that this was about increasing turn out in elections in November. An August primary election was not mentioned.
- **Will this referendum increase voter turnout in city elections?** It might increase turnout in November elections. What was not disclosed was that there is an August primary election at the same time as the partisan primary which has many fewer voters who are much more partisan than the usual city voter. Our city elections are non-partisan. With few contested races in August, Democrats and Independents have little reason to turn-out to vote. .
- **Fewer choices of candidates.** The hidden August primary election disregards the fact that voters in city elections have the largest array of candidate choices in the first election, which is now in March. More city citizens are in town in March than in August. August is a traditional vacation month for year round residents. Seasonal residents do not return until later in the Fall. As a result, there is less opportunity to attend election forums, attend to local media reports, and meet the candidates before most of them are eliminated from the race.
- **Changing the date is less favorable for grass roots candidates.** In a crowded field of candidates and issues in November, city candidates will have difficulty getting their message out without large amounts of campaign money for mailers and media. In the past, grass roots candidates have “paid their dues” by serving on city boards, walking neighborhoods, and serving as community leaders. Money and partisan get out the vote efforts will dominate. In the future, all city elections would be at the bottom of the ballot. This November’s election shows how daunting a long ballot can be and how difficult it is to vote on the last thing on the ballot.
- **Changing the date will not increase the turnout of younger voters.** Although younger people vote more often in November elections in years of presidential elections, turnout of younger voters is notoriously poor. In this year’s August election, there was record voter turn-out. Among younger voters turnout was extremely poor. (Source: Jacob Ogles, *Where the Votes are*, SRQ Magazine.) Narrowing the field of candidates in August elections will deprive younger voters of their choices for most candidates (many having been eliminated in August) when they rarely vote.
- **Retaining the current election cycle is NOT voter suppression.** Some supporters have claimed this. Voting is easy. One can vote by mail, by early voting, or on Election Day. Many groups encourage voter engagement. Civic organizations take pains to inform voters of the field of candidates and how to vote. Lack of interest is not the same as voter suppression. Voter turn- out is influenced by many factors other than the timing of elections.
- **It is a common practice for local elections to be separated from the August/November elections.** Seventy-five percent of the 53 largest American cities hold their elections in the spring or in November of odd-numbered years, reflecting the desire not to mingle city elections with a wide variety of more high profile races in order to focus on meaningful discussions of city issues. Of 185 Florida cities reviewed, the majority has elections in the spring or in November of odd- numbered years. That’s 100% of the six largest cities, 65% of cities our size, and 55% even when you get to cities with populations as low as 7,000.

For the reasons above, we encourage you to vote NO on the Change the Date referendum.

Signed: Mollie Cardamone, Susan Chapman, and Virginia Hoffman