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# 2 REPUBLICANS, 1 NON-PARTY AFFILIATE EYE DISTRICT 5 SEAT

**M**onroe County has lost tourism revenue, tax revenue and residents throughout the coronavirus crisis. Additional changes are ahead, as the island chain deals with sea level rise, housing shortages for working residents and the continuing decline of the coral reef and the steep cost of employee salary and benefit packages.

The race for Monroe County Commission District 5 has two Republican candidates and one non-affiliated candidate vying to represent constituents in Key Largo. Current county commissioner Sylvia Murphy announced that she wouldn't run for reelection. It led Robby Majeska, Mike Forster and Jose Peixoto to announce their candidacy for the seat.

Keys Weekly asked the candidates to answer the same four questions in 100 words each. (Answers are presented as submitted. Candidate Jose Peixoto did not respond as of deadline.)

**1. If you had sole authority to make one immediate and permanent change to Monroe County government (with regard to policies, operations, personnel, payroll or anything else) what would you do?**

**2. With the benefit of hindsight, what should Monroe County have done differently in response to the coronavirus pandemic?**

**3. What must Monroe County do to encourage and enable more affordable housing options in the Keys?**

**4. What's the best approach to addressing sea level rise in the Keys?**



**Name:** Mike Forster  
**Age:** 60  
**Professional background:** restaurant industry  
**Political party:** Republican  
**Current job:** Owner & Operator Mangrove Mike's Cafe Islamorada, Mangrove Mike's Cafe @ Bud & Mary's Marina, Rain Barrel Artisan Village (partner) Mangrove Mike's Endeavors Paying Forward 501c3

1. There are quite a few things that I'm passionate about, and would like to build consensus with sitting commissioners, but you have asked to limit it to one, so my top priority would be to address and help pay down the county's large debt service and increase the general fund balance that is so important in being able to deal with unexpected events. That would help with the excessive borrowing from federal or state agencies that are on the surface proffered as reimbursable, but sadly are not. And it falls back on to our taxpayers.

2. All and all, I believe it is fair to say that Monroe County's five-person Emergency Management Administrative Team did a good job, and that is reflective of the limited number of COVID-19 cases and deaths prior to the checkpoint coming down. But, there is plenty of room for revisiting the protocols of how this five-person board operates and sets policy. It took me many meetings to get any traction on instituting the checkpoint. Those that were on the call, 150-plus participants, can corroborate that. More inclusion by elected partners throughout the County, and a lot more testing!

3. Unfortunately, the county has less than 10 affordable allocations left at this moment. In the past two years they made the right decision to vote in favor of private affordable housing developments in excess of 400-500 units. The only way to continue this much needed forward progress in order to retain our essential workers, i.e. first responders, teachers, public defender's office, state attorney's office etc., is to accept the additional 300 units offered from DEO.

4. Finally, just acknowledging that this is real, after many years of denial, was a major step forward. We need to be proactive and not reactive, but incrementally. We need total guaranteed and verifiable buy in of funding from the state and federal partners. Not loans, but a reinvestment to our sustainability. Just like the very well executed Canal Restoration Program, we would also need to seek out private/public partnerships, to begin the mitigation that already exists in the flooding and ponding in our neighborhoods today, due to sea level rise. It's time to get to work.



**Name:** Robby Majeska  
**Age:** A young 67  
**Professional background:** Small business owner for 42 years, 22 of those years here in Key Largo. Elected Commissioner Key Largo Wastewater Treatment District 10 years  
**Political party:** Republican  
**Current job:** Owner of Keys Kritters Pet Store, Key Largo

1. Home Rule and unfunded state mandates surely need to be addressed, but if I could get one big thing accomplished, it would be to take control of U.S. Highway 1 (from the Monroe county line all the way to Key West) away from FDOT. If we owned the highway, we could impose an entry fee that would be used to the benefit of Monroe County residents. Some major cost analysis must be done first of course.

2. While I am happy with most of the way things were done, some missteps such as the payroll overtime scandal should have been avoided. The main change I would like to have done is to have our local licensed medical doctors throughout the Keys join in the decisions we make. Scientific facts should be guiding our political decision makers.

3. Government regulations are the main cause of affordable housing shortages in the country and county. We need to re-examine the needs for many of our building and zoning regulations. The use of residentially zoned houses as commercial vacation rentals must be curtailed. A residential house used as a vacation rental business should be zoned and taxed as a business, with all the regulations and requirements that motel, hotel or guesthouses are mandated.

4. Global warming and sea level rise are a scientific fact, and as Monroe County is doing now, all government infrastructure must take into account for this rise. Social and technological changes have been tremendous in the last 25 years and will continue to rapidly change how and where we live. We should not be making decisions on what will be 50 to 100 years from now. We should focus on the next 25 years.