

Evaluation of Candidates for FL-17 Congressional District

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Why bother to read this?

We are about to vote to determine who will represent us (the people of the FL-17 district) in Congress for the next two years. Unless we collectively look at the information available and decide to vote for the candidate who we believe will best serve our interests, we will likely continue the status quo. That is because, unless people vote on the information and our interests, most of us will vote along party lines. Since we have mostly republicans (about 55%) in the district, the incumbent republican will be re-elected.

This paper provides objective information on two of the candidates, for which a great deal is known. When I say objective, I mean that sources of information presented will be made clear. The only thing we know about the third candidate, running in the NPA ticket, is what is available on his [website](#). This includes the statement that he has voted republican in every primary election. Only two candidates will therefore be evaluated: Greg Steube, the Republican incumbent and Matthew Montavon, the democratic challenger.

If you are willing to take 15 minutes reading this paper, you will have more information to use to decide who to vote for.

The author’s perspective

I am not a member of a political party. When in the Navy, I took my oath to the constitution and did not feel it appropriate to obligate to a party or individual. In my second career as a college professor, it seemed fitting that my students could trust me to be politically neutral. Now in my third, non-paying career as an ecologist, I have discovered that we need bipartisan solutions for a livable world. This means working with both parties. These experiences leads to an evaluation of candidates by other than their party affiliation. I focus on interests and outcomes instead of politics. This paper reflects that philosophy.

I am not compensated for this report. My analysis and conclusions are not biased by financial benefit.

What matters to people?

Beyond party affiliation, what factors shape our votes? Many people focus on the cost of living, including food, housing, healthcare, transportation (fuel, and vehicles). Others prioritize foreign policy, such as ending prolonged wars or supporting Ukraine. Environmental issues are especially important in Florida, where access to the outdoors is a major reason many people choose to live here. Veterans and military families also consider

policies that affect them, particularly funding for veterans' care and support for military families.

Underlying some folks' attraction to, or revulsion from candidates is whether the office holder is accessible to them.

Who the candidate is accountable to matters to some people. A politician who is beholden to other than the constituents is not likely to give priority to the people's interest.

How do the candidates measure up?

Using public information, we can compare the incumbent with the challenger on what matters to us.

The Economy

What stands out in our region is that the economy is killing us and the incumbent won't help us. United Way data tell us that too many people in Lee, Charlotte and Sarasota County are in grave financial circumstances. Their ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) report explains that nearly half of households cannot afford the basic cost of living.¹ Even the rest of us, above the ALICE threshold but below the top 1%, are at a disadvantage. Corporations and the rich are taking it all.

Greg Steube doesn't care about us regular people. The incumbent isn't concerned about us grass roots folks because he doesn't need (or want) us. Anybody who has ever reached out to our congressman knows he is not accessible to regular people. He did not respond to the Sun's inquiry about losing the Murdock branch post office.² An Article in the October 2 Sun ("Candidate forum set") provided another example of Stuebe not even responding to a request to speak to the public. Stuebe's support comes from outside the district. Open Secrets tells us that Steube's financial campaign support comes primarily from corporations (sugar, agriculture), political action committees (PACs) with corporate interests, and wealthy individual donors (many with corporate interests).

Steube is on the take from Corporations, and Corporations are hurting us. Because the supreme court has decided that corporations have the same constitutional rights as people, we regular people are screwed. The economy does not work in our favor. The healthcare and food systems support corporate profits over individual needs. Our world is becoming unlivable because political decisions are more influenced by corporations and the wealthy. If you are not familiar with the concept of "Corporate Personhood," please

¹ Charlotte and Lee counties share nearly identical 2023 ALICE statistics — both have 36% ALICE households, 12% in poverty, and 48% below the ALICE threshold. Sarasota County's exact 2023 numbers are not in the provided data, but it is part of a region where nearly half of households are below the ALICE threshold, with a family of four needing over \$108,000/year to afford basics. See the Reference section.

² Daily Sun March 6 Editorial, "Post Office closing hard to swallow"

take 4 ½ minutes to watch the Peter Coyote video, [Why we need the We the People Amendment](#). In his captivating tone, Coyote explains the problem, and the solution.³

Montavon has pledged to support the We the People Amendment. Montavon is [on the record](#): “I support amending the U.S. Constitution to make clear that corporations and other artificial entities do not have Constitutional rights and that money is not speech and campaign spending should be limited through regulation. I will use my office to support the Movement to Amend Coalition by passing resolutions, proposing legislation, and publicly speaking out about the need for this Amendment. I will refuse corporate PAC money for my campaign and will work to get corporate and big money out of politics. Our political offices should represent the will of the people, and not the will of corporations or large donors.”⁴

Montavon will strive to get dark money out of elections, and corporations not having undue influence on government policy, so that regular people will get a break. The things that matter to many of us: food, housing, healthcare, and transportation (fuel, cars) policies (and prices) will favor The People. Corporations and the rich will not be taking it all, as they do now.

The challenger has proven to be accessible on his 80-mile walk in nine days from Fort Myers to North Sarasota. Montavon sat and listened to people’s priorities.⁵

Energy and the Environment

The League of Conservation Voters scores Steube close to zero. The League of Conservation Voters (LCV)’s annual *National Environmental Scorecard* tracks the voting records of members of Congress on environmental, climate change, and democracy legislation and scores them on whether their votes protect people and the planet. Including our economic interests, LCV’s fact sheet on Steube which covers 2019 -2025, gives him an overall 1% lifetime score.⁶ Steube’s 2025 voting record is 0 Pro-environment votes, 33 Anti-environment Votes.

Similarly, for the 5 years back to 2020 with zero Pro-environment votes, and all Steube’s votes being Anti-environment Votes. In 2019, Steube had a 7% pro-environment record with 2 Pro-environment votes and 27 Anti-environment Votes. His overall record is a 1% lifetime score.

In 2026 **Steube voted to repeal a program that helps us.** The Southern Alliance for Clean Energy (SACE) reports that our Congressman Greg Steube voted for H.R. 4758, the “Homeowner Energy Freedom Act,” which repeals and defunds the federal High-Efficiency

³ Peter Coyote on why he supports Move to Amend's efforts to overturn Citizens United is on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bPMxwVfIKhs>

⁴ Move to Amend shows Montavon’s pledge at <https://www.movetoamend.org/pledge2025>

⁵ Finton, Daniel. 2026. Shoe leather politics underway. Daily Sun. October 30. https://englewoodsun-fl.newsmemory.com/?publink=3ff349931_1352266

⁶ LCVs scorecard on Steube is at <https://www.lcv.org/moc/greg-steube/>
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Electric Home Rebate Program. SACE explains that the program Steube voted to repeal saves participating homeowners over \$1,300 on their energy bills per year.

The program he voted to repeal and defund is for low-and middle-income households—families that are struggling the right now with unaffordable energy bills. The program helps residents improve the comfort and safety of their homes while reducing their energy bills, by offering incentives to replace old, inefficient HVAC systems, water heaters, and appliances with high-efficiency units. Our state government’s energy office has already put substantial work into this program, and homeowners are hungry for programs to help reduce their energy bills.⁷ Steube’s vote makes clear again that he doesn’t vote with the interests of regular Americans in mind.

Montavon on protecting the environment

Montavon’s platform is in stark contrast to the incumbent dark stance. He says we “must deal with the very real crisis of climate change, which is particularly problematic for Florida’s Gulf Coast. By utilizing science-based criteria to address this problem we can protect our beaches, homes, and local economy from rising seas, stronger storms, Red Tide, and algae blooms.

“Rising temperatures have led to rising sea levels in Florida by an inch every decade. Heavy rainfall is causing more flooding and storm damage. Warmer ocean temperatures are damaging coral reefs and harming sea life. Development must be environmentally sensitive. Additional protections to our threatened and endangered animals and natural resources are also important environmental considerations.

The costs in life and property damage of doing nothing are astronomical. We must start taking action now.”⁸

Foreign policy

There are significant numbers of Ukrainian Americans in both Sarasota and Charlotte counties, with Sarasota County acting as one of the most prominent cultural hubs for Ukrainian Americans in the entire state of Florida. The absolute focal point of this community is the city of North Port (located in southern Sarasota County, right on the border of Charlotte County). Local officials and cultural organizations estimate that around 5,000 Ukrainians and people of Ukrainian descent live in the North Port area.⁹

⁷ See Southeast Politicians Vote to Take Away Programs That Reduce Home Energy Bills. <https://cleanenergy.org/news/southeast-politicians-vote-to-take-away-programs-that-reduce-home-energy-bills/>

⁸ Montavon environmental platform is at <https://www.montavonforcongress.com/platform>)

⁹ Ukrainian Men’s Club. 2026. About us. <https://www.ukrainiansofswflorida.org/about-us>

FL-17 has many Ukrainian supporters who could take exception to **Steube's repeatedly voting against funding and support for Ukraine**, a democracy fighting for its life against the illegal, unprovoked invasion by the autocratic state of Russia.¹⁰

In candidate Q&A with the Fort Myers New-Press, **Montavon said, "We need to fully support Ukraine and oppose Putin's attempt to expand Russian borders."**¹¹

Forever wars. Steube voted No on House resolutions seeking to restrict or withdraw U.S. military forces from hostilities with Iran. Some citizens in the district are critical of the conflict many Americans didn't want and which has resulted in death and injury to children at an [elementary school](#).¹²

Montavon's says "The Executive Branch does not have the authority to conduct foreign policy alone. Congress has the sole authority to fund (or not fund) wars, to declare war, and to finance our overseas commitments."¹³

The incumbent doesn't care about Veterans, Montavon has been among us.

Steube, a veteran of sorts (he was an Army lawyer), has not even given the courtesy of a response to numerous requests to speak to Florida Veterans for Common Sense (FLVCS). He voted against the PACT Act which helps veterans suffering from serious health effects of Burn Pit exposure. He brags about being a veteran, but I have seen no evidence of his support for us.¹⁴

I met Montavon at a Florida for Comon Sense meeting. He knows what it is like to serve overseas from his time in the peace corps. He served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Costa Rica from 1979 to 1981, supporting rural agricultural communities, which formed the foundation of a long career in public administration and international food security.

Montavon honors his parents, who met while serving in the Navy during WWII. They both were very proud of their service and are buried in the Florida National Cemetery in Bushnell.

He knows that veterans sacrificed to serve their country, and he believes that we should return to civilian life with all the support we need: access to education, help finding a job,

¹⁰ Staff report. 2026. Ukrainian independence recognized. Sun Northport. Aug 24.

https://www.yoursun.com/northport/news/ukrainian-independence-recognized/article_c9d08dd4-42c1-11ee-af1a-5b84f4f940ce.html

¹¹ William, Amy Bennett. 2026. Meet Matthew Montavon, 1 of 2 Dems running in U.S. District 17 primary. Fort Myers News-Press & Naples Daily News. July 28.

¹² : 2026. Steube's Iran war stance reeks of hypocrisy, lack of values. Sarasota Herald Tribune Letters. April 14. <https://www.heraldtribune.com/story/opinion/letters/2026/04/14/steube-iran-war-children/89602561007/?gnt-cfr=1&gca-cat=p&gca-uir=true&gca-epti=z117201p004050l004450c004050e110010v117201d--xx--b--xx--&gca-ft=167&gca-ds=sophi>

¹³ See Montavon's platform at <https://www.montavonforcongress.com/platform>

¹⁴ Florida Veterans for Common Sense. 2026. Fact Sheet on Representative Greg Steube. <https://mailchi.mp/flvcs/flvcs-fact-sheet-on-a-maga-representative?e=2b91f60499>

affordable housing, and good healthcare. Montavon emphasizes that this is no time to cut services for veterans or for military families, as Steube supported budget proposals do. Florida's 17th District has a high percentage of residents who are veterans (8%), and they will have Montavon's full support in Congress.¹⁵

Conclusions

If republicans and NPAs are willing to think about voting outside party lines, Matthew Montavon should be considered.

Montavon's allegiance is to us, the people, and not corporations and the wealthy, who are taking it all. He pledged to support the We The People amendment. Montavon will strive for policies that make life affordable: cost of living, including food, housing, healthcare, transportation (fuel, and vehicles). (The incumbent is beholden to corporations, PACs and wealthy donors outside the district).

Montavon is against wars not authorized by Congress. He will support Ukraine's continued independence. (Steube votes to continue the Iran war and votes to cut off aid to Ukraine).

Montavon is committed to acting with science-based solutions to red tide and the increasing numbers of violent weather events, sea level rise and increasing temperatures which impact on our beaches, homes, and local economy. (Steube scores zero on the environment. He voted to repeal a program that saved us money on energy).

Montavon empathizes with veterans and their families. He will work for us having access to education, help finding a job, affordable housing, and good healthcare. (Steube has voted for veterans' budget cuts and voted against a law that treats vets with burn pit injuries).

Montavon walks with the people, and listens. He is accessible. (Steube is not accessible to We The People).

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¹⁵ Montavon's campaign platform is at <https://www.montavonforcongress.com/platform>
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