

Mayor Demings Won't Debate

Challengers, Messina and Semrad Ask Why

ORLANDO, FL, USA, July 1, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Orange County Mayor Jerry Demings has refused to debate his primary opponents and has turned down a televised candidate forum on WESH-TV, an NBC affiliate. Demings has been pushing an Orange County Transportation Sales Tax Referendum that will increase voters' taxes. The fate of the increase in sales tax will be decided by voters in November. If passed, the tax increase could generate approximately \$600 million in taxpayer money for unspecified transportation improvements.

Demings claims, "the sales tax increase will be an economic driver that will create jobs, opportunities and connectivity." His primary opponents Republican Christopher Messina and Democrat Dr. Kelly Semrad have serious doubts regarding these claims. So do the District Commissioners, who expressed during an April BCC meeting that they wanted further information regarding how this \$600 million in taxpayer money would be spent.

Demings' tax increase referendum narrowly passed the BCC with a vote of four in favor and three opposed to the sales tax increase. Mayor Demings claims this money will attract billions more from the federal government, but admits there's no guarantee. However he won't answer any questions, turning down a televised candidate forum on WESH-TV where Messina and Semrad have agreed to participate. Greg Fox, an investigative reporter for the NBC affiliate, notified the challengers by email Tuesday that Demings is the hold-out.

"Experts will tell you Orange County has no experience whatsoever managing multiple large projects at the same time. Most of our large infrastructure projects have been managed by the state or by private companies - not the county. Mayor Demings' refusal to debate is an unambiguous warning to all of us: we might as well hand him sacks of cash and hope he doesn't waste it or lose it. If he won't answer questions about his \$600 million spending spree now, then what's he going to do once he has the money? And will any of it matter then? Do you hand somebody \$600 million before they tell you how they'll spend it? Or do you make sure you know exactly why and how that money will be spent first? Why should we manage the public's money any less carefully than we would our own?," Republican Christopher Messina asked. "With the amount of money the Mayor's demanding, he could buy his own small country," quipped Chris. "That's why it's so important that we get answers now. We have a right to know how he's going to spend our millions, and that means we need transparency into his plans. I trust the Mayor just fine, but I wouldn't give \$600 million to anybody without asking a few questions first, and the Mayor's no exception."

Democrat opponent Kelly Semrad added, "The fact that there is lack of transparency in the transportation projects that will be funded via an increase to our taxes should raise concern. We witnessed Mayor Demings' vote to plow a toll road through Split Oak Forest to service developer needs. Eighty six percent of us voted to protect the forest. He completely disregarded the will of the voters and broke a promise to the people. What's to prevent him from using \$600 million for similar environmentally destructive projects? Or, what is to prevent him from selecting transportation improvement projects to help developers while neglecting projects that would best service the needs of the community? The unfortunate issue is that Mayor Demings fails to see the correlation between his lack of transparency in the spending of \$600 million and voters' trust."

Given the challenges facing Orange County, voters will want to know the answers to these questions before the November election, especially since the referendum if passed, would be collecting sales tax beyond the term limits of the existing BCC. "It's clear we need a full and vigorous debate regarding the transportation sales tax increase as well as other community related topics. If Mayor Demings won't debate, then we already have our answer: there's not enough transparency into the Mayor's spending plans to justify this tax increase," Messina and Semrad concurred.

NOTE: Messina & Semrad will host a joint press conference on the steps of the Orange County Administration Center on Friday July 1, 2022 at 1PM.

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