

WHY SENIOR LEADERSHIP IS NEEDED



Try as we might, there is always more we can do to promote the wide array of elder care services available in Brevard County. Five years ago, Helping Seniors was founded to inform, educate, and connect seniors and those who care for them to the many helpful resources in our community. Having so many programs to serve those

in need is wonderful, but it is equally important to tell everyone about the unmet needs that still exist in our county.

Many of us mistakenly believe that all have access to health care and can afford the cost of daily living. I wish that were true. Or we assume that if there are needs, programs like Meals on Wheels can fix them. However, the Kaiser Foundation and Meals on Wheels indicate that funds are shrinking and costs are rising. Two weeks ago the Florida Medicaid Managed Care program had a waiting list of 50,000; now it is 62,000. What is significant is that the number of people needing services is increasing, while the funds to provide help are decreasing.

We all want lower taxes, but few will admit that the provision of necessary services may require more taxes. In a recent article in Florida Today, John Byron proposed a tax increase to help pay for road improvements. This recommendation was made in part to avoid a reduction in Community Based Organization (CBO) funds, which are given annually to assist non profits in providing services. What the article did not reveal is how current CBO funding for such services is already inadequate – \$500,000 out of a budget of over \$1,000,000,000.

What is rarely discussed is the amount of funds in the county's one billion dollar budget that are already designated for spending and can be used for no other purpose. Of the one billion, only about \$220,000 is available to meet general needs. County salaries, some parts of healthcare, and roads are in that \$220,000. I attended the recent town hall meeting sponsored by Commissioners Tobia and Isnardi. It was a well run meeting. Questions were answered, and both Commissioners stated the need to prioritize spending in the budget.

I fully support the need to prioritize, but based on the mandatory spending requirements, the available money may fall short of the needs of our citizens, especially the elderly, disabled, and those who need some type of assistance such as Meals on Wheels. In developing a budget, I believe that any prioritization must be based on established needs. When one considers that 50% of Brevard County is classified as senior according to AARP, then it follows that seniors should be involved in prioritizing spending. For that to happen, we need better senior leadership to accurately determine senior needs.



Joe Steckler is the President of Helping Seniors of Brevard, a non profit organization designed to advocate, educate, and fundraise on behalf of Brevard's senior citizens. Feel free to contact us at info@helpingseniorsof-brevard.org or calling 321-473-7770.



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