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Job 1 for Miller unclear

Likely to join the County Commission, he has a taxpayer-funded USF berth.

BY JANET ZINK
Times Staff Writer

TAMPA — Les Miller needs only to beat a write-in candidate to become a Hillsborough County commissioner in November.

For Miller, it would be his second taxpayer-funded job: He has been working full time at the University of South Florida since 2007.

But, for now, Miller hasn't decided if he'll leave his $96,500-a-year job as USF's student ombudsman and community liaison if he becomes a county commissioner — which pays $92,000.

"I've got to get past that general election," Miller said. "That's what I'm focusing on right now."

Miller beat Commissioner Kevin White in last month's Democratic primary and faces write-in candidate Dwight Bolden in November — practically guaranteeing a win that will result in another publicly funded position.

While Miller remains undecided, other county commissioners say it's impossible to hold down a full-time job and give proper attention to government duties.

County Commissioner Al Higginbotham last week asked the county's charter review board to consider changing the charter to clearly designate a County Commission seat as

» See MILLER, 8B

Les Miller would collect $188,500 with two salaries.

Submitted into the Record
By Gerald White, member,
(Charter Review) 9/13/2010

» MILLER continued from 1B

Some commissioners want to limit any outside work

a full-time position. The charter now states only that commissioners can have outside employment as long as it doesn't interfere with commission obligations.

Higginbotham quit his work as a motivational speaker after his election in 2006.

"When I became a commissioner, I felt with the compensation that I was offered it merited my full-time attention," he said.

Kevin Beckner significantly reduced the time he spends as a financial planner after being elected to the commission in 2008. The owner of an Ameriprise Financial franchise, he puts only eight to 15 hours a week into that business — much of it at night and on weekends.

"Most of my time is spent being a commissioner," he said. "I can't imagine working for somebody else and do what I do here."

County Commissioner Mark Sharpe gave up his part-time consulting business altogether a few years after his 2004 election. The move coincided with difficult financial times for his biggest client, and the realization that he didn't have the time to do anything other than work for the county.

"It was very, very hard for me to manage staying up with all the material I need to as a commissioner — reading through all the background material and not getting blind-sided by an issue — and then give whomever else I was working for adequate time," he said.

In addition to regular County Commission meetings, board members have to prepare for and attend land use meetings. They double as the Environmental Protection Commission.

They serve on multiple outside boards, such as the Hillsborough County Aviation Authority and the Tampa Port Authority.

They receive thousands of requests for help from constituents.

"You have a little bit of extra time," Sharpe said. "Not much."

If Miller opts to juggle two jobs, he wouldn't be the first. County Commissioner Jim Norman collects $95,000 a year in a full-time job for the Salvation Army. Norman has said he does much of his work at night and on weekends.

USF does not have any rules that would prevent Miller from holding two jobs.

Charter review board member Joe Robinson said he would like to see the rules changed so commissioners can work only part time at other jobs.

But Jan Platt, a review board member and former county commissioner, doesn't think it's necessary.

She agrees that it's impossible to be an effective county commissioner and work full time in another job. Still, the charter isn't the place to address the issue, she added.

"To me, these other employers are the ones to be questioned. Once somebody runs for these offices, they've got their hands full," she said.

She said she's perplexed that the Salvation Army has continued to pay Norman for full-time work.

"They're the ones to be criticized," she said. "I've talked to a lot of people who aren't going to donate to the Salvation Army because of this."

Like Platt, review board chairman Mitch Thrower isn't sure a charter change is appropriate but said it's worth discussing.

"Because of the amount of work involved, it seems to me you need to dedicate at least 40 hours a week to be an effective commissioner," he said. "But it doesn't necessarily mean you should exclude someone from working a full-time job. I'd like to see what viewpoints other people have."

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Editorial

OUR OPINION

Iorio knows limits of government

Tampa Mayor Pam Iorio has spent most of her adult life in public office and is enthusiastic about the value of government and honor of public service. You won't find the lifelong Democrat leading any tea party rallies.

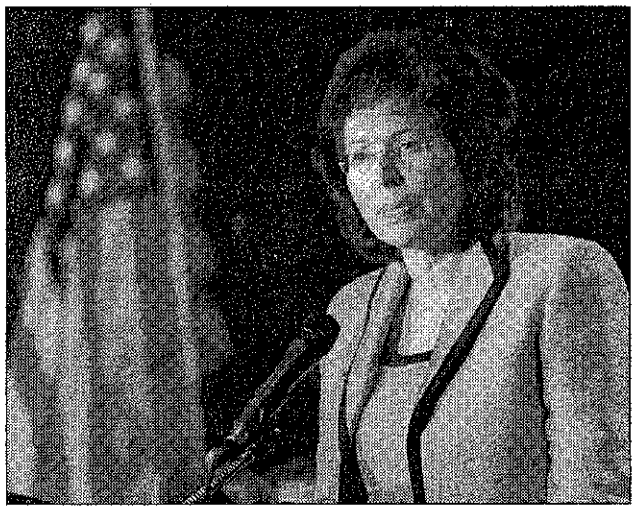
Yet Iorio, near the end of her tenure as mayor, has some surprising observations about government's expanding reach.

"There is way too much reliance on government ," she said during a recent visit to The Tampa Tribune Editorial Board. "People try to rely on government to solve all these problems that are really free-market based."

Iorio recognizes that even supporting worthy causes – such as housing programs or financially troubled nonprofits – can encourage ill-advised dependency.

"In this financial crisis, people looking for more from government, I think that is wrong," she says. "I don't think we need more programs.

"If you can't afford a home, you shouldn't buy it. If you can't run a nonprofit efficiently, find someone who can."



Staff file photo by PAUL LAMISON (2010)

Iorio, a former Hillsborough County commissioner and elections supervisor, doesn't advocate abruptly halting aid to nonprofits. But she says government cannot continue to be the financial backstop for every community cause.

She points out even the business community's economic development efforts require government support.

And during a campaign season in which most candidates, whether liberal or conservative, are promising to create jobs, Iorio offers a more candid view.

"People ask what I am going to do to create jobs, and I say that's up to the private sector."

This doesn't mean Iorio thinks government has no role in building a strong economy. But she thinks its efforts should be confined to making the community a good place to live and do business.

"I tell people I am working to reduce the crime rate, to promote a modern mass transit system, get new water and sewer pipes, to keep the city clean and streamline business regulations.

"All these things will make economic development possible. But if we all wait around for government to create jobs, we are in trouble."

It is refreshing to hear a leader say as much.

We wish more politicians, especially during this election season, had Iorio's clear-eyed view of government's responsibilities – and limitations.

Submitted into the Record by Gerald White, member Charter Review Board (9/13/10)

A RESOLUTION OF THE CHARTER REVIEW BOARD PROPOSING TO THE ELECTORATE OF HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY BY MEANS OF A REFERENDUM, THE QUESTION OF AMENDING THE HOME RULE CHARTER FOR THE GOVERNANCE OF HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY, FLORIDA BY: PROVIDING THAT THE COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR BE REQUIRED TO BECOME A MEMBER OF THE INTERNATIONAL CITY/COUNTY MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION UPON APPOINTMENT, PROVIDING FOR AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

1. Section 5.01 shall be amended to read as follows:

Section 5.01. County Administrator. The executive responsibilities and powers of local self government of the county not inconsistent with this Charter shall be assigned to and vested in the county administrator. One or more assistant county administrators may be appointed by the county administrator with the advice and consent of the board and shall serve at the pleasure of the county administrator. **The county administrator shall, upon appointment, become a member of the International City/County Management Association or its successor organization and shall abide by its Code of Ethics.**

2. (a) The proposed amendment to the Charter of Hillsborough County, Florida shall be presented to the Hillsborough County electorate by placing the question of whether to adopt the same on the ballot at the next scheduled general election.

(b) The question on the ballot shall be as follows:

AMENDMENT TO THE CHARTER OF HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY

Shall the Hillsborough County charter be amended to specify that the County Administrator shall join the International City/County Management Association and abide by its Code of Ethics?

____ Yes for Approval

____ No for Rejection

3. Effective Date:

This Amendment to the Charter of Hillsborough County shall become effective when and only if approved by a "yes" vote by a majority of those voting on the question posed at the next general election. If a majority of those voting shall not vote "yes" to the question posed, the proposed amendment shall not be adopted.