FALL BACK

Daylight saving time ends at 2 a.m. Sunday.
Set your clocks back one hour before bed Saturday.

CITRUS COUNTY CHRONICLE

WEEKEND

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VOTER TURNOUT

Citrus turnout tops 32% before election day

Nearly 40,000 ballots have been cast locally as Florida approaches 3.9M

By JAY WAAGMEESTER
Florida Phoenix

With Saturday marking the end of early voting, Citrus County residents didn't waste their opportunity to vote ahead of Tuesday's General Election, according to the Citrus County Supervisor of Elections website.

So far, the unofficial voter turnout for Citrus County was at 32.79 percent (39,806 ballots cast) as of Friday morning. According to the website, 22,313 residents cast their votes during the early-voting period with another 17,656 ballots cast by vote-by-mail and 16 provisional ballots submitted.

Statewide, early voters plus mail-in voters equal nearly 3.9 million ballots cast so far, according to Thursday afternoon state data.

Of that, 2.2 million Floridians have voted early and 1.68 million returned vote-by-mail ballots. About 750,000 mail ballots are outstanding.

Ballots cast by party:

■ Democrats: 1.51 million (36.6 percent of active registered voters as of Sept. 30)

■ Republicans: 1.56 million (27.5 percent of active registered voters as of Sept. 30)

■ No party affiliation: 717,560 (21.4 percent of active registered voters as of Sept. 30)

As of the end of September, Florida had more than 13.67 million registered voters.

With Election Day approaching, candidates have been crisscrossing the state, vying for votes. Meanwhile, Gov. Ron DeSantis is attempting to use his influence to pass Amendment 3, which would greatly reduce state revenues from property taxes by giving homesteaded property owners an eventual $250,000 exemption.

The Phoenix will report on the governor's race, U.S. Senate and House races, Cabinet races, and key Legislature contests, as well as the three constitutional amendments on the ballot.

— The Citrus County Chronicle contributed to this report.

GENERAL ELECTION 2026

Big decisions await Citrus voters Tuesday

From property taxes to the governor's race, here's what's on the ballot and what you need to know

By MICHAEL D. BATES
Chronicle Reporter

Tuesday is Election Day in Citrus County, and voters still have some important decisions to make.

The August primary settled several major local races, including county commission contests.

But the November ballot brings another round of choices, from state and congressional races to proposed constitutional amendments that could affect Floridians well beyond Election Day.

Here's what Citrus County voters need to know before heading to the polls.

Three amendments to consider

■ Amendment 1 would allow the state to build a larger financial cushion for emergencies and budget shortfalls. It would raise the cap on the Budget Stabilization Fund from 10 percent to 25 percent of the previous year's general revenue and require the state to deposit $750 million a year until the fund reaches that limit.

■ Amendment 2 would exempt certain equipment and other tangible property used in agriculture and agritourism from property taxes. That could mean tax savings for qualifying farms and agritourism businesses.

■ Amendment 3 has generated the most debate. It would increase the homestead exemption for non-school property taxes to $150,000 in 2027 and $250,000 in 2028, with future increases tied to inflation.

It would also cut the annual cap on increases in the assessed value of non-homestead properties from 10 percent to 5 percent.

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UnSplash

Election 2026: Meet the candidates

Still deciding how to vote? Today's Commentary section features our candidate profiles, giving voters a closer look at the people seeking office, their backgrounds, priorities, positions on the issues and their pitches to voters in their own words.

Also inside are the Chronicle Editorial Board's recommendations in three key races of particular interest to Citrus County residents.

For more election information, including a sample ballot and other voter resources, see Pages A10-11.

Turn inside to meet the candidates and read our recommendations before you cast your ballot.

AMENDMENT 3

DeSantis says tax relief is affordable, Brandes warns of cuts

Governor says local governments can spend less, former state Senator questions how

By MIKE ARNOLD
Chronicle Reporter

Chronicle / ChatGPT

This month, two Florida leaders offered contrasting views of the proposed Amendment 3, which will go before Florida voters Nov. 3. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis making his case Wednesday at the Crystal River Wildlife Refuge Center and former state Sen. Jeff Brandes spoke earlier this month at the Citrus County Chamber of Commerce's Salute to Business Luncheon.

Amendment 3 would give homeowners meaningful property tax relief without crippling local services. Former state Sen. Jeff Brandes warns the proposal could leave cities and counties struggling to pay for services residents depend on.

Their disagreement comes with Citrus County officials projecting the amendment could reduce county property tax revenue by approximately $43 million.

DeSantis argued local governments have seen property tax collections grow far beyond what is needed to maintain existing services, leaving room to return money to homeowners.

"Are you trying to tell me we can't put money back in people's pockets?" he asked.

Brandes, founder and president of the Florida Policy Project, said the proposal lacks the analysis needed to understand its long-term consequences for local governments.

"The challenge is this: there was no data and there was no modeling when this was presented to legislators," Brandes said.

DeSantis pointed to statewide property tax collections rising

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