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Democrats look to the future

By Anthony Man
South Florida Sun Sentinel

MIAMI BEACH — Florida Democrats are putting on a brave face and professing confidence that they've started to slow — and reverse — the downward slide that has seen them come close to irrelevance as Republicans have surged.

"I am feeling optimistic — very optimistic," said Alfredo Olvera, Broward's state Democratic committeeman, on Saturday during a break at the Florida Democratic Party's annual summer Leadership Blue conference and fundraiser.

"The excitement is genuine. We haven't disguised the challenges with optimism. We are aware of the problems, and we are creat-

ing a path to win in 2024. We were absent in 2020."

The challenges are many: finding candidates willing to run for open offices; registering voters in an attempt to counter a rapidly growing Republican advantage; and getting voters who want to use mail ballots in 2024 to send in requests because previous mail-ballot requests have now expired.

And, essential to it all, raising money to fund everything a political organization needs to do.

"I know that we have problems," said Junaid Akther, the Palm Beach County state Democratic committeeman. "It's a big ship that's turning around."

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Developer carries great weight with DeSantis

By Jeffrey Schweers
Orlando Sentinel

TALLAHASSEE — Millionaire developer Morteza "Mori" Hosseini has been called the most powerful unelected person in Florida and a close adviser and donor to Gov. Ron DeSantis, who is running for president in 2024.

The 68-year-old Iranian-American developer from Volusia County has raised millions for his "beloved" University of Florida and his alma mater, Embry Riddle Aeronautical University. He and his family raised millions more for numerous charities, but also the Florida Republican Party and state and local political candidates.

He's also garnered headlines for getting tickets for DeSantis to play golf at Augusta National Golf Club, flying the First Lady Casey DeSantis to a defense contractor's fundraiser in Jacksonville and frequently lending his private jet to the governor's campaign.

More recently, Hosseini has been in the news for lending a fancy golf simulator to the Governor's Mansion and playing a role in state transportation officials steering \$92 million in leftover COVID funds toward an interchange project that would benefit one of his developments.

But outside of the circles of real estate development, state politics and higher education, Hosseini is not a household name.

"The average Floridian is probably not aware of his name, but he is more public than most donors not only because of his ability to raise millions but because of his appointment



Hosseini



Marty Proctor, an advocate for dark skies, holds a red light aloft as he takes a reading of the evening sky with an electronic device on his dock on Lake Emma in Groveland. STEPHEN M. DOWELL/ORLANDO SENTINEL

Stargazers rejoice

Groveland's effort to dim light pollution wins honors

By Stephen Hudak
Orlando Sentinel

With darkness falling, Marty Proctor stood at the end of his dock on Lake Emma and pointed a small gizmo upwards at the heavens over Groveland, once a remote outpost about 30 miles west of Orlando.

The device, a "Sky Quality Meter," measures artificial brightness in a night sky.

"I call this the edge of the wild," Proctor said, speaking over a chorus of crickets and frogs.

But even here, at wild's edge, the average reading on the retired engineer's

meter registered at a level far better than the night sky in Orlando, where a constant flood of urban lights hides a galaxy of stars, but far worse than at Kissimmee Prairie Preserve where astro-photographers go to take breath-taking pictures of the Milky Way.

As Groveland has grown from 3,000

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