

## **Patriot Project presents**

### **Overview of **The Hot Seat** w/*Dan Cook***

#### **Featuring: Collier County Public Schools Board candidate** **– Jen Mitchell**

##### ***Part 1***

##### **CCPS = Collier County Public Schools**

***Editorial Note:*** The full video of this interview can be found at the Patriot Project YouTube channel. I did my very best to moderate The Hot Seat fairly as well as to quote Jen Mitchell accurately.

- Specific questions will be **BOLD and in Blue**.
- “Quotations are used for verbatim quotes.”
- [Brackets are used when I paraphrased a long answer from our guest].

Please watch the video in full, there are five parts, to get the full context of the candidate’s answers.

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A big thank you to all the volunteers and contributors to the Patriot Project for the help promoting, asking questions, attending meetings, making phone calls, knocking on doors, donating goods and services, pledging your time, etc. An equally big thank you to the Food and Thought staff for sharing their courtyard with We The People every week. It is a blessing but also a huge responsibility. We who are in the know, that our country and freedoms are under assault, have a moral obligation to do something about it.

I certainly would like to thank our guest, Jen Mitchell, for sitting down in The Hot Seat, and having the guts to answer the people’s questions.

“My mask isn’t helping you and your mask isn’t helping me.” -- Jen Mitchell

- [Jen Mitchell stated that the CCPS attorney advised that EO6 and EO7 subjected the school board to the order of state and local health departments, noting that other county school board attorneys interpreted it that way as well.]
- **What will your stance be during the next epidemic?** “We will stand on the side of freedom of choice.”
- **What are the health consequences of masks?** “I know for a fact we have issues around speech, due in large part to the masking. Feedback from teachers tells me that first graders have trouble with phonetic pronunciation.”
- **Please comment on suicide prior to and since ‘Covid.’** “Isolation exacerbated the problem. Local resources spread thin.” [In order to address the speech issues and raise phonetic awareness, the CCPS board extended the school day and extended after school programs.]
- **[Re: Students with Disabilities:]** “I’ve connected parents to resources by having an expo for students with special needs.”
- **How do you plan to initiate feedback to the public?** “I’ve provided my phone number. It’s important to receive feedback and I try to bring that up at the board comments part of the meeting. Board members should make themselves available.”
- **Would you support lowering or eliminating taxes on people who own their home outright?** “We’ve lowered your taxes this year.....”
- **Property values are going up, so the school board gets more money. I would suggest rather than taking that increase in money, would you be willing to decrease the amount of spending the school board does to let homeowners keep that tax money?** “So here’s what I’ll say, I think the question should be look at what are you getting for your money?”
  - Dan interjected to note, **“but that’s not the question I asked.”** [Jen Mitchell would go on to compare Collier County to other counties with higher taxes.]

- **Dan replied, “It’s not fair to compare us to other counties..... I think taxes need to decrease. I believe the school board budget was at \$900M just four or five years ago and now it’s \$1.3B. How can we decrease that, and if you’re....actually maybe first question is how come it has gotten that high on your watch?”** [To which Jen responded that:

  - Revenues are up because property values are up
  - \$400M in capital reserves
    - New highschool (paid cash, no interest payments)
  - 80% of spending is on people
    - Salariessubstitutes
  - Cost of fuel has gone up
  - Pension system requirements via the State of Florida up 26%
  - Free insurance provided
  - Operation side going through the roof
  - State money has strict spending categories.
  - “For years we haven’t asked the State for more money, we’re asking for more flexibility to spend it on teachers.”
  - We have a Tax neutral referendum]
- **Let me ask about that 80%....I read in the Naples Daily news recently that many administrators are making triple digit money and there are 3,000 teachers and 4,000 administrators. We have to be able to cut that number of administrators down.** “That would be 200. The other 3800 are not administrators. We have our own trade union workers. We have our own carpenters, we build our own furniture in Collier County Public Schools. We have our own bus drivers, food nutrition workers. So many of our workers make barely, they make minimum wage. It’s getting harder. That’s why we have so many staff shortages in bus drivers and food nutrition workers because they’re having a hard time living here. 40% of our people come from Lee County.
- **Are there any positions you would eliminate to reduce people’s tax burden?** [To your point about the article, I’m going to go back to the article. The interesting thing about that is they didn’t compare it, they didn’t benchmark it to any other counties.... It’s about how to we compare. That’s a question I put to the superintendent and she will put a chart together for me. The problem is they call these other districts to benchmark this information.....We’re having trouble finding a way to scale that information.]

  - **Dan: “Can I make a suggestion. Maybe ask the superintendent not to compare us to other counties and to listen to the people.”**
  - Jen: “I think it’s important to know where you stand.”

- **Why isn't Trump's 1776 Project part of our curriculum, and have you read it?** “No I have not read it, I perused it.”
- **Programs like sexual health education that are too obscene or break privacy laws. Do you support those?** “One of the important things to know is the Parents Bill of Rights. Parents have always been able to go in and take a look for themselves. We were talking about censorship and freedom, parents have the right to make a decision for themselves. I was one of those moms who came in and looked at the books and I flipped through and was so pleasantly surprised with the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade material and I chose to let me children participate. But I think it's important to protect a parents right NOT to participate. The parents bill of rights required that this material be put onto a website so anyone can access it and you don't have to go inside the schools or inside the district to do that. I think we do a very good job of giving a very vanilla version of the issues people find controversial.” [There is a note on some of the controversial materials telling teachers 'Do Not Elaborate' because there are conversations that parents need to have at home with their children.]
- **Quick follow up, are parents right now, allowed to go to their kids' schools to look through the library?** [Not only are they not allowed to do that right now..... parents at Seagate were not allowed to participate in their child's walk-a-thon. If you were at the board meetings last spring, you know that I asked about parents being allowed to return to normal activities at their kids schools and the answer was yes. So this was news to me. Parents should be back in the schools period, for lunch, volunteerism, walk-a-thons, whatever the case.]
- **Recently the Biden admin has weaponized the DOJ by labeling parents going into school board meetings as terrorists under the Patriot Act. Can you tell us where we can find your public statement in opposition to this policy?** “You can make a Freedom of Information request for my email to the Florida School Board Association to make sure we are not dues paying members of that organization, and she confirmed that we weren't.” ..... [It was a complete overreach and absolutely ridiculous.... I never thought any of you were terrorist.]

- **Have you apologized to students and parents for the psychological damage caused by the mask mandates you voted for in the 2020-2021 school year?** No I did not. But I will tell you we did what we thought was best
  - Man in Crowd: **You did what every body else did**
  - Jen Mitchell, answering the man, “well you’re right, and that was part of the problem.” [So when we asked the health department, they pointed us up to the State. When we asked the State, they pointed us up to the CDC. I understand the anger, but I can promise you that I did the best I could, at that moment with the information I had and under the constraints I was under.]
    - **Crowd: Will you apologize now?**
- **Are you a liscenced doctor?** “No, that’s exactly why we were stuck listening to conflicting medical advice.”
- **I spoke how you were violating ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) laws, my mic was cut off.... Question is, what were you thinking when you shut down and censored public comments? You didn’t stand up for our kids then, why should we think you will now?** “To the point about the meeting, there were determinations made before the meeting based on what was going on around the State about what our protocol would be” .... [And we decided if things got out of hand, we would go to the back, let things calm down, and then return to let the speaker finish. And that’s what we did. I don’t believe anyone’s rights were usurped because we let everyone finish their statement.]
  - **Beth Sherman, “Mine weren’t. That was not an appropriate response.**
  - **Mitchell,** “When was that, was that after your three minutes Mrs. Sherman??
  - **Beth:** “No, that was when I took my mask off and told you that you were violating ADA laws”
  - **Another lady yelled at her to sit down, it got a little hectic, and then Jen responded,** “In other districts around the state, there were boards cutting people’s time down to one minute and moving people to the back of the room to make comments. Because free speech was being attacked across the country from the spring of 2020 to present.

- Dan: Free speech was under attack, but our freedom of assembly was also under attack. If you'll recall it, was.... You know I didn't even start going to the school board meetings until November of 2020 because I was required to wear a mask to get inside and I was stubborn and I wasn't going to wear a mask just to go to the meeting. But a friend of mine, Patrick Jira asked me, 'Dan, will you please just put on a mask and go speak for our rights?' And so I did, so then Beth did that, and then John did that, and more and more of us did that. I was extremely disappointed that we were locked out of attending a public meeting because we didn't want to wear a mask. That was an absolute violation of our rights, so what I want to know is, who specifically made that call, and why did you and the other board members go along with it? "So I think in terms of limiting the number of people in the room, I think you remember there was like a 50 person capacity limit..."**

  - Dan: Yeah, a violation of our assembly rights**
  - Crowd: "46 people"**
  - Jen:** "I think per the EO I think it was 50, and so that's why we kept people outside. As the state stating lifting restrictions. I mean if you remember when we would go out, people weren't even putting the ketchup out, I mean people were wearing gloves. We learned so much more about the virus as it went on, but there were... the fear was real at the time."
  - Dan: Well that was the case at Publix but not at Seed to Table. You had some I think a lot of our frustrations here, Jennifer, are about the compliance. That the school board complied without really knowing all the facts**
  - Jen:** [So again it goes back to the executive order, the fact is that that was DeSantis' guide. The commission of ed is appointed by the Governor and I believe he kept the EO in place, most likely was to protect us from lawsuit. Because on the first groups that assembled during spring of 2020 were the trial lawyer association. Senator Passidomo talked about it that spring after session. This association asked, "how can we make money on this?" So legislation came out saying you cant get sued if you catch covid in an establishment of in an institution, as long as they're following cdc guidance that didn't even help us getting out from under the EO order.]

- CCPS public schools spend about \$27K per student, charter 13K, homeschool at 3K. Given performance at charter schools like MCA, why should voters trust you over Kelly Lichter?** [I'm not getting into a tit for tat about Mrs. Lichter.....she served the county well when she served on the board. Regarding charters and home and public, it's not as easy as dividing the total budget by number of students. For example, \$400M doesn't get touched so you take that out of the example.] "I hear about this, "the money following the student" as long as the tax payers can follow the money. Now there is not method of oversight in that. I support choices whether its charter, private or successful public schools. We have choices and are fortunate to have great choices. So many in this room are fiscal conservatives, and we care about fiscal oversight. We're sending \$2 Billion of what would be going to the general fund, on vouchers. Which is great, that's fine. I would love to see us audit those schools like we do public and charter schools. I would like to see us ensure we have state testing accountability. I'm all for that, the money following the child" ..... [We all should want better oversight of all of our tax dollars, regardless of what education choice parents make.]
- How much money has ccps received as result of Cares Act?** "\$8M first round \$32 in second round. We did not stop paychecks, even though buses not running they still got a paycheck. Food nutrition workers still got a paycheck. Big tech purchase to get computers to all families, and hotspots where no connectivity. Expanding after school and summer school. That's that's the big picture of where that money went."
- Let me ask this about the Cares Act money, if the school board had the desire to reject that money could they have done that?** "It would have been, well we wouldn't have lowered your taxes. We wouldn't be able to lower your taxes. At the end of the day, we needed that money. It served our employees and students, and recouped that unfinished learning that happened to get our kids back up to par. And they did fabulously. We got our results back and we outperformed the state on 20/21 tested area. We got an A rating, btw only 8 districts in the entire state asked for their district grade. Now how do you know how your students did and what the gaps are, if you don't even ask how the kids did on that test? But we wanted to know and we needed to know.

- **Dan: I'm going to respectfully disagree that acceptance of Cares Act money didn't raise our taxes because everyone is paying the price at the grocery store through the inflation tax. Jen: "I agree with that"**
- **Dan: I believe that local government that accepted cares act money, or any federal money that is outside the scope of Article 1 Section 8, of the Constitution contributes to this inflation this printing of money out of thin air. So I'd appreciate if future school boards, city councils, county commissioners would reject this "free" federal money.**

***This concludes part 1 of the overview of The Hot Seat featuring Collier County Public Schools board candidate, Jen Mitchell.***

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**"We all have a part to play."**