

## **Real answers buried by talking points**

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**Byline:** ANDREW SKERRITT

### **Body**

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It required leaving home at 7:30 a.m. to get there, but judging by readers' response to a recent column, I couldn't afford to miss U.S. Rep. Ginny Brown-Waite's sit-down with reporters.

I had said she needed to hear some tough questions. Many of you agreed and even suggested questions of your own.

The problem is an hour isn't enough time. But this being an election year, the second-term representative will have ample opportunity to provide honest answers.

But first, we had to hear the talking points. The Brooksville resident said she was hearing from many of her elderly constituents who were worried that illegal immigrants were depriving their grandchildren of jobs.

It was hard to hear those sentiments and not picture one of those radio talk show-contrived issues that now dominate our political landscape. She touted her support for measures to stop illegal immigration. A recent mailing mentions her support for constructing a fence along the border with Mexico.

Canadians who winter in Hernando and Citrus counties need not worry, however. There's no money in the budget for a fence along the northern border.

To her credit as a Florida resident, Brown-Waite acknowledged that the agriculture industry couldn't survive without illegal immigration. She sees the need for a "tightly controlled" guest-worker program.

That won't mollify her conservative friends.

Among her other accomplishments, Brown-Waite talked about bankruptcy reform, legislation pushed by banks and credit card companies that made it harder for regular folks to seek bankruptcy protection.

And of course, she was proud of her support for the 2005 "deficit reduction package" - the Veterans Affairs budget saw record increases.

Brown-Waite has been criticized for supporting cuts to student loan and antipoverty programs while giving tax cuts to the affluent. Her staff says the "cuts" aren't really cuts but reductions in the size of future increases.

That's window dressing. When you consider inflation, those reductions equal cuts. And the \$1 increases in veteran copays for health care? Her staff said she opposed even bigger proposed increases and refused to support enrollment fees for some veterans who wanted to get VA health care.

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With Senate action, Brown-Waite and her House colleagues will have to vote again on the budget package. She may want to reconsider her initial decision.

Some of those who suggested questions were concerned that Brown-Waite had become a rubber stamp for business interests and the Bush administration at the expense of many of her less well-off constituents.

No one goes to Washington planning to become a rubber stamp. And Brown-Waite has shown just enough independence to avoid the label. But not when it comes to civil liberties, national security and foreign policy.

On the question of the president's authorization of spying on Americans without court warrants, Brown-Waite wasn't very insightful.

Domestic spying isn't new, she said. When she used to work in New York, the state troopers used to photograph license plates, she said.

More recently, Democratic presidents, Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton, authorized the same kind of surveillance as President Bush.

Notice how Republicans like to blame others, especially Democrats, when they're in trouble?

There was no mention of Richard Nixon, whose administration's abuse of domestic surveillance in the 1970s led to reforms.

Brown-Waite thinks the president is obligated to protect us. Of course. His actions are necessary in the name of national security. But sometimes that's questionable.

If Brown-Waite sees any limits to presidential power in the open-ended war against terrorism, she isn't saying.

On the war in Iraq, Brown-Waite was happy to remind us that she didn't vote to authorize President Bush to use force. Her predecessor, Democrat Karen Thurman, did.

"She gave the president the authority to use force," Brown-Waite said. "I get to pay for it."

She's wrong again.

We all do.

Andrew Skerritt can be reached at (813) 909-4602 or toll-free at 1-800-333-7505, ext. 4602. His e-mail address is [askerritt@sptimes.com](mailto:askerritt@sptimes.com).

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