2026 CATHOLIC VOTER GUIDE · FLORIDA · LETTERS FROM LEO

U.S. House, District 16

Open seat (Rep. Vern Buchanan is retiring). District lines redrawn for 2026.



Sydney Gruters

REPUBLICAN · OPEN SEAT

Former executive director of the New College Foundation; married to RNC chairman Joe Gruters.



Kelly Kirschner

DEMOCRAT · OPEN SEAT

Former mayor of Sarasota and Peace Corps volunteer; founder of a nonprofit for first-generation college students.

Where the candidates stand on the issues Pope Leo XIV has raised, in their own words and votes. Bracketed numbers link to sources. We do not rate, score, or endorse candidates.

WAR & PEACE

POPE LEO XIV *Leo invited citizens of every country involved in the war with Iran to contact their leaders and members of Congress "to work for peace and to reject war and violence."* Remarks at Castel Gandolfo, Apr. 7, 2026 (Vatican News via The Good Newsroom)

SYDNEY GRUTERS

No public position found.

KELLY KIRSCHNER

Says, "Under the Constitution, only Congress has the power to declare war."

[1] Ballotpedia: Kelly Kirschner

AI & THE DIGNITY OF WORK

POPE LEO XIV *"No one can be reduced to productivity, to cognitive performance, or to mere data."* Magnifica Humanitas presentation, May 25, 2026

SYDNEY GRUTERS

Says "Big Tech should pay their own way" and that data centers should not raise consumers' bills.

[1] WUSF: CD 16 candidates forum

KELLY KIRSCHNER

Says AI companies "need to be held liable" for current harms and supports limits on AI research.

[1] WUSF: CD 16 candidates forum

THE POOR & THE SAFETY NET

POPE LEO XIV *The preferential choice for the poor is "a source of extraordinary renewal both for the Church and for society."* Dilexi Te, Oct. 4, 2025

SYDNEY GRUTERS

Pledges to "protect Social Security and Medicare" and says, "I do not want the government taking over my healthcare."

[1] Gruters campaign site
[2] WUSF: CD 16 candidates forum

KELLY KIRSCHNER

Says Congress stripped "healthcare from nearly 280,000" district residents and pledges "to restore every cut," starting with the expired ACA subsidies.

[1] Ballotpedia: Kelly Kirschner
[2] WUSF: CD 16 candidates forum

ELECTIONS & CIVIC LIFE

POPE LEO XIV *Authentic democracy, "far from being a mere procedure," "recognizes the dignity of every person and calls each citizen to participate responsibly in the pursuit of the common good."* Message to the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, Apr. 9, 2026

SYDNEY GRUTERS

Says, "I do support having to show voter ID," and pledges to stand with President Trump "to ensure our elections are secure."

[1] WUSF: CD 16 candidates forum
[2] Gruters campaign site

KELLY KIRSCHNER

Calls the SAVE Act a distraction and says voting should be easy for people who move.

[1] WUSF: CD 16 candidates forum

LIFE OF THE UNBORN

POPE LEO XIV *Abortion "cuts short a growing life and refuses to welcome the gift of life."* Address to the Diplomatic Corps, Jan. 9, 2026

SYDNEY GRUTERS

No public position found.

KELLY KIRSCHNER

No public position found.

THE DEATH PENALTY

POPE LEO XIV *Someone who opposes abortion but favors the death penalty "is not really pro-life."* AP via PBS NewsHour, Sept. 30, 2025

SYDNEY GRUTERS

No public position found.

KELLY KIRSCHNER

No public position found.

IMMIGRANTS & REFUGEES

POPE LEO XIV *"Defending human life also includes welcoming, protecting and assisting immigrants."* Letter on the 250th Anniversary of the United States, June 25, 2026

SYDNEY GRUTERS

Supports the administration's deportation efforts — "The laws are there. We just have to enforce them" — and pledges to work "with President Trump and ICE."

[1] WUSF: CD 16 candidates forum
[2] Gruters campaign site

KELLY KIRSCHNER

Says spending $75 billion without "a national conversation on immigration reform is insane," and stresses immigrant labor's role in the district's economy.

[1] WUSF: CD 16 candidates forum

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY & EDUCATION

POPE LEO XIV *Religious freedom is "the right of every person to worship according to conscience."* Letter on the 250th Anniversary of the United States, June 25, 2026

SYDNEY GRUTERS

No public position found.

KELLY KIRSCHNER

No public position found.

CARE FOR CREATION

POPE LEO XIV *"We cannot love God, whom we cannot see, while despising his creatures."* AP, Oct. 1, 2025

SYDNEY GRUTERS

Says tech companies, not consumers, should pay for data centers' energy and water use.

[1] WUSF: CD 16 candidates forum

KELLY KIRSCHNER

No public position found.

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