

# THE SPEAKERS

Volume II

1994 - 2012



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The Florida House of Representatives  
The Promise of Florida Continues



WRITTEN BY

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## The Florida House of Representatives

**Will Weatherford**  
**Speaker**

Dear Reader,

For generations, the membership of the Florida House of Representatives has reflected the unique makeup of Florida. As part of Florida’s “citizen legislature,” the members serving in the Florida House have personified our vibrant and diverse communities around the state. They have served through periods of Florida’s triumphs, turmoil, wartime, peacetime, a Great Depression, Florida’s ascendancy and our transition into a global, 21st Century economy. Simply put, the story of the Florida House has been the story of Florida.

With a great appreciation for its history, I thought it would be fitting to restore the tradition of publishing this book with updated information about the Speakers who have served over the last decade, which was the last time the book was updated. Florida experienced tremendous growth over the past few decades and the leadership of the Florida House in recent years has sought to manage that growth in a positive and effective way. It is my hope this new chapter of our history will reflect our sincere commitment to making Florida a great place to live for many generations to come.

This year, Florida celebrates the 500th Anniversary of Juan Ponce de León’s arrival to Florida. From the time of his arrival until today, many of Florida’s leaders, particularly in the Florida House, have contributed to the Promise of Florida. From the millions of tourists we host every year to our farming communities, urban centers and suburban populations, Florida always has a story to tell. It is my hope that you find our story as remarkable as I have.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Will Weatherford".

Will Weatherford





# PREFACE

We often write about the people in our history as they are the ones who act upon the stage, making the sometimes tedious and often difficult decisions about our government that have an impact on who we are as a society and what we do, both as individuals and in the collective body. This book is also about the people who have served as elected leaders in Florida, but it is more. It is written to capture the spirit of Florida, the Promise of Florida, and the role of one institution, The Florida House of Representatives. We often forget that our institutions also have a life of their own. Through the doors of the House have come many people from many walks of life. It has seen comedy, tragedy, times of stress and times of joy. Many have dedicated their professional lives to making it run smoothly and effectively. Many have found their life's partner within its walls. Many have made lifelong friends, and many have lost friends made there, too. We all come and go about our lives, but our institutions often serve as a touchstone for our experiences.

This book is dedicated to those who have served within the walls, either elected, appointed as staff or reaching in from the outside to have your voices heard. It is dedicated to the ongoing Promise of Florida and a future filled with boundless opportunity.





## AN INSTITUTION FILLED WITH HISTORY

There are many terms and phrases peculiar to the legislative process but not common in usage outside of the realm of legislative affairs. Legis-speak is an often entertaining use of words, with many words or phrases having a specific origin sometime in the past that had relevance to both the term and the process or act it described. The Clerks of the House have, over time, compiled an excellent resource titled *The Language of Lawmaking in Florida*, now in Volume VIII. As you can tell by the Roman numeral, it has been a long series of compilations designed to help the unfamiliar interpret more easily what might be going on in the process. Some of the words are colorful descriptions, such as “bells and whistles,” “loved to death,” or “motherhood bill,” and some are just accurate descriptions of the names and terms in the process, such as “technical amendments” and “waive the rules.” And some just go to the heart of debate and the styles used, such as “would you believe” and “with all due respect.”

The process is a colorful one that sometimes masks the seriousness of what is being done, especially when someone unfamiliar with the process sits in the gallery and sees the commotion of everyday activity.

But all of this is done under the direction of the person designated by their peers to be the Leader, the Speaker of the House; the one who wields all that power and pounds the gavel bringing order to the process. The term “Speaker” actually came from customary English usage. The first recorded usage of the title was in 1377, used to describe the role in Parliament of Thomas de Hungerford. The office he held had been in place for a long time, but this is the first known usage of the term that was recorded, actually written in French, by scribes recording the events of the day. Hungerford had been High Sheriff of Wiltshire, England, from 1355 to 1360. He was a knight of the shire and served in Parliament from 1357 to 1393. He was chosen in 1376, in the last Parliament of Edward III, often referred to as “the Bad Parliament,” to act as “Speaker.” It was a title long used in the House of Lords, in modern times changed to Lord Chancellor.

Florida has had many Speakers since statehood in 1845, although it is difficult to find out much about many of those who served. Some names remain with us as



several Florida counties are named after Speakers from the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, such as Pasco, Gilchrist and Hardee. Our legislatures have used language and terms for roles taken from ancient history. The press often use the term “Solon” as shorthand for legislator. Solon was an ancient Athenian statesman. *Sine die* comes from the Latin, meaning “without a day.” Even the term legislator comes from the Latin root word *lex*, which means law. So while some might claim “there is nothing new under the sun,” clearly they have not spent time looking back over the actors, issues and times of the Florida Legislature. The times are rich with diversity, the issues complex, and the actors all bring attributes that make each year and each session something very different from the others.



# THE PROMISE OF FLORIDA

From the beginning there was the promise; the promise of opportunity, of a new life and new adventures, of gold and riches beyond dreams and the promise of discovery. From that first day on April 2, 1513, when the flag of Spain was planted on Florida's shores, there always has been the Promise of Florida, the land of flowers, and the dreams of what might be. And now we are celebrating the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that first exploration by Juan Ponce de León and the beginnings of a new La Florida.



Of course, like all new ventures and explorations, there have been both successes and there have been disappointments. Disappointment has been an emotion often felt following the dreams of many in the earliest days of exploration and attempts to settle Florida, but as time progressed into the modern era of Florida, the state has blossomed into a modern economic and cultural leader for the United States, and with this growth has come challenges. Through all of these past 500 years, there always has been the promise of potential and the promise of better things to come. La Florida always has been a land to be explored, a land to be embraced and a land to be expanded and enhanced, so that what began as a ship full of conquistadors and monks could evolve into home for almost twenty million people. The people of Florida have always been its greatest asset, even from the beginning.

As Florida grew, so did opportunity for those who came from elsewhere. New markets, land to farm, vast landscapes upon which cattle could be raised—all of these



beckoned to others to share in the potential of what was not too very long ago, mainly a wilderness. Many other states grew due to discovered mineral resources or due to waterways that provided transit for goods and services produced elsewhere. Florida grew from the beginning due to its abundant land and water resources and within all, the promise that it was a place where others could come to find a new life. The author's own ancestors, Archibald and Rachel Mixson, came to Wacahoota Hammock, Florida, in the early part of the 1800s, moving to the wilderness to settle, farm and raise a family of 15 children. They came because of the promise of opportunity. Life was hard then and life can be hard now for many different reasons. It has been the duty of our elected officials through institutions like the Florida House of Representatives, to bring about a balance between the safety, economic vitality and security of the people of Florida, and the freedom needed to pursue opportunity and build a new life.

This book captures the leadership of 11 Leaders, selected by their peers to be the Speakers of the Florida House of Representatives. It follows the first volume written by former Clerk of the House, Allen Morris, that captured the history of the Speakers from 1963-1994. Florida has changed tremendously since statehood in 1845, yet our institutions have continued to provide us with the framework for success as a people. The Speakers contained in this short review all led during times of great changes, some positive and some stressful. All sought to lead as they thought best. But the constancy of the process and the ever changing cast in leadership have added vitality to the menu and brought about significant policies that have affected all Floridians.

While reading this book, keep in mind the dreams of those who have come before and those who live in Florida now, for it is due to both the successes and the disappointments of our predecessors that a government was formed, markets were established, and what was once wilderness became home to so many. From those first ships filled with explorers, Florida is now home to close to twenty million people. Florida has grown tremendously in the past few decades. It is vastly different than the state it was in the '50s and '60s. It has evolved from small and mid-size towns across Florida then, to mega-metropolitan areas now that are the gateway to the world.

What once were vast farms, groves and ranches, now house tens of thousands in suburban communities with demands for services. Over time, our elected legislators also



have evolved from old time cracker patricians to a highly diverse, largely urban chamber forced to face issues of complexity never even imagined by their forebears, even 60 years ago. The leaders of the Florida House of Representatives have changed greatly over that same timeframe. This book is designed to capture both the times and the personalities of those who were chosen by their peers to serve as Speakers of the House.

Florida should remain our lens for seeing the promise of that which is still to come. Florida is truly a land of opportunities and promises. It remains a place where the seemingly impossible becomes the possible. The future of Florida is filled with promise, but to fulfill these promises our citizens must go beyond their dreams and do what our ancestors have done before us: work hard, work together, and help create an environment of opportunity. The leadership selected by our elected officials, as Speakers, are each like the captain of a ship—not fully able to control the environment through which they sail, but skilled enough to guide the ship forward in good times and in bad.

However, most of the subjects of this writing have come forward as Leaders through a system far different than their predecessors. In 1992, the Florida electorate passed a constitutional amendment popularly titled “Eight is Enough,” through which members could serve no more than four consecutive terms, or eight years. With one exception since the advent of annual sessions in 1968 (Speaker Don Tucker), Leaders served as Speaker for only two years and were now to be chosen from a single class of elected officials, the immediate peers of those who would seek the speakership, for the most part. It has been altered by custom and not by rule, from selection by a much larger group—all of the members of the majority party in the Chamber—to the selection of a future Speaker from those elected in the same year. The Speakers featured in this writing emerged during this transition that somewhat limited who might be running for Speaker, with the modern Speaker having served generally less time in the Chamber than most of the Speakers from an earlier time. How they become the designated candidate for their party as a future Speaker has altered the process. Qualities of leadership must be shown quickly. Yet, as you will see in the pages that follow, each of the Speakers have seemed to have very different personalities, priorities and perspectives on their role as Leader.



No longer could the elected members of the House rely upon what our founders had imagined and described in the *Federalist Papers* for the federal system, from which Florida had largely copied, whereby “a few of the members... will possess superior talents,” and “by frequent reelections, become members of long standing.” They will be “masters of the public business, and perhaps not unwilling to avail themselves of those advantages.” Through term limits, the playing field had been leveled and from 2000 on, the starting line for leadership was the same for all who might seek to be Speaker. History will be the judge as to whether Publius was correct in asserting that “All these considerations taken together” give us reason to affirm “that biennial elections (and now term limits) will be as useful to the affairs of the public as we have seen that they will be safe to the liberty of the people.”

## SEEKING THE EARLY PROMISE

It is so easy to forget in our modern era that Florida has not been modern for long. While our fast-paced world tends to measure our activities based on the lightning speed of internet communication, where singular events are transmitted globally in seconds, there once was a time, not very long ago, that news took months to be received and the transmittal of the reality of situations resulted in responses far too late. Times have changed drastically. In the past, rumors took precedence over facts, and ambition triumphed over practicality. In large part, that is the story of the Spanish Conquistadors and their ventures into the New World. La Florida played an integral part in these early explorations. Florida was a beacon of promise for these early explorers from Europe, but more often than not, it was the site of failed expeditions and disastrous consequences.

In this brief segment we explore the explorers a little—important to do as we celebrate the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first explorers to land in Florida, conquistadors seeking fame, fortune and expansion of territories and monks seeking to proselytize native populations, soon to vanish as if they never inhabited Florida. The natural attributes of La Florida both hindered their quests and hampered their capabilities to reach out to explore more profitable and beneficial regions of the New World. Early exploration of Florida was not filled with successes.



## JUAN PONCE DE LEÓN

Juan Ponce de León is credited with discovering Florida, reaching its shores on April 2, 1513, during the Spanish Easter feast. Since it was custom to name new lands after the closest religious holiday on the calendar, he called the new land, La Pascua de la Florida, “Passion of the Flowers.” At the time he discovered Florida, it is estimated there were over 350,000 native residents from over 100 different cultural groups. Historians estimate there were over 150,000 speaking the dialects of the Timucuan tribes. Tribe names include: Ais, Calusa, Mayaimi, Tequesta, Jaega, among others, none of which lasted past the 1700s. He did not stay at that time, returning to Puerto Rico and then coming back to Florida to try to start a settlement in 1521. However, he was repeatedly rebuffed by native tribes on the Southwest coast, such as the Calusa, suffered huge losses, was wounded in battle by a poisoned arrow in his thigh and gave up, sailing to Havana, where he died from his wound.

## PÁNFILO DE NARVÁEZ – ONE VERY UNLUCKY EXPLORER

Following Ponce de León in efforts to secure a settlement was Pánfilo de Narváez, who sailed around the peninsula in 1528 with five ships and 600 men to explore the west coast of Florida. His fleet was hammered by storms and desertions. With his remaining men, he landed in what is now St. Petersburg and proceeded inland. Again, like Ponce de León, they were repeatedly attacked and repelled by native populations. However, he successfully landed and marched inland seeking the gold and gems earlier explorers had discovered in expeditions to other parts of the Americas. Gradually, he moved northward into the realm of the Apalachees. After failing to find riches, they decided to build four rafts, planning on returning to the ships he had left behind, but the ships had been destroyed in a storm. The same storm wrecked two of the four rafts and Narváez and most of his men died. Eighty-six began an overland trek to Mexico. Eight years later, four survivors reached Mexico. Florida had not been a welcoming host.

## OTHERS WHO FOLLOWED

Hernando de Soto, in 1539, was a bit more successful, actually setting up encampments in what is now Tallahassee and venturing much farther inland, still in search of riches found by other explorers in Central and South America. A settlement was established in 1559 in what is now Pensacola, by Tristán de Luna y Arellano, but



again a storm destroyed the settlement and it was given up two years later in 1561. The Spaniards were finding La Florida to be highly inhospitable.

The French, seeking a foothold in the region, established a settlement in 1564 in the Northeast part of La Florida, near modern Jacksonville, calling it Fort Caroline. It was to be a haven for the religiously persecuted Huguenots, intensely disliked by the dominant Catholics of France and hated by Spain. One year later the Spanish decided to try again to resettle the east coast, arriving in what became St. Augustine, under the leadership of Pedro Menéndez de Avilés. The town of San Augustin was established. Spain finally had a foothold in Florida and from this base missions grew across the region. Also from this base, Menéndez launched a successful attack on the residents of Fort Caroline, eventually slaughtering the remaining troops on what was named Matanzas (slaughter) Inlet. Again, Florida was not a welcoming host for settlement and exploration. Even San Augustin had to struggle to survive as native raids, fires and disease often killed most of the inhabitants and it had to be constantly restocked with settlers. In 1586, Sir Francis Drake, the English captain and brigand, shelled and burned the city. In 1702, Colonel James Moore, an Englishman, led troops that destroyed St. Augustine, but could not win the fort.

Over time, one after another would-be conquistadors and explorers set foot upon the land of promise, La Florida, and one by one they failed to achieve their goals or find the riches they sought. All failed to secure the foothold required for the real promise of settlement to be fulfilled. The explorers and early settlers came to Florida seeking mineral wealth, especially gold, personal glory and fame, increased land holdings and in a broader sense, Spanish expansion to counter British footholds in North America. The early incursions into our peninsula were mainly failures, mostly due to two factors: a generally inhospitable coastal terrain and the fierce opposition of native populations. During the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, native forces consistently destroyed Spanish outposts. These tribes are now historical memories as their populations died from war, disease from which they had no natural defense, and their removal to Cuba and other lands through a system called repartimiento, which was a forced labor system used by the Spaniards against indigenous tribes in the New World. The Ais, Guale, Apalachee, Timucua, Calusa and others all disappeared over time.



Florida was a battleground territory for much of the next two centuries, with the Spanish, English and French all fighting for control, yet the riches earlier sought were not there and farming settlements and the use of the land were hindered by the constant warring. Florida became a haven for runaway slaves from the north while providing a rich crop of slaves from the native populations. The Promise of Florida was yet to be revealed, yet the magnetic attraction of the region continued to bring hardy settlers seeking a new life in an uncultivated land.

Slavery was a major issue in the territory, as runaway slaves from the British colonies were granted freedom by the Spanish if they would convert to Catholicism. Enough came to St. Augustine that a new town was built, just to the north of St. Augustine, called Gracia Real de Santa Teresa de Mose. It was a settlement for freed slaves and a magnet for those seeking the Promise of Florida. Florida became a haven for both runaway slaves and native tribe members from other states seeking freedom and the avoidance of a second effort at removal like the repartimiento, only this time to relocation in the western U.S. on reservations. New native tribes began to form and grow, assimilating those seeking the promise of freedom which today are evidenced by the great Florida tribes, the Seminole and Miccosukee nations. They found the Promise of Florida and today are fully engaged in the economic engine of our state.



Most of the Spanish settlers and officials left Florida in 1763 when the British gained control of Florida in exchange for giving back Havana to the Spanish, as one



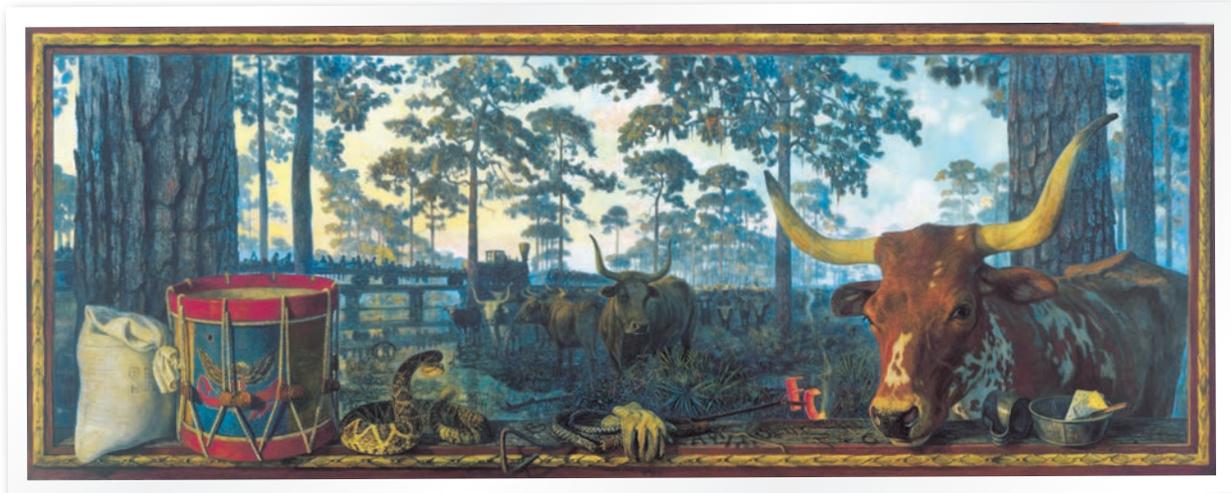
part of the complex results of the end of the French and Indian War. The British had designs on settlement and increased land for agriculture and pushed increased populations into the northern parts of the state. They also sought to reduce the flow of runaway slaves from other colonies. The Florida territories remained loyal to Great Britain during the American Revolution. After the war, the Spanish regained control of West Florida, but this, too, did not last, as settlements had gained roots and American and British settlers simply ignored Spanish rule. Again, the Promise of Florida was not kind to the Spanish. Florida continued to grow as an agricultural base for the northern states. During the Civil War, railroads made it possible for Florida to be the breadbasket of the Confederacy.

Much of modern Florida history had its foundation laid during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This book is not designed to capture the full efforts at settling Florida, but these few pages have been included to emphasize the importance of Florida to the world during that era. And yet, most of Florida remained largely uninhabitable. Sandy soils, insects, diseases, and the remaining unfriendly terms with native populations who had moved south into Florida—the Creek, the Miccosukee and the Seminole—made it a hard place to settle. And yet they still came, building small towns and settlements along the coasts and slowly pushing south into the interior. The author’s ancestors were among those who sought the Promise of Florida, moving just south of what was later named Paynes Prairie, then a large lake, in the mid 1830s. Farmers were what Florida needed and the land was plentiful—and that was largely how Florida stayed until the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## EARLY STATEHOOD

Florida and Iowa became states at the same time in 1845, through an act of the 28<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress, Second Session, which said in part, “... *and whereas the people of the Territory of Florida did in like manner, by their delegates, on the eleventh day of January, eighteen hundred and thirty-nine, form for themselves a Constitution and State Government...*” The delegates had met in the City of St. Joseph, now called Port St. Joe to organize a government. In doing so, they vested legislative power in “*two distinct branches, the one to be styled the Senate, the other the House of Representatives,*” and providing in the House so that “*when assembled, shall choose a Speaker and its other officers.*”





In 1865, upon the conclusion of the War Between the States, it was required that a new Constitution be written, but it was never accepted by Congress and Florida was put under Radical Reconstruction, or military rule, until the acceptance of a newly-drawn constitution in 1868. The 1868 Constitution provided for each Chamber to “choose its own officers,” and “determine the rules of its proceedings.” It is interesting to note that the pay of elected legislators was “five hundred dollars per annum.” The bulk of this 1868 Constitution remained in effect until the major revision that took place in 1968, 100 years later.

## THE EMERGENCE OF MODERN FLORIDA

It is hard to imagine modern Florida without the blend of cultures we see today. It is this strong, vibrant blend of people that emerged through the 20<sup>th</sup> century that captured the Promise of Florida, and upon this promise have built a state of limitless opportunity where those who seek the promise of a brighter tomorrow can find their dreams and fulfill their desires.

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Florida was still a largely agricultural state with an abundance of unsettled frontier. Most Americans think historically of going west to the frontier, but for most of our nation’s history, Florida has been an untamed frontier and difficult to settle. In 1900, there were a little over 500,000 people in Florida, most living between Jacksonville and Pensacola with scattered settlements around the coasts. About 44% of the population, about 200,000, were African American, and more than one-fifth of them migrated out of Florida to northern cities during the great migration



to urbanize between 1910-40. Over 18 million people moved to or were born in Florida during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, an amazing accommodation of growth and expansion.

Perhaps Florida might never have reached its full potential if not for the entrepreneurs mentioned here and others like Apalachicola's Dr. John Gorrie, who moved there in 1833. He is considered the father of refrigeration and air conditioning. He died penniless in 1855, but not before receiving Patent No. 8080 for a device to make ice. With his passing, the "promise" of air conditioning drifted away for 50 years.

A great land boom in the 1920s rapidly increased the population, but it faltered with the crash of 1929 and many who had moved to Florida quickly left and went home. Think how far the process has come since the "Hundred Days of 1931" chronicled by former Clerk of the House Allen Morris, where the Legislature became hopelessly deadlocked regarding the state budget and the bankruptcies that abounded throughout Florida. E. Clay Lewis, from Gulf County, was Speaker then. It was a major battle between small county and big county legislators with the small county having dominant numbers. They went into a filibuster that lasted most of three days. Rep. John E. Mathews, Sr., from Jacksonville, recalled, "*... the Honorable Tom Watson from Hillsborough and the Honorable Raeburn Horne from Madison engaged in a fist-fight over my desk, and brought the blood freely from each other.*" Times have changed.

The land boom was made possible by the building of rail services to southeast and western Florida. In the late 1800s, men like Henry Flagler and Henry Plant brought rail service to Florida, making the transport of people, goods and services possible. Flagler created the FEC Railway, giving the entire east coast of the state rail from Jacksonville to Key West, partnering with Julia Tuttle in Miami and several other railroad companies. He developed at each town along the way, creating grand hotels and structures that endure today. In Miami, he dredged, installed a sewer system, laid streets, installed water and power systems and created the first newspaper, all at the age of 67. Among his hotels were The Breakers in Palm Beach, the Royal Palm in Miami, the Ponce de Leon in St. Augustine and the Ormond. Plant developed in the Tampa area, building the iconic Tampa Bay Hotel with the famous minarets. Predating Plant in Tampa was the entrepreneur from Spain by way of Cuba, Vicente



Martinez Ybor, who moved his cigar making skills from Cuba to Key West and then to Tampa, where he built a factory on the outskirts of the city, eventually causing the region to be known as “the cigar capital of the world.”

The Ponce de Leon is now a part of the buildings of Flagler College and the Tampa Bay Hotel is home to the University of Tampa. Another noted Florida higher education institution, Bethune-Cookman University, was founded as the Daytona Normal and Industrial Institute in 1904 by the daughter of plantation slaves, born in 1875 in South Carolina, Mary McLeod Bethune. She was an early advocate for the value of higher education for all and an early activist for civil rights in America.

The '30s and '40s also brought huge increases in military presence in Florida, as the federal government decided to make use of so much open space and built multiple training facilities in Florida. At the onset of World War II, Florida was home to more than a million and a half people. Servicemen returning from WWII returned to Florida in great numbers, having enjoyed their time training here. Communities grew and were further stimulated in the '50s by the expansion of roadways, rail and air service and then in the '60s the common availability of air conditioning for homes, businesses and automobiles.

Key people in the development of Florida in the 20<sup>th</sup> century were men like Dade County developers Carl Fisher and George Merrick, who brought the concept of subdivisions to South Florida. Families like Alfred I. du Pont and his wife, Jesse Ball du Pont, and her brother, Edward Ball, were key investors in the development of Florida. It is important to keep in mind how much of what Plant, Flagler, the du Ponts and others did was done by corporations and individual funding and support, not by government funded projects. The Overseas Railroad was a Flagler project and likely one of the largest personally funded engineering projects ever seen in Florida. The du Ponts invested in land and banks. When Alfred du Pont died in 1935, his estate left a trust of about \$26 million. Under Ed Ball's direction, the estate grew to control an empire in Florida that included the FEC Railway, St. Joe Company, and other extensive holdings, with the trust being valued at \$4.5 billion in 2006.

Florida's promise had drawn the right people at the right time to see the potential for growth and development. Twentieth century icons also included Ben



Hill Griffin, who was born during a hurricane near Fort Meade. He turned ten acres near Frostproof into a citrus, ranching, sugarcane and sod empire, helping to create the citrus industry for which Florida became world famous.

Clearly, the Promise of Florida has been a magnet for all kinds of people. Modern Florida is a diverse state with varied cultures, industries, opportunities and institutions, each of which has a foundation in those who came before, opening the wilderness of Florida much later than much of the rest of the United States had been settled and developed. Our rapid growth created problems while offering opportunities. These are the problems faced by the government of Florida and the Florida House of Representatives. Since 1990, Florida has grown from a population of just under 13 million to close to 20 million today. The people included in this growth alone would create the 13<sup>th</sup> largest state in the U.S. if they could be isolated as such. So with immense growth have come huge changes and challenges for Florida.

## MEETING THE CHALLENGE - LEADERSHIP FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

The Florida Legislature has long been recognized as an innovative institution. As far back as the 1970s it received accolades from national organizations for independence from the executive branch, and not much has changed. There is always a sense of pride in the Legislature, in maintaining an institutionally sound balance of power with the Legislature serving as an incubator of new ideas, new directions in policy and management of government.

The Speakers included in this short treatise on Florida history served during times of great change in Florida and in the United States. Their service covered three U.S. Presidents—Clinton, Bush, and Obama—all of whom were elected to two terms and two of which were Democrats. While the nation swung back and forth from “D” to “R” to “D,” and while Congress, especially the House, changed back and forth in party control, the Florida House of Representatives has been dominated by Republican majorities and Speakers. This is a sea change from Florida history, and in this narrative we will highlight the men selected by the elected members of the House through the transition to the most recently elected Speaker of the House, Will Weatherford from Wesley Chapel.



## THE SHIFTING BALANCE OF POWER

It is important to note how quickly the Florida House shifted from well over a century of control by Democratic Party elected officials to Republican control.



*Speakers: Ralph Turlington, Terrell Sessums, Dan Webster, Mallory Horne, T. K. Wetherell, Ralph Haben, Donald Tucker, Doyle Conner, James Harold Thompson, Lee Moffitt, Bo Johnson*

As required by law, the reapportionment process took place during the 1990-92 term, with the results implemented during the elections of 1992. Of controversy during the '92 elections was the process determining minority districts and fulfilling the requirements imposed upon Florida through a series of court rulings dating back to *Baker v. Carr* (1962). The dominance of the rural Porkchop system had been broken since the series of reapportionment battles of the 1960s in Florida, but a racial and ethnic mix representative of the Florida population had yet to be achieved. The implementation of single-member districts in 1982 added vigor to efforts toward more reflective representation, at the time assuring the election of ten African-American legislators, but it was the reapportionment battle of 1992 that



fully transformed the composition of the House and subsequently led to Republican member control over the course of three election cycles.

This was the first reapportionment drawn subsequent to the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Thornburg v. Gingles* (1986), where the court interpreted the Voting Rights Act to infer that legislators are required to draw district lines so as to provide a guarantee that minorities can elect members of their choice. This insistence that the Legislature craft “minority-majority” districts ended up serving as the cornerstone of changes within the Florida House district lines that assisted in shifting the balance of power to the elected Republicans.

The 1992 reapportionment effort in the House occurred under the control of a Democratic majority. When maps emerged, the Republicans filed suit, seeking to have the courts draw maps more favorable to the election of African-American and Hispanic candidates. The final maps resulted in 13 districts with a majority African-American population, with a majority Democratic registration population and 9 districts with a majority Hispanic population, mostly located in Miami-Dade County, and all in majority Republican districts.

The 1992 election resulted in the election of 49 Republicans and 71 Democrats, with Bolley L. Johnson from Milton presiding as Speaker. In 1994, Peter R. Wallace, a Democrat, was elected Speaker by a vote of 62-58, with one Democratic member, George Crady from Yulee, voting for Webster, the Republican nominee. The House had a tight balance. By 1996, Democratic Party control of the House was lost for the first time since Reconstruction. The selection of Dan Webster as Speaker was only the fourth time that office had been held by a Republican since statehood in 1845. The House had shifted from a 63-57 elected majority under the speakership of Peter Rudy Wallace from St. Petersburg, to a narrow 61-59 Republican control which then elected Daniel Webster as the Speaker, Florida’s first modern Republican Speaker. Over a brief period of time, Florida had gone from a political process where party was not a key element, since one party had been in control for so long, to one where party and ideology mattered. The rise of party competition in Florida also altered legislative politics and perhaps tended to motivate the dilemma Speaker Wallace sought to address when he commissioned the study “Making Florida Democracy



Work.” Instead of a fractionalized, one party dominated body, there now emerged a system with much more clearly defined ideological differences.

DANIEL WEBSTER STATED ON OPENING DAY, MARCH 4, 1997:

*“All of us realize today that a transition in leadership has occurred, and it took place at the election time. With that shift also comes change. Change was predictable. Change is difficult. The fear of the unknown and untried is perhaps our greatest fear; it certainly is mine. I’ve never been here; I’m standing here today... I’m treading ground I’ve never tread before, and many of you are, too.”*



*A transition of power from Wallace to Webster*

Party affiliation became more than the driving force behind leadership selection. It became what Thomas R. Dye, noted Florida political scientist, described as “the strongest single determinant of voting behavior in the Florida Legislature.” Clearly the significant ideological division provided Florida voters with clarity of choice at the polls. Over several decades, Florida had transformed from a state political system driven more by personalities and regional factionalism, to one more focused on the philosophical views of the role of government.

While modern observers might think the Republicans emerged in Florida



beginning in the 1990s, former Clerk of the House Allen Morris, in his short historical piece, *Reconsiderations*, points out how the true birth of the party in Florida occurred in 1928 when William J. Howey, candidate for Governor against Doyle Carlton, received enough votes at 39% (with the law requiring a 30% threshold) to allow Republicans to have balloted primary elections rather than nominating candidates at conventions. During this same election Herbert Hoover, Republican candidate for President, won 56.8% of the votes in Florida and the general election. Morris notes, “*Florida not only left the ‘solid south’ by giving its six electoral votes to Herbert Hoover in 1928 but also became, in theory, a two-party state. Actuality came a half century or more later.*”

A “half century” was a bit of an understatement as a full sixty-eight years would pass before enough Republicans would be elected to be able to elect a Republican Speaker of the Florida House, elected by a slim majority. The Florida Senate had drawn equal four years prior in 1992, with twenty members from each party, and through compromise, the position of President of the Senate was shared by party leaders, Ander Crenshaw and Pat Thomas, each serving one year of the two-year term. By this time Florida had already elected two Republican governors, Claude Kirk and Bob Martinez, each serving only one term. Florida had flirted with being a two-party state, but in 1996 the strength of each party was tested and Florida was fully balanced. This was a far cry from the general election in Florida in 1918 when there were zero Republicans on the ballot.

This is important to recognize in a book that largely reflects the election of ten consecutive Republican Speakers. In 1903, Lambert M. Ware from St. Andrews was elected as the first Republican House member in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It wasn’t until 1917 that a second Republican was elected, Henry C. Hood from Palm Beach. Slowly, over time, the numbers grew and in the coming decades there were as many as six. In 1961 there were seven, and twenty-six in 1966, but never a significant number, only reaching barely a third of the House in 1968 with forty-two. However, as Florida grew and new citizens arrived from traditional Republican areas of the country, the registered voter balances began to change. Added to this was the slow re-registration conversion of areas traditionally the locales of “Blue Dog Democrats,” especially in northern Florida.



It was the combined effect of these various factors that allowed for the shift of control in the House from Democratic to Republican, and in 1996 the mantle of leadership was passed from Wallace to Webster, although the formal gavel was actually handed to Webster by former Minority Leader Curt Kiser and not by a previous Speaker. The transfer of power was not a perfectly smooth one, perhaps not as bumpy as we have seen in some foreign countries where legislative brawls were common, but it was not without discomfort, hard feelings, and suspicions of possible defections. The transfer of power in the U.S. always goes smoothly in the global sense. But sometimes it occurs with hard feelings, with distrust, and sometimes with a degree of uncertainty and confusion. The 61 votes on paper were only as strong as party loyalty and after all, in the words of Finley Peter Dunne in the 1890s, “politics ain’t beanbag.” In the end the votes for Speaker held, a change that signaled the House was now under a different control, Republican, than all the participants in the process had experienced in their lifetimes.

From a slim majority in 1996, the Republican membership grew to two-thirds dominance in the process, a reversal of roles similar to what the Republicans had experienced in the early ’70s. In the 1970s, Republicans were stuck mainly in the thirties in number, rarely able to even mount obstructions, much less control debate and results. Increasingly, since 1996, this has been the case in reverse in the House.

In this text we focus on each term of office and the people selected to serve Florida as Speaker of the House of Representatives. Much more could be written on the impacts of party change and how it has influenced issue emergence and the impact on policy. However, the background given here is more to set the scene for the changes that occurred so we can focus on the personalities, priorities and impacts of those chosen to lead.

Some selected as Speaker have been perceived as more successful choices than others, and in one case legal issues prevented a selection from fulfilling his assignment, by the membership. However, even in that circumstance we are reminded of the Abraham Lincoln line in a current film, *Lincoln*, where he rhetorically asked two young soldiers, “Are we fitted to the times we are born into?” As stated earlier, the Speaker is like a ship’s captain, unable to always control the environment through



which the ship sails, but with talent can keep a sharp and steady hand on the tiller.

Each term, especially in the rearview mirror, tends to have a personality of its own. It is sometimes difficult to ascertain if the personality flows down from the selected leader purposefully, or if it is the influence of the larger body and the confluence of events that end up reflected in our memories of the leaders. It is clear, however, that the personalities and demeanors of the two transitional leaders, Wallace and Webster, men who were charged with managing the transaction of the people's business in an environment never experienced before by a sitting Speaker, were the right ones to be in place. They were "fitted to the times." The wisdom of the body had prevailed in the broader sense, even while individual issues rubbed raw on many, and while a sense of mistrust was pervasive in the process, the mature, focused and steady hands of people selected by the body to lead, enabled the processes to go forward and for Florida to continue to grow and prosper.

The notion of the person in a given role being as important as the actual purposes of the role are captured in the words of Thomas Hardy in his classic *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*: "The beauty or ugliness of a character lay not only in its achievements, but in its aims and impulses; its true history lay, not among things done, but among things willed."



*Speaker Webster, Governor Chiles,  
Senate President Jennings*



PETER RUDY WALLACE  
Speaker 1994-1996



*“I can’t tell you what a deep honor it is for me to have the opportunity to serve here in the Chair of the House of Representatives. And, Representative Webster, my friend, we face many challenges together, but as we work together, we will achieve many successes as well, and I commend you to all the members for your honor and integrity.”*



Peter Rudy Wallace was elected Speaker of the House on November 22, 1994. During his time in office, first elected in 1982, he had seen the Democratic majority shrink from around a two to one majority to the slim majority, 63 to 57, greeting him at the organizational session. One Democrat, George Crady from Yulee, actually voted for Daniel Webster, the minority party nominee for Speaker, thus yielding a final vote of 62-58. Wallace entered office having seen the tides shifting with rising Republican numbers. He knew he could not rule the House in the same manner as some of his predecessors, so he decided he needed to be open, engage the minority leadership and members, and try to run a process that was more inclusive than had been seen in the past.

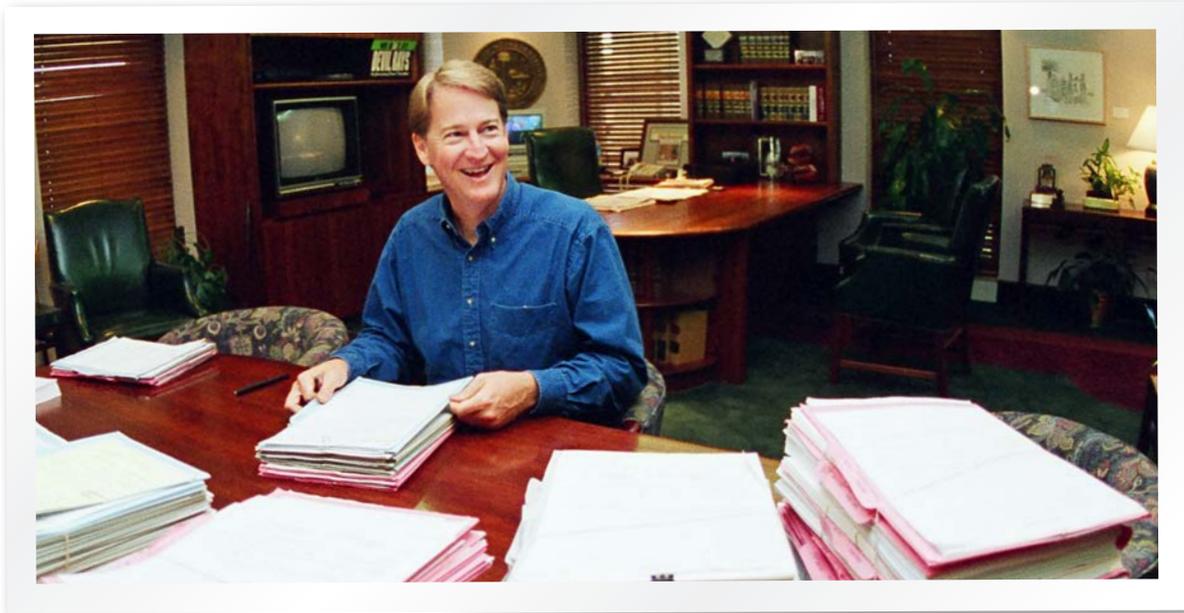
Peter Rudy Wallace comes from a heritage of public servants. His great uncle was Henry Wallace, Vice President of the United States under FDR, and his mother, Martha Wallace, was a long term member of the Pinellas County School Board. His grandfather, Merle Rudy, was the Chairman of the Pinellas County Republican Party. Born April 13, 1954, Wallace had the lifetime view of a native Floridian who had seen tremendous changes in the state. It is interesting to note, especially since Wallace was the last Democratic Speaker before the current line of 10 Republicans, that when Wallace was born there were six Republicans in the Florida House of Representatives.

He watched Florida grow and change through the '60s and '70s, when Florida became more of a fulltime residence for those who had previously been winter visitors and where perhaps they had a history of different party registrations from where they came.

Wallace left Florida for higher education, earning his baccalaureate at Harvard in 1976 and his Juris Doctorate there in 1979. Upon graduation he moved back to Florida. He didn't waste much time running for office as he was elected to the House at the age of 28 in 1982 in the pre-term limits era. However, 1982 was the first election in Florida using single-member districts. Previously there were multiple House members in each district, with Senate districts not being congruent to the House lines. Different House districts also had differing numbers of members and each ran for a specific numerically designated seat from 1-120. By the time he was Speaker in 1994, two elections had taken place under the revision of "Eight is Enough," but there



were still 19 members who had served from 1982 or before and 41 members who would serve longer than eight years at the conclusion of the term. By contrast, when Tom Feeney was Speaker in 2000, there were only three members who had served for longer than the requirements of “Eight is Enough” and each of the three served, then had a gap in service, and then returned. The Chamber was very different when Wallace became Speaker due to member length of service changes, but also due to the majority-minority party ratio. Florida had changed and so had its representation.



*At the Speaker's conference table with enrolled bills to sign*

Wallace always had a passion for policy and an almost academic sense of process. He carried a concern that polls were showing a high level of mistrust, so in office he assigned the tasks that emerged from “Making Florida Democracy Work.” On being interviewed, he lamented that there likely wasn't a copy left of that study and if so, it was gathering dust on a shelf. But he maintained that the intent of the study, *“to change the way the Legislature responds to and makes itself acceptable to the people it represents”* and to *“begin a dialog to effect change in the public mood toward government,”* all still have value. As Speaker, he was concerned about the consistently high negative ratings of public officials. He knew full well that this negative perception had a lot to do with the ease of passage of “Eight is Enough,” which passed with 77% of the vote. Term limits also resulted in the loss of members with experience, thus making the task of rebuilding trust even more difficult as the knowledge base changed.



When Wallace heard about this project, he greeted it with enthusiasm, stating, *“That sounds like fun!”* Wallace is disarmingly little changed, looking and sounding as if he had just stepped down from the podium, although it was 16 years ago. He practices law in his hometown of St. Petersburg in a comfortable office in an old house converted to legal offices downtown.

He quickly began talking about the others involved when he was Speaker. He looked back with a mix of nostalgia, joy, regrets and warm thoughts, especially for those with whom he served.

He spoke of the rapidly changing mix that occurred in the House. *“Florida didn’t change that much registration wise and yet it changed quickly. It was like quicksand under my feet. I had come into the House in the class of the first single-member districts in ’82. It seems impossible to believe now, but we were 84 Dems and 36 R’s and the Senate was 30 to 10.”* Wallace recalls a lot of factors having influence but gives a lot of credit to national changes in ’94 and especially the impact of the Republican congressional sweep and the Contract with America. *“’94 was a disaster that came from the top down. The morning after the election we were 63-57 and I was still trying to make sure I still had all those 63. There were members like George Crady, who had gotten very unhappy with me. He was a master of the rules. George had always wanted to be Rules Chairman, but no one had put him there, and I think I was the straw that broke the camel’s back. He decided he would place his own name in nomination for Speaker. He literally did. He nominated himself and got one vote, so therefore I wound up with 62, not 63.”* In the end Crady ended up voting for Dan Webster, the minority nominee for Speaker.

The transition into the Speaker’s office was a little bumpy, as the election had caused some turmoil and with a few members there was some uncertainty about for whom they would vote. *“The weeks between election day and that day were pretty tense. I had to shore people up and I only had so much to give, so to speak.”* The tides of change were heavy in the post-election air, and there was a great deal of uncertainty as to whether the slim majority would hold.

Wallace had fond remembrances, however, of his relationship with Minority Leader Daniel Webster, stating they had a good working relationship. *“There were no*



*surprises which I think was so essential to the smooth running of the House.” Looking back, Wallace regarded the ebb and flow of policy processes and the operations of the House to be critical factors, even more than the subject matters at hand at the time. He recalled he had deep concern for the well-being of the institution. He knew he needed to cooperate and create an atmosphere of congeniality to accomplish this. “The way that Lee Moffitt ran the House when he had 84 votes was not possible. I had to evolve his technique quite a bit. I had subcommittee chairs that were Republicans and we worked together on the agenda of the House and we tried to treat everyone fairly and the result, I think, was a smooth operation of the House.”*



*From right, Speaker-designate Wallace with Rep. George Crady*

*“We couldn’t agree on everything but we tried to find areas of common ground. My Speakership was the first time we had a full term [Republican] Senate President, Jim Scott. We had a good relationship too. There was no animosity there. We had Lawton Chiles as Governor. You know Lawton, he was always pushing a pretty aggressive agenda, but he understood, too, it was a new day.”*

*“I would have thought it would have stayed more balanced, but one thing that happened was redistricting was really tough for us; tough for Democrats.” Wallace spoke of the need to create reliable minority, for the Democrats mostly African-American seats, due to court rulings. “The obvious tendency of that was to draw reliable Democratic*



*voters from the surrounding districts. It was a tough dynamic, but I felt we did the best we could with our redistricting in '92. We wound up in the U.S. Supreme Court with [Miguel] DeGrandy on one side and me and T.K. [Wetherell] on the other."*

It is clear Wallace has a sense of history and the dynamics of change. He credits the further consolidation of power and numbers by the Republicans to a continuation of the pendulum swinging at the same time the redistricting tools got better in '02 and '12. *"People will often say, 'weren't you the last Democratic Speaker?' and I always say, 'No. I am the most recent Democratic Speaker.' I suspect the pendulum has swung so far one way it will be a considerable time before it swings back."*

## FONDEST MEMORIES

*"Everyone will say this, but the reason they will say it is because it is true. The relationships that were built over those years are the most important, were and are the most important thing. I served from the time I was 28 until I was 42. That was a time in my life when those friendships and relationships really mattered, not just with members, but with staff, constituencies, the press, and the lobby corps. There were a lot of friendships built over that period. I remember it fondly." "We had some incredibly good staff too." He recalled Chief of Staff George Meier, David Coburn, Tom Tedcastle, Elaine New, Richard Hixson and Billy Buzzett. "They were all very, very talented and knowledgeable."*

Wallace has always believed an important role for senior members is to mentor new members. *"The opportunity, once I gained seniority, to help mentor newer members was one of my favorite things... Ron Klein, Debbie Wasserman Schultz, Kendrick Meek,"* were a few he mentioned. *"I got to sit back and watch them grow as public servants who have given much to our nation."* In the term of office when he was Speaker there were eight future members of Congress: Boyd, Davis, Frankel, Klein, Meek, Wasserman Schultz, Posey and Webster; one future Chair of the Republican Party of Florida, Dave Bitner; and two future Senate Presidents, Pruitt and King. *"It was stressful at some times, but I remember it as fun more than anything else. It was challenging; it was fun. It was always exhilarating too!"*





*Celebrating his Scottish Heritage*

Wallace thought it was good to have family close by so he moved his to Tallahassee. He had been married two years after first being elected and brought his wife and later his children to Tallahassee each year for session. *“It was a little chaotic,*



*but it was the right thing for us to do. We were drawn to other members with families who we would spend the time with.” Wallace had mixed feelings as to whether this added to general collegiality, since those with families would often go home every evening while those without were often attending evening social events.*

## KEY POLICY ISSUES 1994-1996

*“All the substantive work and memories of issues are incremental. They come and they go. I worked on a lot of issues and legislation over the years as there was always a lot to be done.” He recalled a huge transportation package he worked on with President Scott and the consolidation of the Department of Natural Resources and the Department of Environmental Protection as big efforts. However, “All that stuff, while still on the books, is kind of ephemeral. They go back and change that stuff every year.”*



*The advent of electronic media*

## KEY ALLIES AND PLAYERS

*“People that I really had to have, especially in the aftermath of that election were Allen Boyd, Buzz Ritchie, Anne Mackenzie and Jim Davis [all from different parts of the state].” “Jim, because he was a close friend and my Majority Leader, the others because*



*they held the majority together. Buzz was an appropriations genius. He was also Speaker-designate for the term after me. It didn't quite work out." "Anne was one of the most capable people; she served the entire time I did and was a great friend."*



*Another Wallace gavels in the House*

Wallace talked about how he had to find ways to accommodate the tight balance and yet still be in control of the House. He wanted to make sure *"things ran smoothly and everyone felt balanced and happy."* He used the committee structure to involve people from both parties much more than any predecessor, knowing full well that a constant stalemate could be a result, one that he wanted to avoid. *"Boyd and Mackenzie shared the Chair of the Rules Committee, which worked pretty well even though everyone said, 'That's kind of ridiculous!' It gave me South Florida and North Florida working together. I also had quite a few Republican Vice Chairs of our standing committees."* In fact, he had 8 Republican chairmen of subcommittees, and had

Republicans as vice chairs of 22 standing committees.

## MAJOR EVENTS OF THE TIME

1994 was a major election year in the U.S. with the Republican Revolution in Washington. Bill Clinton was President and later visited Tallahassee while the Legislature was in session in 1995. Wallace recalled, *"They planned his visit for weeks and then, when he arrived, it was Miami-Dade Day and they always make this big paella. This was the Secret Service's worst nightmare; they had not prepared in any way for that. So*



*they pulled me aside before I even met him and suggested I just tell him that is not a really good idea. And so he asked me about it. I said I think it's a bad idea for you to go down there. He looked at me like I was a man from Mars—because to him it was all politics—and he said, 'Why would you possibly miss all those people?' Sure enough he insisted and they accommodated him, and he was there for the stirring of the paddle."* Wallace still has some great photos in his office of Clinton with the huge paella pan. He also has some funny photos of Wallace and his family posing around and behind Clinton, while Clinton was sitting at a desk in the Speaker's Office working on his speech to the Chamber. *"We had fun posing. He was completely oblivious."*

*"We were in session when news of the Oklahoma City bombing came through, I remember presiding."* Wallace recalled it raising heightened concerns about building safety, this occurring in 1995, well before the 9/11 attacks when the Legislature had to make safety and security a major priority. The world at the time was focused on ending the war in Bosnia with the Dayton Accords, the O.J. Simpson trial, the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin and Microsoft releasing Windows 95.

## THE TRANSITION

*"After the '96 election it was 61-59 and Buzz, of course, was trying to find a vote or two. I think that even though I was out of office and really wouldn't have had any authority to do anything, they [the Republicans in the House] were so concerned about something going wrong on Webster's transition that on the day he was sworn in I didn't get to turn the gavel over to him. I don't think it was personal. I just think it was a little odd. It was just two weeks after not being Speaker and they had a place for me on one of those benches in the back of the Chamber."*

After stepping down as Speaker in 1996, Wallace and his wife Helen stayed in Tallahassee for four more years as she worked to finish her Ph.D. at FSU. While she was busy doing that he ran for Commissioner of Education in 1998. *"I was in a primary with Keith Arnold and a guy named Ron Howard, great name to have! Keith and I had come into office together in '82."* Jeb Bush had picked the incumbent Commissioner, Frank Brogan, as his running mate in the '98 election making it an open seat. Arnold had been in the Governor's race and had switched over to this race. *"In the primary Ron Howard beat both of us. It was a great lesson, once again, as to how well you get known*



*being Speaker. It took everything I had in the run-off so I was penniless in the general and Tom Gallagher was the Republican nominee.” In his dry humor-filled way of presenting facts both ironic and real, Wallace continued, “I like to say I only lost by about a half a million votes. When you lose by half a million you don’t have to spend a lot of time thinking about it. I had my one race statewide and that was about enough!” he chuckled.*

## HIS LEGACY

When asked how he wanted to be remembered since so much of what happened years ago gets lost over time, *“It was always important to me for people to believe that my motives were for the public and not for myself personally. I think maintaining a high level of integrity... not to be just another politician in the public’s mind. This is not meant to be unfair to others, but it was very important to me to maintain a level in my conduct that was appropriate to the office. Once I knew I had such a balanced House I wanted to leave a legacy of a smooth transition. I didn’t know the House would be Republican the next time, but to the extent that transition was on the horizon I wanted to show that we could have a House closely balanced, one that was less partisan than the House was when it was in the control of one party.”*

*“There may have been times on legislation when we could have pushed harder and passed it 61-59 or something like that, but that would not have been worth sacrificing the efforts to keep it fair and collegial. This is not a lot of high-mindedness. There, too, is a lot of practicality. But the tone was very important to me. Above all, I loved presiding over the House. Just being there was the best part of all, just being in the chair, looking out at everybody, just watching it all—I do miss that more than any part of it. It’s a great system! It’s a great experience!”*

### KEY HOUSE LEADERS 1994-1996

**Speaker – Peter Rudy Wallace**

Speaker *pro tempore* – Jack Ascherl

Rules & Calendar Committee Co-Chairs – Anne Mackenzie and Allen Boyd

Majority Leader – Jim Davis

Republican Leader – Daniel Webster

Appropriations Chair – Buzz Ritchie





*Press Opportunity – Speaker Wallace with President Scott*

## KEY STAFF

Chief of Staff – George Meier

Clerk of the House – John Phelps

Sergeant at Arms – Wayne Westmark

Majority Office Staff Director – Clay Phillips

Republican Office Staff Director – Bob West

Appropriations Staff Director – David Coburn

Governor – Lawton Chiles

President of the Senate – James Scott



# DANIEL WEBSTER

## Speaker 1996-1998



*“All of us realize today that a transition in leadership has occurred, and it took place at the election time. With that shift also comes change. Change was predictable. Change is difficult. The fear of the unknown and untried is perhaps our greatest fear; it certainly is mine. I’ve never been here; I’m standing here today. And, certainly, that’s a part of it. I’m treading ground I’ve never tread before and many of you are, too.”*

– March 4, 1997, remarks of Speaker Webster



*“Everybody remembers the first Republican Speaker, but not the second.”* These words were spoken by John Thrasher, the second Republican to be selected the Speaker of the Florida House of Representatives in modern times. However, both will be remembered because they were instrumental in the huge transition of power and were each caught in the moment when they heard that they had a 61 vote majority, reflected in the photograph below.



*After 16 years of planning, Webster and Thrasher celebrate!*

The person selected as the first Republican Speaker in modern times was Daniel Webster, a man described by a staff person who had worked closely with him for a number of years as follows “... *there was no one better suited to take the speakership than Dan Webster, who had always been a man of reason, but never once wavered from his personal and legislative principles. Dan was and is a man of strong religious convictions, whose concern for the institution of the House as well as his fellow legislators in many ways was a driver for his legislative agenda. He wanted to do the right thing and was very tolerant of the minority party members—to a point. When their agenda was clearly opposed to his,*



*it was stifled, in a quiet, but obvious way.*” These same words were used by many to describe Daniel Webster. It was this personality that was charged with transitioning the control of the House for the first time in over a hundred years from one party to another. It was a time fraught with the potential for difficulties and dissension, yet the transition generally went smoothly, with only minor conflicts and the personal difficulties of individuals, which seems to take place each term of office even absent such a huge transitional time.

Daniel Webster was born April 27, 1949, in Charleston, West Virginia, moving to Florida at the age of seven. He received his engineering degree in 1971 from Georgia Institute of Technology, returning to Central Florida to work in the family heating and air conditioning business. He married Sandy Jordan and they had six children and now have eight grandchildren. After serving in the Florida House and Senate for 28 years he ran for Congress, winning first in November 2010, and being subsequently reelected in 2012 in a hard fought race, winning by a substantial margin even as President Barack Obama carried Florida.

Daniel Webster came to the Florida House as a newly elected member in 1980, at the age of 31, two years before single-member districts and twelve years before term limits. He had been a volunteer at his church, chosen to be the building committee chairman. They had decided to purchase a house next door to the church to be used for Sunday School and other purposes and as Chair he went to the county to get an exception for zoning purposes. He was turned down as the project was found to be adverse to public policy, much to his surprise. *“I was totally politically naïve... I voted, that was it. I asked them who sets the public policy and they said the Legislature. So I said, OK, I’m running for the Legislature!”* He remembered that the only politician he knew then was Toni Jennings since they were both in the construction business in Central Florida.

*“I flew to Tallahassee on the last day, the last two hours of qualifying and paid my money. I had no one on our campaign team who had ever worked on a campaign before. Someone gave me a little book called, ‘In the Spirit of 76’ about how to run a campaign. We just went at it.”* He ran in a multi-member district and had a primary, a runoff and a general election. Webster recalled later in his interview for the Legislative History



Project with Mike Vasilinda that they had a planned victory party, but when the news came on TV that his opponent had won, everyone went home and even his wife went to bed. He went down to the elections office to watch the final returns come in. When he arrived he found his race was now determined to be too close to call; actually tied with one precinct remaining, his home one from Pine Hills. It was then he knew he had won. Webster believes that the naïveté of his team of the political process helped him win because if he had been more knowledgeable he would likely have been too discouraged against the odds of winning. It was his core belief that with hard work and good planning anything could be achieved; that later came back to help him as he planned to move from a small minority in the back row to the rostrum as Speaker.



*The first time R's controlled both Chambers since Reconstruction: Speaker Daniel Webster and President Toni Jennings*

When Webster entered the Chamber in 1980, he was one of 39 Republicans. Ralph Haben was the incoming Speaker. *"I was told as a freshman R at the orientation, don't file any bills. I said why not? They [leadership] said we don't hear any freshman bills."* He could only recall two main things he did that first term since he wasn't burdened by his own agenda of filed bills: *"One, I read the rules. I knew I had to know them as well as anybody. The second was thinking about being Speaker of the House."*



## THE REAPPORTIONMENT PROCESSES

Webster recalled the Speaker then having a very selective vision of those in the back rows, with one member even using a flashlight to beacon up to the rostrum to be noticed. He decided then to also ask to take part in the reapportionment efforts soon to be underway. *“I was an advocate of single-member districts. We had huge maps on the floor and used magic markers,”* since the sophistication of the map drawing process was nowhere near today’s computerized standards. He remembered Tom Gallagher, a Republican member at the time from Coconut Grove, pushing for more districts for Hispanic candidates due to the actual populations in Florida. Webster thought at the time that those on the committee from the majority party made a huge mistake in not listening to Gallagher, as *“they spread the Hispanic votes into several districts. What they didn’t realize was that over the next several years how those communities were going to register to vote... they registered Republican.”* In the 1984 elections, what might have been only a three or four seat change, ended up being a seven seat switch from Democrat to Republican.

In the next reapportionment process for the 1992 elections, while the majority was still Democratic, Webster actually lost his old House district lines. His old District 41 *“ended about a vacant lot away from the house where I was living.”* *“I think it was one thing that unified our caucus and made us realize we could plow towards a majority.”* Webster recalled, *“We decided to work on our own maps at a different place, not at the computers run by the Democratic majority and so we came up with our own plan.”*

The minority Republicans felt like the courts were their best chance to get the districts drawn more to their liking. They went before a three judge federal panel to hear arguments on voting rights issues, with two primary regional areas of focus, Pensacola and Miami-Dade. The contentious issues regarding Pensacola were settled by the Democrats, from which Webster credits the resulting agreement with helping him to narrowly become Speaker two years later since Republicans went from one seat to three in that area. Regarding the issues in Miami-Dade, the court ruled in the Republicans’ favor, only to have it overturned at the U.S. Supreme Court. *“However, the damage had been done,”* recalled Webster. *“The final plan wouldn’t hold as many Democratic members as had been serving in the House. They had to cast the districts tight which made them competitive.”* The need to accommodate too many members became



a problem. *“To placate incumbent members they had to shave it,”* making what would have been one solid Democratic district into two narrow ones. *“They could win both, but they also could lose both.”* *“So, the first vote out of the box in ’92, we lost, but the second time, ’94, we made huge gains and came very close.”* *“In ’96 we needed four seats and we got the four seats and I became Speaker.”* This was sixteen years after he began planning from his seat in the back row of the Chamber.

There is some degree of irony, based on later party issues and conflicts in 2011 and in 2012 regarding party affiliation, in that the actual deciding vote giving Webster the majority he needed was when Nancy Argenziano was declared the winner in her House race in District 43, Dunnellon. The phone call confirming her victory was the one captured in the photo seen earlier of the then Minority Leader Webster smiling broadly and shaking hands with Rep. John Thrasher (page 38).

At that moment in time, they knew they had won a majority at the polls. They also knew they had to work hard to keep that majority when the actual organization session occurred and the real votes were taken. Representative Buzz Ritchie was still a viable candidate for the position of Speaker, with an assumed 59 votes he could count on, but at least on paper the Republicans had reached a majority.

It was so tight with only a one vote majority, that even with potentially known Democratic votes planning on coming over to vote for Webster, if needed, and with George Crady, Bud Bronson, and Bob Sindler doing it anyway, no one was 100% sure right up until the floor vote was taken. The final vote was 64 votes for Webster and 56 votes for Buzz Ritchie from Pensacola. John Thrasher recalls, *“I brokered a deal between Rojas, Diaz de la Portilla, and with help from Al Cardenas the night before. We actually had to sign a piece of paper in my office, literally the morning of the designation, and promise them a couple of things in exchange for not voting for a Democrat.”* It actually went up until they went to the floor and Webster’s team brought Cardenas onto the floor to help insure the deal was kept. The entire event was tense and to top things off the electronic board went out and the actual calling of the votes had to be done by voice and a manual calculation process.

By agreement of all parties, Curt Kiser, a former Republican representative from Pinellas County, and one who had the confidence of both sides, was asked to preside



over the beginning of the organization session. Outgoing Speaker Peter Wallace was disappointed he was relegated to the benches along the back of the Chamber. A committee that included members from both parties, including John Thrasher, Fred Lippman, Buzz Ritchie, and others, worked to avert potential problems in the transition. Thrasher recalled, *“We were trying to make sure we had a transition; we didn’t want the Democrats to preside because we weren’t precisely sure about the outcome.”*



*Webster with his family, being sworn in as Speaker by Justice Ben F. Overton*

## ON BECOMING SPEAKER

From his first early thoughts from the back row Webster had reached his dream, he was now Speaker. *“I was probably the most unlikely person to become Speaker, especially the first Republican Speaker.”*

*“I wasn’t the only freshman told not to file a bill or have their bills quashed by the process, so I planned out if I ever became Speaker, it wouldn’t be that way.”* He looked back over his time in office, remembering, *“I saw that there was a pyramid of power and it was pretty high and I knew I was at the base. At the top there were three or four people and at the end of every session most of the decisions were decided by those three or four people.”*

*“It was purposeful that you would hold all the bills until the end, purposeful that you’d keep them tied up in appropriations until the end and let them out one at a time. That was how you controlled the membership.”*



Webster told the story about an earlier session when the first bill taken up was the naming of the state pie, when there was lots of time to debate and the last bill taken up was the \$40 billion appropriations bill, taken up on the last day after midnight when there was no time. *“Those were the kinds of things that I observed. I said we are not going to do it that way. There is nothing wrong with every single member being a player. Certainly there is leadership, ... but there is nothing wrong with pushing down the power, spreading out debate so every member can be a player.”*

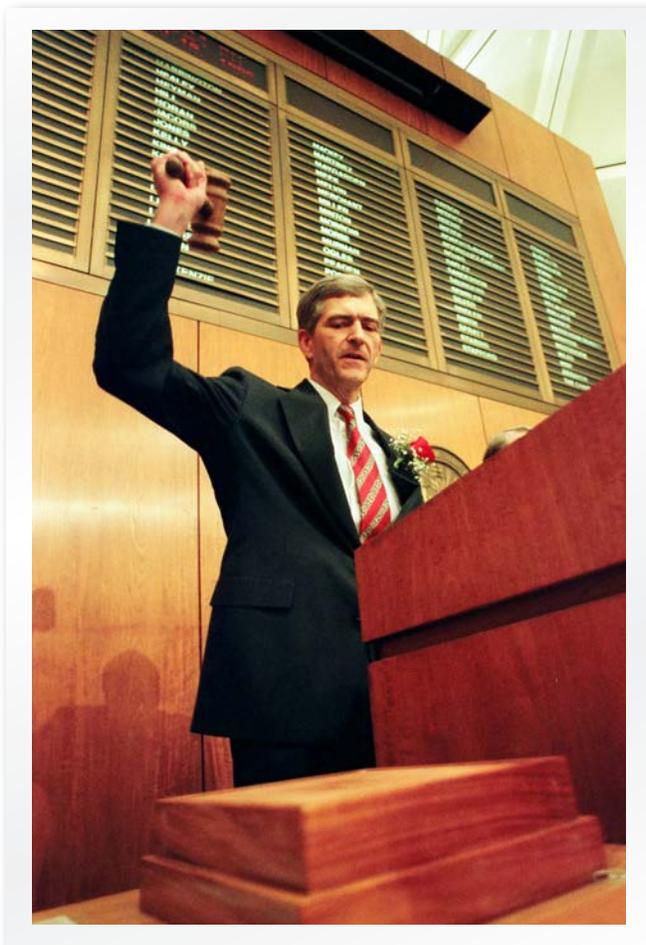
Webster also changed much about how and when the House functioned. *“I hated late night meetings. When I became Speaker I said, ‘No meetings, nothing after 6 o’clock.’ People would come and counsel me, ‘you can’t do this, you have to have that time.’”* He was also told he couldn’t spread out important issues to come to the floor throughout the session. He was told, “you can’t take up the most important issues first; you have to use that time to control your members... so they will do what you want!” “I said I don’t want them to do anything. My agenda is how successful we can be.”

The rules and structure of the House were changed significantly when Webster took over. *“I think the Democratic members were skeptical,”* but the rules changes did alter the process, *“and they did get to participate in the minority. We did treat them a little better than they had treated us,”* he remembered. *“It wasn’t me treating them that way, it was the process that actually allowed them to participate.”* Webster also banned basement offices in the House Office Building as demeaning, as he found them to be small and impractical and hardly having room for two people.

Of concern to many at the time of transition was the focus and loyalty of long-term staff who had always served under Democratic leadership. Many pushed Webster to simply fire all staff and rehire those found to be acceptable. Many, including senior staff, were concerned that due to the lack of availability of known conservative thinking staff and the likelihood this would serve only to politicize staff rather than maintaining a professional staff, it would be impossible to have wholesale staff turnover without it being tremendously disruptive to the institution. Webster quickly decided not to replace staff, except for leadership staff and those who had distinguished themselves as ‘partisan staff’ by taking leave to work in campaigns. Webster sought to improve the professionalization of staff. *“We actually dismissed less*



people than the Democratic Speaker before us. We allowed returning staff to make a choice, first and second on which position they would like to have,” with the intent of placing people where they could serve best.



*Dropping a focused gavel!*

would have something to speak for.” The Five Principles—later placed on wallet-sized cards and also incorporated into the staff bill analysis process for each bill in the form used by staff for member consideration of bills—were: less government, lower taxes, more individual freedoms, more personal responsibility and the empowerment of traditional families. “These have been picked up by others. They have served me well.”

Webster also pushed hard to finish session on time, again being told by many this was near impossible. “I sat on the back row for 16 years, even when I was Minority Leader I was on the back row... so I realized that when they opened the doors I knew I could see Toni Jennings on the podium [at the Senate Rostrum when he was Speaker and she was Senate President]. “At 5:59 Toni and I raised our gavels and dropped them down. There was a huge cheer, not for Toni or myself. I think it was because there had been a huge change. Every member got to be a player if they wanted to be.”

Webster had long believed, “The issues should be decided by principles; five principles that we put into place... we put them there so every member

## HUMOR IN THE PROCESS

One of the funniest moments to him was a time when he was a minority member who somehow got included on a leadership conference call. He was in



Orlando and his wife was expecting. The call was supposed to be over and just about everyone but key leadership got off the call, except Webster decided to hang on and the conversation continued. They began to knock him around a bit, apparently not knowing he was on the call, and talked about what they were going to do to one of his bills. *“I was laughing so hard, I couldn’t stop. ... Finally, I think it was the Speaker, gets on the phone and you could hear one of the members who had a distinct voice starts laughing and you could hear them messing with the phone. By this time I am almost on the floor. So then I get there [Tallahassee] the next day and the Speaker comes up to me and says ‘Did you hear the end of that conversation?’ and I said, ‘Somebody else asked me that—why do you ask?’”*

## LOOKING BACK

Webster clearly thinks his best experience working with another legislator was his relationship with Toni Jennings. *“It had to be a partnership... that partnership we formed was awesome. Neither of us compromised the institutions we were serving... neither one of us compromised those dynamics as we led our Chambers... Toni and I talked every day. We chose direct communication, not sending messages via press conferences. One brings communication, the other brings battle lines.”*



*Governor Lawton Chiles waits on a special table*



Webster knows he will always be remembered as the “first Republican Speaker,” but his biggest accomplishment was passing the Home Education Bill. *“I did that when the House, Senate, and Governor were Democrats. I think that was the toughest bill I passed; it was hard to convince Republicans. I was able to hook up with a Democratic member, Walt Young. On a lot of issues we weren’t necessarily in tune... but we sat down... worked out how it could work, how it would be accountable,”* and to his delight, it became law.

*“Number one, I picked my battles; I liked to pass the things I filed so I selectively picked them. You want people to listen when you speak and the best way to have people listen is to not speak very often. Second, I think you have to be knowledgeable about the issue and convince yourself. Third, I have to be able to balance it with my principles.”*

When Daniel Webster was interviewed for the Legislative History Project while he was sitting as an elected State Senator after leaving the House, he was asked how he would like to be remembered. *“... I entered the Legislature with my faith, my family, my name, and my principles. When I walk out of the Legislature, I believe I will have those four things and I hope everybody remembers me for that.”*

*“I am the son of Dennis and Mildred Webster and I am proud of that. I was just a guy from Pine Hills who saw a need for good public policy and went to Tallahassee to make a difference. Whatever success I have had or awards that I have won, I would give the credit to what God and others have put into my life. I tried to be the same person whether I was on the back row or the front row. I want to be who I am and nobody else.”*

## KEY HOUSE LEADERS 1996-1998

### **Speaker – Daniel Webster**

Speaker *pro tempore* – Luis Morse

Rules, Resolutions & Ethics Committee Co-Chairs – John Thrasher, George Crady

Procedural Council Chair – Tom Warner

Majority Leader – Jim King

Democratic Leader – Buzz Ritchie

Fiscal Responsibility Council Chair – Rodolfo Garcia





*First time since Reconstruction for Republicans to lead both Chambers – Webster and Jennings*

## KEY STAFF

Speaker's Lead Staff – Laura Brock, Sherry Churchill, Patricia Levesque, Kathy Mears, Don Rubottom

Clerk of the House – John Phelps

Sergeant at Arms – Wayne Westmark

Majority Office Staff Director – Bob West

Democratic Office Staff Director – Lillie Bogan

Fiscal Responsibility Council Executive Director – David Coburn

Governor – Lawton Chiles

President of the Senate – Toni Jennings



JOHN THRASHER  
Speaker 1998-2000



*“...the thing about being Speaker...when you first get that gavel in your hand you realize it’s just an awesome responsibility!”*



John E. Thrasher was born on December 18, 1943, in Columbia, South Carolina. Fortunately for Florida, his family moved there in 1949 so he grew up in Jacksonville and not Columbia.

When talking with John Thrasher, there are two topics that often come up: his family and Florida State University. Both are critical components of who he is and both added to his life's experiences that he brought to the speakership in 1998.

John and his wife, Jean Moore, originally from Calhoun, Georgia, have three children, Jennifer, Jon, and Julie, and eight grandchildren. He is a proud graduate of FSU, from which he received his bachelor's degree in business before enlisting in the U.S. Army. While in the Army, he was first stationed in Germany and then assigned to Vietnam. He was awarded the Army Commendation Medal and two Bronze Stars for his service, rising to the rank of Captain before he was discharged. After his service, he returned to FSU where he pursued his law degree.

After graduating law school, he entered private practice in Daytona Beach and Tallahassee, but soon returned to Jacksonville where he served as General Counsel to the Florida Medical Association (FMA), an experience he credits with allowing him to meet many excellent legislators over time and many of the Speakers that preceded him, all Democrats, and thus giving him an advantaged perspective for the tough position of Speaker.

In 1986, he was elected to his first office as a member of the Clay County School Board, later rising to Chairman. In 1990, he decided to run for the Florida House of Representatives, a race he lost. However, in 1992 after the redistricting of Florida, he ran again and won. Thrasher quickly built a following and his local political base became so strong he ran unopposed in '94, '96, and '98, the year he became Speaker.

On November 17, 1998 he rose to what he describes as "*the best job I ever had,*" Speaker of the Florida House.

Since the end of his term as Speaker in 2000, he has served as Of Counsel to the firm Smith, Hulsey & Busey, as a partner in Southern Strategy Group, a prominent advocacy group, as a co-chair of the George W. Bush for President Campaign, and as



Chairman of the Board of Trustees for Florida State University.

Thrasher was elected Chairman of the Republican Party of Florida during the tumultuous period of Jim Greer's departure as Chair. He quickly set about to settle things down, and by the end of his term the party had raised record funding, swept the Florida Cabinet races, gained four U.S. House seats, elected Marco Rubio to the U.S. Senate, elected a two-thirds majority in both chambers of the Florida Legislature, and in a very tight election, maintained control of the governorship, electing Rick Scott over Alex Sink. Those who know him well know he doesn't do anything partway!

He was elected to the Florida Senate in October 2009, filling the seat vacated by the untimely passing of his longtime friend and colleague, Jim King. He was reelected in 2010, receiving 60% of the vote and reelected subsequently.



*Two future Presidents, McKay and Pruitt, confer with Speaker Thrasher and Speaker-designate Feeney*

## HOUSE SERVICE

As mentioned, in 1990 he ran and lost in his first try for the Florida House. There were 46 Republicans elected that year and 74 Democrats. T.K. Wetherell was the incoming Speaker. Thrasher recalls, "T.K. had offered that if I would switch parties, 'I'll make you chair of Judiciary.'" Thrasher assumed it was because of his long



experience with the FMA. Rob Trammell, the appointed chairman, is likely pleased that never happened. *“I had lobbied for quite a number of years before I got elected and had the benefit of knowing so many Speakers, all Democrats,”* said Thrasher. He credits his success as Speaker in part to early 7:00 AM meetings with Speaker Hyatt Brown. *“He is now my constituent, I hope he votes for me!”*



*With his family present, Speaker Thrasher's portrait is unveiled*

In 1992, Thrasher was elected as a part of the first class of “Eight is Enough.” They were the first to go into service knowing their potential time in the House would be limited to four terms, or eight consecutive years. There were 49 Republicans elected that year and 71 Democrats. However, the philosophical divide was not as clear yet in Florida. Thrasher recalls, *“We still had some Yellow Dog Democrats serving.”* He recalled that this made alliances for certain policies and programs possible, giving an aura of bipartisan support, but it was usually along a more conservative-liberal construct, not party lines. *“We had some members actually switch parties, too. We had a pretty strong hand,”* remembers Thrasher, with the strong support from many Democrats. Sandra Mortham served as Minority Leader that term, with Daniel Webster as Leader *pro*



*tempore*. As a freshman minority party member, Thrasher did not get to chair Judiciary. Speaker Johnson assigned him to the Education, Governmental Operations, and Tourism & Economic Development Committees.

In 1994, when Wallace was Speaker, Daniel Webster served as Republican Leader. Thrasher was appointed by Wallace to the Education, Corrections, Insurance and Rules & Calendar committees and as Vice Chair of Judiciary.

The balance between parties had grown very close, so the election of 1996 would be a pivotal one for control of the House. The Republicans won 61 seats, a slim majority, and Daniel Webster was selected as the first Republican Speaker since Reconstruction in Florida.

There were some pretty tense times in the House during this transition, recalled Thrasher. *“They had some guys, like Fred Lippman [elected 1978], who had been there in control for 20 years. It was a shock to their conscience. We had some turmoil, but we had some built in support from some of the Democrats, too.”*

By the election of 1998, the Florida transition of control to Republican from Democrat was complete. Florida had elected a Republican as Governor and also Republican majorities in the House and Senate, where Toni Jennings was elected for her second term as Senate President with a 25-15 majority. The House elected John Thrasher as Speaker of the House on November 17, 1998. He had a 72-48 majority. Thrasher recalled, *“Florida was the first state in the south to have a Republican Governor, Senate President, and House Speaker.”*

*“We were drinking out of a fire hose, no question about it,”* as the long list of policy items wanted for a long time by the Republicans in the minority could now be addressed and passed. In visiting with Thrasher, he quickly rattled off a long list of substantive legislation passed under his speakership, while crediting key members on every issue for their knowledge, leadership and hard work. *“We had a booming economy and we addressed many issues. A+ [a nationally recognized innovative school assessment and voucher program] was a big thing, tort reform, we cut taxes by over a billion dollars, the largest proposed tax cut in state history at that time [including property taxes and the intangibles tax on savings, among others], Three Strikes and 10-20-Life*



[creating a system of mandatory prison sentences], we increased spending for education by over a billion dollars and increased social service spending by about that same amount. We passed Preservation 2000 [an environmental land preservation program], cut taxes again in 2000 and also did Transportation 2000.”

“Those two years were flush. They were filled with heavy policy initiatives! All that pent up policy stuff the Republicans wanted to do for so long, we were able to do it!”

“I didn’t have any secret agenda. I just threw that stuff out as fast as we could and sent it down to the Senate... The Senate was not as cooperative as we would have liked, but we eventually got to where we needed to be. The public was behind us and Jeb [Governor Jeb Bush] became a very popular governor after that, but I think those two years set him up for the rest of his term.”

Jeb Bush recalls his first session fondly. “I would say the ’99 Session was probably the most prolific in my recollection. I had no experience in the legislative process. Ken Plante was my legislative affairs director and I trusted him, I trusted Toni Jennings and I trusted John. They said it would get done, be patient not one of my strong suits... but the A+ plan passed, as did Florida Forever, 10-20-Life, we began to eliminate the intangibles tax and started tort reform. John was the driving force behind tort reform.”



Governor Bush arrives to deliver the State of the State address



Governor Bush also recalled the reformation of the child welfare system that created a model for the nation. *“The conservative legislature supported dramatic increases in funding for the disabled, child welfare and many other programs.”*

*“So in 1999, thanks to John Thrasher, all of my agenda got done and I credit that to the leadership in the Legislature.”*

## WORKING IN THE MAJORITY WITH THE MINORITY

Les Miller was the Minority Leader during this term. *“Les was great; I had a great relationship with him,”* recalled Thrasher. *“I talked with him frequently and still do. He was passionate about the issues he was concerned about, but we never had a cross word. I think we kind of set the tone for working together for future Speakers. I can’t say the same for some of his lieutenants though.”*

But at the end of this term, the first full effect of term limits hit. No longer would there be long-term members who had been in control of the Chamber for most of their careers having to find a way as a much smaller minority. *“They didn’t have experience being in the minority,”* remembers Thrasher. *“I think they were trying to find their way. They didn’t like many of the things we did; they certainly didn’t like us cutting taxes!”*

Thrasher does point out, however, that even while issues might have been acrimonious from time to time, the final votes on budget passing each year were with bipartisan support. *“I think this is also a reflection of the fact that we had a lot of money, even though we cut taxes.”*

## BECOMING SPEAKER

*“When I came to the House we were such a minority I never thought I had a shot at being the Speaker.”* As things evolved and the numbers got better, Dan Webster and Jim King both sought the possible post, with Webster prevailing in 1996. When Jim King decided to not seek the post after Webster, instead running for the Senate and eventually in 2002 becoming Senate President, *“I said to his supporters, ‘Hey, what do you think about me running?’”*



With most of King's supporters behind his bid, along with the members of his 1992 election class, Thrasher secured the party support for the 1998-2000 term as Speaker. *"It was kind of a shock in some ways that I got to be Speaker after six years. A key to me in my success was having Jean here throughout my legislative career. I could not have had a better partner."*

## WORKING WITH JEB BUSH

*"I've heard him say a thousand times that the best job he ever had was being Governor of Florida. I feel the same way about being Speaker. Talking with Jeb and being with him is like drinking out of a fire hydrant. There is so much that comes out. The beauty for me was that we got to be really good friends and still are."*



*Senator King makes a point with the Speaker*

*"I think I will be remembered as a pretty loyal guy to Jeb Bush as Governor. We passed some really significant policy things in those two years. Leadership came from the Governor. By and large, he and I agreed on most things; working with him was the highlight of those two years. Seeing it through the rearview mirror, so many of the things we accomplished are still so valuable today."*

*"I gave him my Speaker's gavel when I left office, the one with the chip in it, as a memento of our hard work and accomplishments together."*





*Press conference outside House Chamber with Governor Bush*

## THE NAPKIN

Most people who have been around Tallahassee for more than a decade know the story of reorganizing higher education in Florida from a drawing on a napkin. Thrasher and Bush had a regular Wednesday evening meeting at the Governor's Mansion, *"where he and I would knock down a couple of Glenlivets and plan the coming week and all that."* One time they met after at an event at the Peabody Hotel in Orlando; an event for George W. Bush. After dinner they began talking policy. *"The 1998 Constitutional Amendment gave us the ability to restructure education so we started talking about it. They had really nice napkins at the Peabody, high-class paper ones... I started doodling... a box here and there, that's how we came up with it. The next day I came back and gave it to Bob Ward [then Council Director for the House Academic Excellence Council], and I told him to 'see what you can do with drafting out some bullets.' I took his product down to the Senate. They didn't like the Board of Regents any more than I did. Damn if it didn't pass!"*



Bush remembers that Peabody meeting. *“I took his napkin [with the drawing], I had a Sharpie and I also drew out a version. I still believe the K-20 system is the right one. It requires a tradeoff that no one seems to want to do. The tradeoff is freedom for accountable results... On a napkin it looked pretty good!”*

## KEY PEOPLE

One attribute that stood out when interviewing John Thrasher was his constant



*The Speaker with two-term President Jennings*

crediting of others. He couldn't credit enough people, as if he feared leaving someone out. So, by inserting names here it is an editorial decision due to space. John Thrasher would name everyone who played a role on every issue, staff and members. He does give much credit to then Clerk John Phelps. *“He was incredible. He made you look good. Kudos also to my Chief of Staff, Steve MacNamara, and our Speaker's staff including Greg Turbeville, Katie Baur, Mark Kaplan and Jason Unger.”*

Along with covering many other issues, Thrasher also mentioned a long list of members. *“Dave Bitner, Tom Feeney... I had a bunch of great members. Ken Pruitt was my appropriations chair. He was fabulous. Luis Rojas handled all our gambling issues. Dennis Jones was pro tempore and a great help.”*

*“We tackled huge issues, such as our Select Committee on Transforming Florida Schools. Evelyn Lynn did a great job there. We spent two full days on the floor with the school reform package. I wanted it to be fully vetted so nobody could go back and say they didn't have a chance. It was that important a piece of legislation. Looking back, I think it worked out well.”*



## ANYTHING LEFT UNDONE?

When asked if there was anything he wished he had gotten done and could not, Thrasher replied, *“You know, there isn’t. I had a list I carried around of the things I wanted to accomplish and things got checked off.”*

One of his big items was the creation of the FSU Medical School. At the time, it was the first medical school to be created in the nation since 1978. He finally got that completed on his last day as Speaker. *“We also got a law school at FAMU and one at FIU. I am really proud of the med school. It’s a good model for providing doctors for Florida.”* Even about this he gave credit to others, including Larry Abel, then Provost at FSU, for this accomplishment.

*“I don’t have any regrets. When I left, I felt we had accomplished just about everything we could have accomplished.”*

## ON ENDING BEING SPEAKER

*“It is hard work, a lot of lonely nights you are there working late. I have no angst, no bad issues to speak of that were detrimental to the experience. But when I left I was ready to leave. I was tired. I felt really great about what we had accomplished. I had expended everything I could do, the energy, and I was ready to turn it over to Tom and go on to the next stage of my life.”*



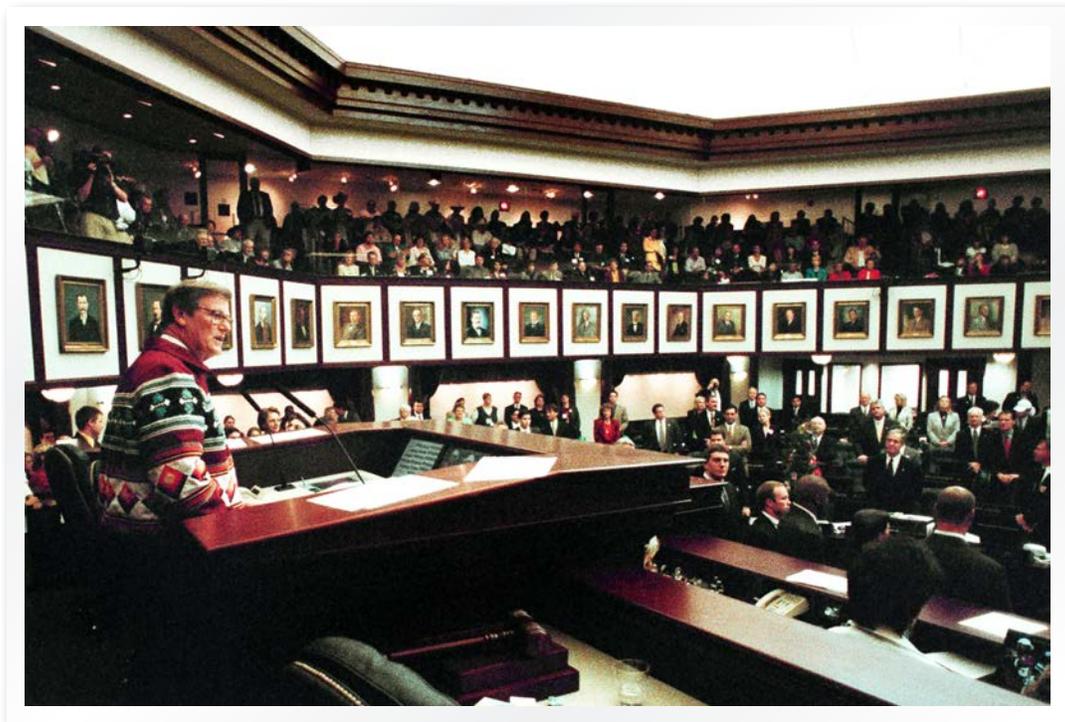
*Minority Leader Les Miller confers with the Speaker and Fiscal Responsibility Council Chair Ken Pruitt*



When one looks at the extensive list of long-lasting policy initiatives, reforms, and creations during these two years, and the impact on Florida, it is no wonder he was tired and ready to go.

In looking back, Thrasher recalled his partnership with Jeb Bush in pushing so many new initiatives. *“He said what he was going to do and dadgum if he didn’t do it and I feel like I had a little part of that.”*

*“The minute you get there... and all of a sudden it is over. It goes so rapidly and all of a sudden you are finished. It was the greatest two years of my professional life.”*



*On the rostrum with an official Seminole Tribal jacket*

## KEY HOUSE LEADERS 1998-2000

**Speaker – John Thrasher**

Speaker *pro tempore* – Dennis Jones

Majority Leader – Jerry Maygarden

Democratic Leader – Les Miller

Procedural Council Chair – Tom Feeney

Fiscal Responsibility Council Chair – Ken Pruitt



## KEY STAFF

Chief of Staff – Fred McDowell, Steve MacNamara, Greg Turbeville

Clerk of the House – John Phelps

Sergeant at Arms – Earnest “Earnie” Sumner

Majority Office Staff Director – Agustin “Gus” Corbella

Democratic Office Staff Director – Barry Kling

Fiscal Responsibility Council Staff Director – David Coburn

Governor – Buddy MacKay, Jeb Bush

Senate President – Toni Jennings



*As Co-Chairman of Rules, Resolutions & Ethics on the House floor*





**TOM FEENEY**  
Speaker 2000-2002



*“And only once since our first legislative session in 1845 have we had more new Members of the Florida House of Representatives. And some may mourn the loss of experience that accompanies term limits, but I prefer to celebrate the vibrancy and the new ideas that this influx of new Members will bring.”*



*“Without the intervention of the State legislatures, the President of the United States cannot be elected at all. They must in all cases have a great share in his appointment, and will, perhaps, in most cases, of themselves determine it.”* – Federalist 45

Those who worked with Tom Feeney know him as a focused, driven man with a keen sense of humor. The *Journals* of the House have captured his sharp wit and insight. He was part of the last class to date to have served on both the back row in the minority and from the rostrum as leaders of the Chamber.

Like Thrasher and Webster before him, he used five simple goals as standards for evaluating public policy issues before the Chamber: smaller government, lower taxes, more freedom, more individual responsibility and empowered families. Feeney had these printed on a card he handed to everyone he met.

Thomas Charles Feeney III, was born May 21, 1958, in Abingdon, Pennsylvania to Tom and Betty Feeney. He is self-described as a “rough and tumble kid” who loved to play hockey. Showing his penchant for bipartisanship, he attended Penn State University for undergraduate and the University of Pittsburgh for law school. After law school he moved to central Florida, later to marry Ellen Stewart, also from Pennsylvania. Tom and Ellen Feeney have two sons, Tommy and Sean, about whom he often commented from the rostrum, especially in his more formal ceremonial speeches.

He was first elected to the Legislature in 1990, serving for two terms before he was asked by Jeb Bush to run as Lt. Governor in 1994. Feeney had quickly made a name for himself as the sponsor of far reaching educational reforms for which he was nationally honored by the American Legislative Exchange Council. After losing to Lawton Chiles and Buddy MacKay, Feeney returned to Orlando to practice law and ran for an open seat in a special election on April 27, 1996. Feeney became Speaker only four years after his reentry to the House and left after only serving three terms to successfully run for Congress, where he served for three terms and was defeated in 2008 by his former Florida House colleague Suzanne Kosmas. *“Feeney was a rock star among the members. He was a Marco before there was a Marco,”* remembered John Thrasher, who preceded Feeney as Speaker.



## KEY POLICY ISSUES 2000-2002

While all of the tumult of the elections was going on, the House and Senate still had to go about the peoples' business. Feeney waited until January to appoint his full committee rosters. Feeney, working with the James Madison Institute's (JMI) President, Ed Moore, had developed an innovative Leadership Now training program. His intent was to allow the programs to finish, thus allowing all members, especially the new 63, to get a flavor of the wide array of policy issues before making their final requests for assignment. Members had already been asking the Speaker for committee assignments but Feeney held off. His intent when he originally began to work with JMI was to bring in expert presenters on as wide an array of topics as possible. He instructed JMI to work closely with the Minority Office, so they met with Minority Leader Lois Frankel and the Minority Staff Director, Barry Kling, to make sure that when panels were constructed on the various issues that multiple perspectives would be included.



*Speaker Feeney in pre-session briefing with Minority Leader Frankel*



*“We are now under term limits, and while others across the country have bemoaned the chaos and anarchy that has occurred in their Chambers as a result of term limits, you haven’t seen that in the Florida House of Representatives.”* Tom Feeney’s closing remarks to the House, March 22, 2002, reflecting back upon how the House absorbed 63 new freshmen legislators.

Four principles drove these sessions: policy centered discussion; a balance of partisan perspectives when applicable; the inclusion of a wide range of policy experts; and the need for the programs to be relevant for the legislative process, especially serving to add to the learning curve for 63 brand new members to the body in the House.

Feeney’s admonition at the time was, *“We need to have a free exchange of ideas. Every member should be able to defend their point of view.”* So from the early beginning meeting in Feeney’s downtown Orlando law offices, the comprehensive program, Leadership Now, emerged. It was truly a policy orientation program that occupied the traditional committee weeks, four sessions beginning with the organization session week and ending January 10<sup>th</sup>.

In Feeney’s words, *“Our orientation program has been unique and the effort put into it unmatched. In no jurisdiction have we been able to find a similar effort to inform and challenge newly elected members. We began with two simple concepts: first, a better informed legislator is a better legislator. Second, ideas are never to be feared.”*

The program variety ran from presentations by previous and current Florida Governors Askew, Graham, Martinez, Mixson, and Bush, a presentation on the judicial branch featuring former U.S. Attorney General Ed Meese, then U.S. Rep. Charles Canady, Judge Ed Barfield, Chief Judge of the 1<sup>st</sup> DCA, Randy Berg of the Florida Justice Institute, and Steven Calabresi, law professor from Northwestern University, to panels on e-commerce, the global economy, urban issues, child development, and many more. In total, there were 65 different panels, lunch, dinner, and individual presentations. Every moment was filled, even the breaks, using key experts by offering “a few moments with...” segments. The program ended with a series of presentations by the people Feeney had selected to be council chairs, including two members



who were busy working to secure pledges for a future speakership race, Bense and Cantens. It was noticed by many how frequently members in attendance at the panels were stepping in and out of the kitchen area in the outside hallway from the main meeting room to visit with these candidates for Speaker. Having so many new and uncommitted members sitting in one place so often was another unintended benefit of these programs.

Tom Feeney, in his remarks during his first organization session as Speaker, stated “... I really look forward to presiding over a House that’s full of new proposals, fresh ideas, spirited debate between honorable men and women in this Chamber, in this House, today.”



*Speaker Feeney watches Presidential returns, Florida a national focus*

It is important to note that all of this was going on with members fully engaged, while outside the building the Capitol complex was under siege by an army of tents, trailers, microphones, and miles of cabling, as the country watched and waited for resolution to the presidential election of 2000, *Bush v. Gore*. In January, Feeney made his full committee assignments and later that month the first committee meetings began in preparation for the 2001 session.

## SPECIAL SESSION

While all of the policy training sessions were going on, the leaders of the Legislature, Feeney as Speaker and John McKay as Senate President, called a special



session in December. “*We’re protecting Florida’s 25 electoral votes and its 6 million voters,*” McKay stressed at the time, “*What we will do may impact the course of the country, and that is why I’ve approached the Legislature’s role in this matter in a cautious and thoughtful manner.*” The presidential election was now before the U.S. Supreme Court and the Florida Legislature wanted to make sure that Florida’s votes were counted when the Electoral College met on December 18. The Supreme Court acted before the drama of a state legislature moving to put forth its own slate of electors could unfold.

## REGULAR SESSION 2001



*House leadership convenes at the rostrum while Rep. Rubio looks towards the House floor*

Key bills passed in the House during the 2001 session which covered a wide range of priorities. The House passed the Corporate Income Tax Credit, allowing Florida corporations to donate money in lieu of taxes to create scholarships for low-income students to attend private schools, largely on a party line vote. The House also passed, but it later died in the Senate, a bill to allow children in crowded schools to attend alternate school options, including both public and private. The Legislature also reorganized the state’s higher education system.

In transportation, the Legislature created a High Speed Rail Commission, assigned the task of exploring options for high speed rail in Florida, which had been



approved, then removed and did not have the support of the Governor due to cost issues. In perhaps a foreshadowing of issues to come following the 9/11 terrorist attacks on American soil, the Legislature passed a major bill regulating port security for Florida's 14 deepwater ports.

In large part due to the problems in the Florida election system evidenced by the issues surrounding the 2000 election, the Legislature created the Election Reform Act of 2001. It prohibited the use of "punch card ballots" made famous by the nightly news showing election officials in Palm Beach and Broward Counties examining ballots looking for "hanging chads" and improperly punched ballot cards. Also, due to how recounts had occurred using different rules in different counties, the bill required modified standards and uniform procedures for this process, as well as the handling of provisional ballots. The Legislature also eliminated the second, or "run-off" primary in Florida's state elections. Final passage of the reform bill was a bipartisan, unanimous vote, although most of the intervening votes on amendments were highly partisan.

A major civil service reform package supported by Governor Bush moved substantial numbers of managers and supervisors from "Career Service" to "Selected Exempt Service." According to the act, the intent of the bill was to create a system that would reward state employees based on performance and not on seniority.

In reaction to the death of NASCAR driver Dale Earnhardt at Daytona Speedway, the Legislature passed a bill restricting the availability of autopsy photographs.

A major environmental bill was passed creating a comprehensive Everglades restoration project. South Florida water quality had become a focal issue, as had the long-term viability of the Everglades. The bill expedited the process for permitting so that the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan could move forward. Reform of the Department of Environmental Protection regulatory and fine authority also passed the House. \$100 million was included in the budget for these projects.

Also passed was a further reduction of the Florida Intangibles Tax, raising the exemption to \$250,000 as a step in the gradual elimination of the tax over time. The House also offered a "sales tax holiday" for a nine-day period before the school year began on back-to-school clothes and supplies.



With 63 freshmen legislators immersed in the process, a lot of diverse issues were tackled. *“I’m extremely proud of the level of debate and energy on the floor and the philosophies of the House that prevailed,”* said Feeney at the conclusion of the session.

## SPECIAL SESSIONS

The attack upon America had an impact that shuddered through the Florida economy. In October 2001, Governor Bush called a special session. He stated, *“We are experiencing and will continue to experience a significant loss of revenue due to the precipitous drop in tourism and overall economic activity...”* Florida had already been seeing a drop in revenues, but 9/11 changed everything. Not only did Florida have to significantly reduce the size of the operating budget in place, it also had to find funds for two new needs: funding for immediate security improvements and funding for an economic stimulus package to boost tourism to Florida.



*Speaker Feeney confers with Minority Leader pro tempore Doug Wiles*

In a display of bipartisanship, Speaker Feeney appointed a Select Committee on Security with Dudley Goodlette-R, Chair, and Dan Gelber-D, Vice Chair, who were assigned the task of moving Florida to better preparedness. Goodlette recalled, *“It was truly a bipartisan endeavor that required the best knowledge in the House in these security areas. It is an often overlooked feature of the Feeney speakership.”* A lot of work



and a lot of time went into this effort and special session. As a result of the feeling of “too much time in Tallahassee,” the Senate canceled December committee meetings and the House had a two-day week. In the words of Senate President John McKay, “*We’ve been here enough.*”

It took two special sessions, 2001 “B” and “C,” to get the work done, especially on budget issues. Possibly the largest difference in approaches to governance between Senate President McKay and Speaker Feeney was on the budget and taxes. During the first special session, the Senate sent over a budget that included changes in the Florida tax structure that would produce new revenues, but it wasn’t the budget the Senate really wanted and they fully expected the House to go to conference. According to Feeney, “... *the Senate sent us a spending program and they sent us a tax increase.*” The House refused to take up the tax matters and the Senate took the position of not negotiating in a take it or leave it posture. Feeney said, “*OK, if that is the best we can do, we’ll take the Senate proposal,*” meaning the budget, but not the revenue changes. Many pushed for conference to which Feeney replied, “*Well, wait a minute, conferences are about resolving differences; if you don’t have any differences, ... you don’t have any conferences.*” The House posture prevailed and a special session was again called, 2001 “C,” and a resolution to the budget issues was found with no new taxes. Again, it is interesting to note that the votes on final passage in the House of the revised state budget, CS/SB 2-C, was along party line votes with 80 in favor and 39 opposed.

Among those voting that day in December to pass a revised budget were three future speakers, one future U.S. Senator, seven future congressmen, one future CFO of Florida, two future Senate Presidents and one future Lt. Governor. More than twenty sitting there at the opening session later went across the rotunda to the Senate. In addition, quite a few members of the 2001 Legislature left office well before terming out of office, many going home to run for local office such as supervisors of elections, school superintendents, mayors and county commission members.

## 2002 SESSION - NEW CHALLENGES

September 11, 2001 changed a lot of things in Tallahassee. No longer could the security of government buildings and the elected and appointed officials within them



be taken for granted. In Tallahassee, the impact of 9/11 was felt in a different way since logic inferred that the Florida Governor, as the brother of the U.S. President, might be an enhanced target for terror. Building security was enhanced, metal detectors installed, barricades built, and security screening was required for entering the garages under the main buildings. The Continuation of Operations Plan (COOP) and the Continuity of Government (COG) procedures were enhanced just in case an attack on the Capitol occurred. Key elected officials were assigned enhanced bodyguards, even as Feeney had been assigned one in 2000-01 due to real threats during the election issues and the controversies over how the U.S. President might be selected if the voting tally could not be reconciled. It was a harsh reminder that power and influence also come with the potential for violence. Florida was going to be prepared.

The 2002 session saw an expansion of the Corporate Income Tax Credit Scholarship program, the creation of maps as required for the census redistricting every ten years, a tightening of the use of Florida driver's licenses for identification, further revisions to the Florida election code, and further security measures such as exemptions from public records for building plans and blueprints.

In addition to the regular business of the House, 2002 was also a reapportionment year. For the very first time, Florida was able to use computerized technology that allowed virtually anyone to be able to draw a map or alter the boundaries of proposed maps to modify all of the districts. The programs used were placed on disks and online and the process was the most transparent to that time. However, the usual issues regarding reapportionment, such as compliance with previous court rulings and political influences affecting the process, still made the process arduous. House Joint Resolution (HJR) 1987 passed the House on March 22, 2002. It set the boundaries for the House and Senate districts in Florida. It was challenged and on May 3, 2002, the Florida Supreme Court found that HJR 1987 complied with the equal protection, one-person, one-vote requirements, as well as the geographic requirements put forth in the Florida Constitution. However, the U.S. Department of Justice found fault with one of the districts, House District 101, finding it to be retrogressive according to the Voting Rights Act with regard to Hispanic voters. On behalf of the House, Speaker Feeney filed a motion for relief and acceptance of an alternative district plan in order for the orderly progress of the election processes to continue. The Federal Court found that the revised plan did offer remedy to the objected portions of the maps and



allowed for the election to proceed with these modifications.

The fall 2002 elections resulted in 81 Republicans and 39 Democrats being elected to the Florida House. This was a net gain of four seats for Republican members.

The two years from 2000-02 were quite memorable and tumultuous. Florida and the country had been attacked by foreign nationals, terrorism had struck deep in our psyche, our economy had been rattled, and we had survived an election that had the potential for long lasting divisions in America and that offered tremendous constitutional crises. Tom Feeney left the House filled with experiences he could never have anticipated. He ran for Congress and won. Six other members of the House during this same period went to Congress, one of whom, Suzanne Kosmas, ran against Feeney in 2008 and defeated him. Feeney now heads one of Florida's largest business organizations, Associated Industries of Florida.

At the end of his service as Speaker of the House, Feeney was presented with a proclamation from the members celebrating his steady hand on the tiller for the prior two years under difficult circumstances. It closed with these words that capture both the times and the person:

Be it Proclaimed: That Tom Feeney's Speakership has been much as described by Irishman, Sir John Pentland Mahaffy who said:

“IN IRELAND THE INEVITABLE NEVER HAPPENS AND THE  
UNEXPECTED CONSTANTLY OCCURS.”

## KEY HOUSE LEADERS 2000-2002

**Speaker – Tom Feeney**

Speaker *pro tempore* – Sandra Murman

Majority Leader – Mike Fasano, Jerry Maygarden

Democratic Leader – Lois Frankel

Procedural & Redistricting Council Chair – Johnnie Byrd

Rules, Ethics & Elections Committee Chair – J. Dudley Goodlette

Fiscal Responsibility Council Chair – Carlos Lacasa





*Speaker Feeney, family, and House Leaders convene in the Historic Capitol*

## KEY STAFF

Co-Chiefs of Staff – Paul Hawkes, Bob Ward

Clerk of the House – John Phelps

Sergeant at Arms – Earnest “Earnie” Sumner

Majority Office Staff Director – Geoffrey Becker

Democratic Office Staff Director – Barry Kling

Fiscal Responsibility Council Staff Director – David Coburn

Governor – Jeb Bush

President of the Senate – John McKay



JOHNNIE BYRD  
Speaker 2002-2004



*“And I intend to be a servant-leader in the Florida House of Representatives. I intend to invest my time in your agenda as if it were my own. I intend to earn your support for the House agenda, not to demand it.”*

– Organization Session remarks, November 19, 2002



Johnnie Byrd was born on February 8, 1951, in Brewton, Alabama, tight against the Florida line. He earned a B.S. in Business Administration from Auburn University and his Juris Doctorate from the University of Alabama. While in Brewton, he served as a school board member in the Brewton City School System. For someone who moved to Florida later in life, Byrd rose quickly in the power of Florida politics. Byrd did not move to the Tampa Bay area until 1988, at the age of 37, where he joined the law firm of Trinkle, Redman, Moody, Swanson & Byrd. He had only been a Florida resident for eight years when he was first elected to the Florida House of Representatives in 1996 at the age of 45.

He was elected to the third class of members who had been elected under term limits. The House was still filled with veteran legislators who had not yet been forced out of office due to the term limits now imposed for service. His “class of members” had fifteen members, only five of whom were Republicans, with Sandy Murman switching parties to run two years later as a Republican and Joe Spratt switching to run as an “R” in 2000. By the time Byrd became Speaker, there were only two of the original Republicans left, Byrd and the Speaker *pro tempore*, Lindsay Harrington. Harrington recalls, *“Speaker Byrd and I were elected together in 1996 – an historic election that put the Florida House and Senate in Republican control for the first time since Reconstruction. We soon became friends, partly because we shared the same conservative political views and family values. Johnnie was a true ‘Southern Gentleman,’ a wonderful son, husband, father and friend. The brutal treatment he received from the liberal media, unfortunately, has colored his legacy.”*

The Byrd speakership, as portrayed by the media, was seemingly more contentious than the normal political processes. Johnnie Byrd, when asked to meet to talk about his term of service replied, *“As for the book, I am not interested.”* It is unfortunate that he chose not to meet as you will see that quite a lot was accomplished during his term as Speaker, especially in his first year in the role. The 2003 session was one of the most substantive in modern memory, so this chapter will focus more on the structural changes made to staff and committees under Byrd and the content of what got passed rather than on the personalities of the period.

Byrd instituted a couple of new staffing and structural changes that were suggested to have added to some of the external dissonance and to the beginnings



of a running skirmish with the print media in Florida. In a move that somewhat emulated the Executive Office of the Governor, the Speaker's Office had a separate Office of Policy & Budget that had six policy coordinators with specialization in different standing committee areas. This was in addition to the standard staff directors and analysts placed in the various committees. He also created the role of Policy Chair, a role filled by Dudley Goodlette, and a committee for Policy comprised of most of the members of the leadership team. As it turned out, most of the major pieces of legislation in 2003 were directed through this office with the Staff Director coordinating with each of the relevant substantive committees on these bills.



*Speaker Byrd and Speaker pro tempore Lindsay Harrington*

The second major change was the creation of an unusually large communications staff on the third floor of the House Office Building, which was assigned responsibility for all press releases, member communications, radio and television work. These two changes combined added a new expense for the House that had not been seen in these types of structures before. This added communication was foretold by Byrd in his opening remarks on March 4, 2003, when he stated, *“So we’re committed to all of those, especially the public’s right to know and the right of the House to communicate in ways that we’ve never communicated before, to people to whom we have never communicated before.”* Harrington recalled, *“... as Speaker, he believed both sides of the aisle had a right to fully communicate to the public back home about what was really happening in the Legislature.”*



The Offices of Majority Leader and Majority Whip were separately staffed and there were two Deputy Majority Leaders, nine Deputy Whips, plus a designated Conference Chair, and a fairly undefined, but named role of Liaison filled by Rep. Randy Johnson. Compared to other administrations there was a large contingent of people in non-substantive committee roles. For example, the previous administration under Feeney had the Majority Leader serve as Conference Chair in a dual role, did not have the role of Liaison, had the majority Whip under the Majority Leader's office, and had only four Deputy Whips.



*Speaker Byrd and Policy Chair Goodlette focused intently*

Dudley Goodlette, Chairman of the Policy Committee and also multiple select committees during this term of office, recalled how the newly created structure, with all of the major chairs and leadership roles sitting as a Policy Committee, was challenging and demanding of his full attention. *“The Chair of the Policy Committee was an interesting assignment. The perception was that I was his [Byrd’s] right-hand-guy, but that was really not the case. In any event, our committee was assigned the task of sorting out most policy issues during the Byrd speakership and, in retrospect, I believe a lot more*



*progress was made on substantive policy initiatives [medical malpractice, workers' comp, Article V, classroom size, etc.] than is often credited to the Byrd years."*

Allan Bense, who served as Chair of the Procedures Committee under Byrd and was Speaker-designate, had a similar recollection. *"We got a lot of things passed [in 2003],"* listing off the top of his head, workers' comp reform, medical liability (med-mal), the smoking ban, a very tough budget, Article V. So much got done in 2003 that according to Bense, *"In 2004, there wasn't a whole lot left."*



*Speaker Byrd and Speaker-designate Bense confer on the floor*

In 2004, many of the members had begun to pressure Bense to step up more forcefully in taking more control. There was the usual expectation that the soon-to-be incoming Speaker would begin to accrue more power and this was unusually exacerbated by an undercurrent of dissatisfaction with the incumbent Speaker's style of leadership and the perceived distraction of running for the U.S. Senate. Bense recalled, *"Byrd was a powerful Speaker... a very centralized philosophy... There was some pressure for me to step up, but you know I'm not going to make all the proper decisions either."* Bense spoke at length about the traditions of succession and how actions taken by one Speaker-to-be could set precedents for future Speakers and Designates



that might become problematic. *“I’m a very loyal person,”* mentioning that trailing Designates tend to diminish your powers as a Speaker in the second session naturally. *“That’s the nature of it.”*

Future Speaker and then Majority Leader Marco Rubio described 2004 in his book, *“As for politics, the 2004 legislative session was just as difficult as the previous year. Speaker Byrd was running for the U.S. Senate and almost every decision he made was viewed by the press and many House members as politically motivated”* (Marco Rubio, *An American Son*, New York: Penguin Books, 2012).

Byrd’s first session as Speaker, 2003, was highly substantive and very contentious over policy issues. Medical liability, alone as an issue, forced multiple special sessions. The second year of Byrd’s term on the rostrum was less substantive, as pointed out above, but with the same contentiousness. This time, more over politics and personalities, with much less content occupying the minds of members. Byrd’s run for the Senate was now the lens through which actions, decisions, and policy matters would be viewed and filtered, even when not relevant. Byrd stayed committed to running for the U.S. Senate in 2004. He came in fourth place in a primary field of eight candidates, garnering only 5.9% of the vote with 68,982 votes. Mel Martinez won both the Republican Primary and the general election that year, defeating Betty Castor and becoming the first Cuban American to serve in the U.S. Senate. Byrd went back to Plant City to practice law after leaving the House.

Then Governor Jeb Bush described how things can go astray in the legislative process. *“A lot of the ultimate success or failure, or how you describe speakerships relate to the relationships that the two leaders [Speaker and Senate President] have and their teams. There were four unique relationships during my tenure, two of which, I think, were focused on bigger things, and two of which were focused on smaller things and it was driven by the unique relationships.”*

Bush continued, *“Interestingly, I found myself and my office too often acting as process therapists—we were way too engaged when it was small things... people would throw wrenches into the machinery... at first the inclination was to try to remediate. It was a bad experience. I felt a duty as titular head of the Republican Party; my inclination was*



to try to solve these problems.” Bush continued, “It looked bad. You had these personality problems, more between [Jim] King and [Johnnie] Byrd, but certainly between Tom [Feeney] and [John] McKay. It is what it is. It was different and it got worse, but even with that we got stuff done.”



*A view from the rostrum*

Bush was quick to credit the House for an amazing 2003 session, even while it took through Special Session D to get medical liability insurance issues resolved. Taking that long “*was not a House issue. As I recall it was our office and the Senate.*” Bush did not think Byrd had much investment in the contentious med-mal issues. “*He was agnostic. He wasn’t calling the shots on it.*” But nonetheless, the results from that effort and the battles over workers’ compensation reform were worth the tribulations involved. “*It has worked [med-mal]. It has been a pretty successful story for Florida.*”

Senator Tom Lee was one of the Senate leaders on the med-mal issues and spent many long hours in negotiations with leadership from all parties involved. He and Bush often crossed swords during that time. Bush recalled, “*I learned to respect him quite a bit. He and Rod Smith were the two people that King unleashed on us.*”



Governor Bush, when interviewed, had these comments about the Byrd term. *“A lot got done. He had a good team. He had Allan [Bense] and Dudley [Goodlette], who were two of the better people I had the opportunity to work with. There were a lot of talented people in the House.”* While pleased with the amount of work that got done in 2003, the following year was a bit more troublesome for the Governor. *“That was far and away my most difficult year to get stuff done.”*

Bush served with four sets of Speakers and Senate Presidents and through engagement recalls he also worked with “two shoulder” sets, both before and after being Governor. He had high praise for the group. *“I would take that group of six and compare them with any group in Florida’s history and say they did well.”*

## KEY POLICY ISSUES 2002-2004

The issues, personalities and politics surrounding the efforts to accomplish med-mal reforms would provide enough material for its own book. The Legislature was unable to reach a resolution to this crisis during the regular session and so there followed separate special sessions that ran until the first weeks of August before a final bill was passed. Med-mal touched on three separate substantive areas, Health, Judiciary and Insurance committees, so there were many players in the House and the Senate, many conferences and uncounted hours of staff time through that spring and summer. All of this followed a statewide fact-finding tour by bus prior to session and a Governor’s Task Force on the issues which had run through the fall and winter months. The end product has done much to stabilize the insurance market for health care professionals in Florida and to both reduce premiums and expand the availability of insurers.

Workers’ compensation reform was also highly charged. As with med-mal, it largely pitted trial attorneys, defense attorneys, insurance carriers, worker groups, business groups, and the interests and liability of the state against each other when seeking reasonable and effective solutions. While not as contentious as med-mal, comp added to the mix of heady disagreements that spilled over to both other issues and to relationships across the aisle and across the rotunda. However, like med-mal, workers’ comp reform did much to stabilize business costs in Florida. Some analysts have credited these reforms with saving billions each year as the costs of coverage to



businesses in Florida ended being reduced for seven straight years after the reforms were enacted. Premiums at the time of the third consecutive rate increase, which was granted in 2012, were still 56% lower than they had been in 2003.

The 2003 Regular Session and subsequent special sessions were responsible for the implementation of several constitutional amendments passed in 2002, including the ones affecting public school class size, smoking in public places, the creation of the Board of Governors, and the restructuring of the court system more commonly referred to as Article V revisions. It also faced increased need for public security after the impact of 9/11, so a great deal of time was spent on seaport safety, access to public records, food safety and security, and public building security issues. Other major issues included the Prescription Drug Protection Act as the first step towards cracking down on pill-mills, expansion of the Medically Needy Program, stabilization of the Bright Futures Scholarship program, the reorganization of the office of Chief Financial Officer, and the reorganization of the Departments of Banking and Finance and Insurance. Substantive changes to the Everglades Forever Act that furthered the implementation of the state-federal partnership to reclaim damaged lands and restore land to its pristine state and modifications to the role of trust funds in state government were also done.

There were hundreds more bills passed in 2003, but those listed capture both the breadth and depth of that session's activity. Perhaps the most contentious issue of the 2004 session was a bill sponsored in the House by the Speaker. After reaching agreement with the Senate, HJR 1, Parental Notification of a Minor's Termination of Pregnancy, was passed by both Chambers and placed on the November 2004 ballot. It passed by a resounding 64.7 to 35.3 percent. A second highly controversial health related issue occurred in late 2003 when the Legislature passed Terri's Law as a reaction to the controversy surrounding the removal of life support care from Terri Schiavo, a St. Petersburg resident who had collapsed on February 25, 1990, found with no pulse and later was intubated and ventilated. Her parents and her husband had battled for years in the courts regarding whether the life supporting processes could be ended. The battle came to the Legislature, which passed a law giving Governor Bush the authority to intervene in the case after her feeding tubes had been removed in mid-October 2003. Her tubes were reinserted at a public facility and the court battles went on, with the story reaching nightly national news status. The law was later found unconstitutional by the Florida Supreme Court.



## JOHNNIE BYRD, SPEAKER

Byrd had been Procedural (Rules) Chairman under Speaker Tom Feeney, and as such he was the one to signal to the Speaker that business on the floor had been concluded for the day and it was time to adjourn, which he did with his signature phrase, *“It is a great day in the state of Florida.”* He opened with this same phrase when he first convened the House in regular session on March 4, 2003, the 81<sup>st</sup> Florida House of Representatives since statehood.

As he convened, he reached out with a quote. *“I was looking for a good quote and I found one by Karl Wallenda, the great highwire and trapeze artist, who said that life is being on the wire, life is being on the wire, and everything else is waiting, everything else is waiting. And so our waiting is over.”* Many of those who took a part in the process during those two years might agree that often the days were filled with the tensions of a highwire act. Whether it was the personalities of the Chamber leaders that raised the levels of tension or the highly complex issues at hand, with so many externals engaged with high levels of tension and contention, can never be fully known. It was made clear by many parties that by the end of the second session the Senate President and the Speaker preferred to not engage directly.

But just as he ended each day with a positive statement, Byrd ended his term as Speaker with positive words from the rostrum. First he thanked his wife, Melane, as the one person *“who has made the biggest sacrifice for me to follow the dream of politics and to be the strong right arm of the Byrd family.”* Then he addressed the members, closing by stating, *“And I would hope that whatever you do, whatever you say, whatever you think, that you’re doing it for a reason and that you know that there’s a reason behind what you’re doing and what you’re saying. And I think if you do that, that you will always be able to look in the mirror and say that you have done the very best that you can do in your family, in your church, and in your political career.”*

Lindsay Harrington credited Byrd for his tireless devotion to the cause of Alzheimer’s research. *“His empathy for families enduring Alzheimer’s disease in a loved one came from his personal experience with his father, and he is devoted to finding better treatment, prevention, or a cure. In fact, the Alzheimer’s Institute at the University of South Florida is his true legacy, and one for which he should be lauded. Early on I did serve with*



*him on the Institute Board and I had the opportunity to observe him pursue this passion of a cure of the dreaded disease.” Byrd’s Chief of Staff, PK Jameson, remembered Speaker Byrd’s passion in this area, “He lost his father to AD. He spared no effort and no relationship in his drive to take Alzheimer’s research to a new level in Florida, where the largest per capita percentage of the elderly live.”*



*Byrd speaking on his priority topic, Alzheimer’s Disease*

## KEY HOUSE LEADERS 2002-2004

**Speaker – Johnnie Byrd**

Speaker *pro tempore* – Lindsay Harrington

Majority Leader – Marco Rubio

Democratic Leader – Doug Wiles

Procedures Committee Chair – Allan Bense

Policy Committee Chair – J. Dudley Goodlette

Appropriations Committee Chair – Bruce Kyle



## KEY STAFF

Chief of Staff – PK Jameson

Clerk of the House – John Phelps

Sergeant at Arms – Earnest “Earnie” Sumner

Majority Office Staff Director – Bill Helmich

Democratic Office Staff Director – Barry Kling

Procedures Committee Staff Director – Tom Randle

Policy Committee Staff Director – Ed Moore

Appropriations Committee Staff Director – Amy Baker, Mike Hansen

Governor – Jeb Bush

President of the Senate – Jim King



*Speaker Byrd with family, gift, and portrait*



ALLAN BENSE  
Speaker 2004-2006



*“You know, we’re up here for 60 days with each other. In life, I’ve always felt that while I’ve been a hard worker, I’ve done my best to have fun while I work, and it makes the time go by faster. But don’t take it so serious to the point where you’re not enjoying yourself, because that’s part of the issue up here as well.”*



Some people just give off an aura of comfort. Not comfort in the sense of relaxation, but comfort in their own shoes while making you comfortable in yours, too. They give you that natural feeling when around them as if you knew them in high school and have been a lifelong friend. They know who they are, are pleased to see you and have a sense of true genuineness. Pretty much everyone you talk to uses a similar description when speaking about Allan Bense.

In other sections of this book it has been mentioned how each Speaker seems to have emerged from a different background, with different talents and life experiences. They each seemed to bring their own lens in how they viewed their leadership roles. Bense is no different. He grew up as a native Floridian from a hard working family with little means. There are many among us not born to wealth or privilege, those who had to earn their own way in life and spent their childhoods at work in low-paying jobs to add what was needed for the family, so they often worked as much as they were in school as kids. Bense is a member of the club who view their own life as making the best of every opportunity, while seeming to spend an equal amount of his time making life better for others. In his view, there were no excuses for him to use to limit himself. He knew he had to work hard, be lucky now and then, and keep a constant focus on what he knew was the right thing to do.

*“I’ve always loved a challenge, and I’ve always been willing to take big risks, because when you are the bottom there is no other place to go,”* said Bense. Bense was born in 1951, to a hard working family pretty much at the bottom of the economic ladder. His parents started and ran a dairy operation that went bankrupt, leaving the Bense family largely as squatters on the family land. The youngest of three kids, he learned early to work hard and earn your own way. His father died at 45, when Bense was just 14, and his mother passed at the age of 45 a couple of years later. Bense recalled, *“He had a stroke one day and my best friend was gone.”*

When his father passed, Bense bonded with one of Bay County’s most successful entrepreneurs, Charlie Hilton, who added to the drive Bense had for hard work and being involved in many things at the same time, even as a youth. As an adult and successful entrepreneur himself, Bense bought the farm he grew up on and still holds it today. *“Those are my roots, you know.”*



Like many Floridians, Bense used the 2+2 system to gain an education, finishing up two years at the local junior college so he could continue working and then transferring to FSU. While at FSU, he worked three jobs while taking courses in history and business, finishing his BS and then pursuing his MBA. *“Man, I hated college. Hated it. But I knew I had to have a good degree.”*

After returning home, Bense was quickly introduced to a new teacher in town, an elementary physical education teacher named Tonie Johnson. They have been together ever since, raising three children and living very modestly in the early years, as Bense worked all the time. Over time he has developed, built, sold, kept, and managed several highly varied business ventures. He and Hilton became partners in the '80s and the team they fostered built and managed hotels, recreational facilities, a cable TV company, a paving company, a mechanical engineering firm and other ventures.

Allan Bense has been successful at family life, business and politics through hard work, a friendly disposition, keen insight, and a laser-like focus on what he seeks to accomplish. He came to Tallahassee in 1998 as an elected state representative and, to the dismay of many, he went home when his eight years finished after serving as Speaker in 2006. Perhaps he foreshadowed his departure from elected office in a news story written by Steve Bousquet, published in March 2005, just as Bense began his first session as Speaker. Bousquet wrote, “Bense is not blindly partisan. When he was sworn in as speaker in November, he invited Hyatt Brown, a former Democratic House speaker, to ceremonially pass the gavel.” Said Bense of Hyatt Brown, *“He came here for eight years and went home. I love that.”*

Even while many, including former Governor Jeb Bush, encouraged him to run against Bill Nelson for the U.S. Senate in 2006, Bense went home to devote his full attention once again to his family, to his business, and to his community. He continues to see his name emerge from time to time in speculation about running for office, but he seems content to divide his time as he has always done. Bense is the proverbial, “If you want something done, ask a busy person.” His businesses now include road building, contracting, farming, insurance, and owning a golf course, among other ventures. He also spends time giving back to organizations, institutions and causes he deems valuable. He serves on multiple boards and has chaired many, including Gulf



Power Company, the Florida State University Board of Trustees, The James Madison Institute, the Foundation for Florida's Future, the state board for the Florida Chamber of Commerce, HCA Gulf Coast Hospital, the Florida Taxation and Budget Reform Commission, Enterprise Florida Inc., and the Florida Council of 100, in addition to quite a few local charitable boards while chairing the Bense Family Foundation.

Bense and his wife of 37 years, Tonie, have three children: Courtney Weatherford, Jason Bense, and Taylor Bense. His son-in-law, Will Weatherford, is the Speaker of the House for the 2012-14 term of office and started his policy-political career working as an aide in the Office of the Speaker when Bense was in the chair.



*Speaker Bense is sworn into office as his family watches*

He still drives a Ford pick-up, stays engaged in his community and supports his Seminoles. On a recent encounter with him at an FSU home game in the President's Box, standing quietly in the back of a packed room filled with highly engaged Floridians, he was bent over trying to re-tie his worn Sperry boat shoes, and looking up, he smiled broadly, stuck out his hand and said, "Hey Ed, how's it going?" just like he has always done to everyone he meets. Bense remains a great Floridian example of



how focused energy, hard work, determination, doing things you don't really like to do to advance yourself to where you want to be, and the importance of the love and support of family and friends can provide you with many of life's blessings.

## LIFE IN POLITICS

*"I kind of grew up in politics. I ran for class president in 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade and lost all those. I ran for the Senate in 1992 and I lost that. I finally ran for the House in '98 and I won. I finally figured out how to campaign better. I won 70-30 against a Democrat, two years later 80-20."*

*"I grew up in Millville, Dempsey Barron's hometown." Bense recalls the huge shadow of Barron and how it set a tone for both service and governance and a community expectation of serving. He also followed Barron's advice in his approach to service as an elected legislator. "You can't be powerful in Tallahassee if you aren't strong back home."*

Bense came to Tallahassee in '98 when for the first time in modern history there was a Republican as Governor and both Chambers were also majority Republican. *"It was euphoric! That began the era of conservative principles of Republican doctrine kicking in... I was the luckiest guy in the world. I was in heaven."* Bense recalled how his agenda and his philosophy of governance were largely the same as the newly elected Governor Jeb Bush.

## RUNNING FOR SPEAKER

*"If I was going after something I was going after it with all the fire in my belly. We had a big class, with a large number of Republicans in my class."* Bense recalled how he spent his first session really observing the process and trying to absorb as much knowledge as he could about issues, procedures, and leadership style.

Then in February 1999, a special election was needed in District 61 when Carl Littlefield got appointed to the Public Service Commission and his brother Ken decided to run for the open seat. Bense began his quest for Speaker by going down to help Ken in this election in March 1999. Fred Brummer was his first actual verbal pledge



in the summer of '99 and Ken also committed. *"I really didn't begin to get pledge cards signed until after Johnnie Byrd was elected as Speaker-designate. Then the race was on!"*

*"To run for Speaker, while I was doing it I thought, 'this is terrible,' I was killing myself traveling the state, but you do have to go to every single county and meet every member... I bet I logged 300,000 miles in my vehicle traveling the state... I did it probably the hard way, I didn't make any deals. I didn't promise anybody anything and that's the best way to do it."*

*"There were six or seven [candidates] to start—one by one they began to drop... I'm a marathon runner. Gaston Cantens held on longer than I thought he ever would hang on. I had my hands full."*



*Ready for a day of action in the House*

After the 2002 primaries, *"I had 37 or 38 pledge cards. Gaston had in the mid-twenties."* There were 28 primary races that year where each of the potential Speakers had selected candidates to support. *"That night, of the 28, I probably won 22 of the races."* Bense and Cantens talked soon after. *"I asked him to be my right hand man. He is a good man!"* recalled Bense.

Bense recalled also the tough task of running for Speaker and the many nights



on the road. As Speaker, he found he got to be “home more” than he did as either a candidate for Speaker-designate or in serving as the Designate with the responsibility of getting party members elected. During the 2004 election cycle, Bense was able to add three more seats to the already large Republican majority. Republicans held 84 seats after that election. *“A race I really wanted to win was Doug Wiles’ seat. I bet I went there seven times recruiting candidates.”* Bense relaxed *“when Dr. Proctor [William L. “Bill” Proctor of St. Augustine] decided to run.”*

As mentioned in the preface, often in the institution there are human issues that have an impact, some joyful, some tragic and some filled with sadness. David Coley’s story has a lot of both. He had been a close friend and confidante of Bense and had served as his Chief Legislative Assistant. David was a close friend to many who worked in the House and all were thrilled when he got elected to the House to serve under his friend and mentor Allan Bense. Speaker Bense reached out to Coley in the organization session. *“Where are you, Dave? Representative Coley, who was my aide for six years and let me travel and let me get things done to move into this slot, so thank you very much, David. And I’m so happy for you. It’s a special one, it’s a special one, my friend.”* But soon after his election it was clear that Dave was ill and he fought long and hard against the cancer that took him from us. He made it to the first session of that term and lost the battle on March 25, 2005. His wife, Marti Coley, was encouraged by many to seek the seat, which she did, and won. She continued to serve, rising to the post of Speaker *pro tempore* under Speaker Will Weatherford.

## LEADERSHIP TEAM

In an interview with Mike Vasilinda for the “In Their Own Words” project of the Legislative Research Center & Museum, Bense recalled how he went about creating his leadership team. He spent the term as Speaker-designate, 2003-04, watching members more closely on the floor and in committee. *“How prepared were they?”* He thought hard about who to place as Chair of Appropriations as he knew how contentious that role can be and he wanted to avoid some of the historical battle with the Senate. *“I made Joe Negron Chair of Appropriations. He has an easygoing demeanor. He’s a very smart person. He does his homework and he shares my conservative philosophy. I thought he could hold it down to a battle [with the Senate] before it becomes a war.”*



*“In my businesses over the years I have been an extreme delegator. I set goals and I hold them accountable to them.”* Bense felt like he had chosen able leaders for the various roles in the House and he didn’t want to get too deep in the weeds, preferring to let the talent function as it should. He also had the issues of an abundance of talent within his own conference. *“There were 45 slots [standing roles] and there were 86 Republicans!”*

Bense was pleased with how members reacted for the most part and also stated being pleased when members did express dissatisfaction, as he knew he needed to know that as well in order to manage effectively. As Speaker, he wanted *“to be firm but even handed.”* He wanted to *“maintain my humility and not abuse the power that is afforded me.”*



*Speaker Bense confers with Rules & Calendar Chair Goodlette*

As was described in the chapter on the speakership of Johnnie Byrd, there was more than the normal member dissension during the 2002-04 term of office. While 2003 was filled with heavy substantive issues leading to five special sessions that ran until October 2003, 2004 was less loaded with policy discussions and even less so in contentious relationships because of policy differences, although relations between the Chambers carried over from the prior year. Much of the dissension had become



more personal and style driven. Bense was the Speaker-designate at that point in time and many members looked to him to exert more power. He did not do that and in an interview he explained that he had to think more of the long-term welfare of the institution. He didn't think it would be healthy for Speakers or incoming Speakers to have to "look over their shoulders" and worry about those kinds of things. Many ascribe much of the contention during those two years and even in the two years prior to distinct personality clashes between the Speakers and the Senate Presidents. Bense was determined to not let that become an obstacle during his term when Tom Lee would be Senate President. *"Just because we disagree doesn't mean we have to dislike each other."* He recalled that leadership during those prior years *"had different personalities more than anything else."*



*Speaker Bense with Senate President Tom Lee*

## MOST PROUD

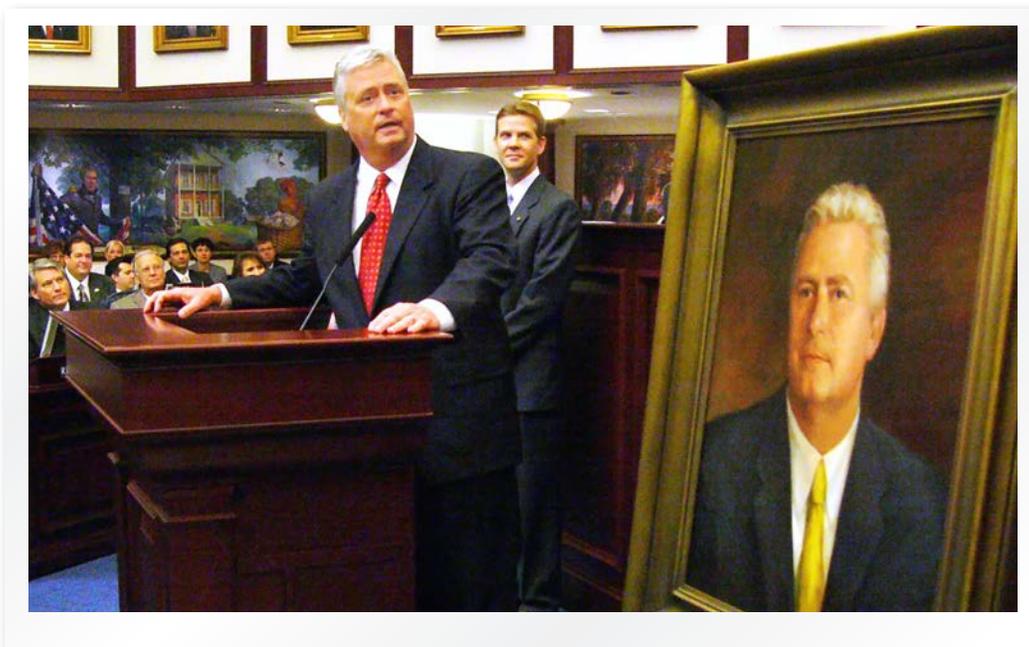
*"I am proud of the fact I was able to get the votes of my Republican colleagues to elect me to be Speaker-designate and then the votes of all my colleagues to become Speaker. It brought tears to my eyes."*



As Bense sat for his Legislative Oral History interview with Mike Vasilinda, he reflected upon the process and the impact of term limits on leadership selection. *“You figure out in each class who is going to run for Speaker. It’s an unwritten rule, but it does provide for an orderly process... I look at Marco Rubio behind me and I look at Ray Sansom behind him and I think the future is bright in the Florida House.”*

When Bense took the podium for the first time as Speaker, on November 16, 2004, his remarks to the Chamber reflected his pride in his office. *“I want to thank you, members, for electing me as your Speaker. It’s an honor beyond words and one that I will work hard to earn every waking moment for the next two years.”*

Bense continued, *“As I look around this room at the portraits of the former Speakers on the walls, and at each of you in this Chamber, the one trait they all shared and that all of us here today share is the desire to make a difference, a positive difference for the people of Florida.”*



*Speaker Bense and Majority Leader Andy Gardiner share the unveiling*

It is clear to all that Allan Bense did make a difference when he served as Speaker as he sought ways to limit government so, *“When someone is struggling to make their small business successful, we should provide them a road map, not an obstacle course.”* He



continues to make a difference by working hard in many ways to help others find ways to make their own lives better. He continues to work to “*encourage those who make the right choices to reach even higher, and encourage those who make the wrong choices to change their ways.*”

As he neared the time when he would leave the House he spoke in the Chamber, addressing the members, staying with his consistent refrain that the members make a difference. “*And like everything else in life, really good things are hard to achieve, and there are reasons for that, because once you achieve those goals or are able to obtain the item you’re looking for, there’s a great sense of satisfaction.*”

Governor Bush recalled, “*Allan was spectacular, very respectful of others, a strong leader, good business sense, good practical experience, really just an extraordinary man. The big stuff got done: creating infrastructure, a water policy, additional reforms to the tort system, ed reform... he got stuff done.*”



*Celebrating another good day with leadership*

## KEY HOUSE LEADERS 2004-2006

**Speaker – Allan Bense**

Speaker *pro tempore* – Leslie Waters



Rules & Calendar Council Chair – Dudley Goodlette  
Majority Leader – Andy Gardiner  
Democratic Leader – Christopher Smith  
Procedures & Policy Chair – Marco Rubio  
Fiscal Council Chair – Joe Negron

## KEY STAFF

Chief of Staff – Bob Ward  
Clerk of the House – John Phelps  
Sergeant at Arms – Earnest “Earnie” Sumner  
Rules & Calendar Council Director – Don Rubottom  
Majority Office Staff Director – Frank Terraferma  
Democratic Office Staff Director – Barry Kling  
Procedures & Policy Staff Director – Christopher Nocco  
Fiscal Council Director – Cynthia Kelly

Governor – Jeb Bush

President of the Senate – Tom Lee

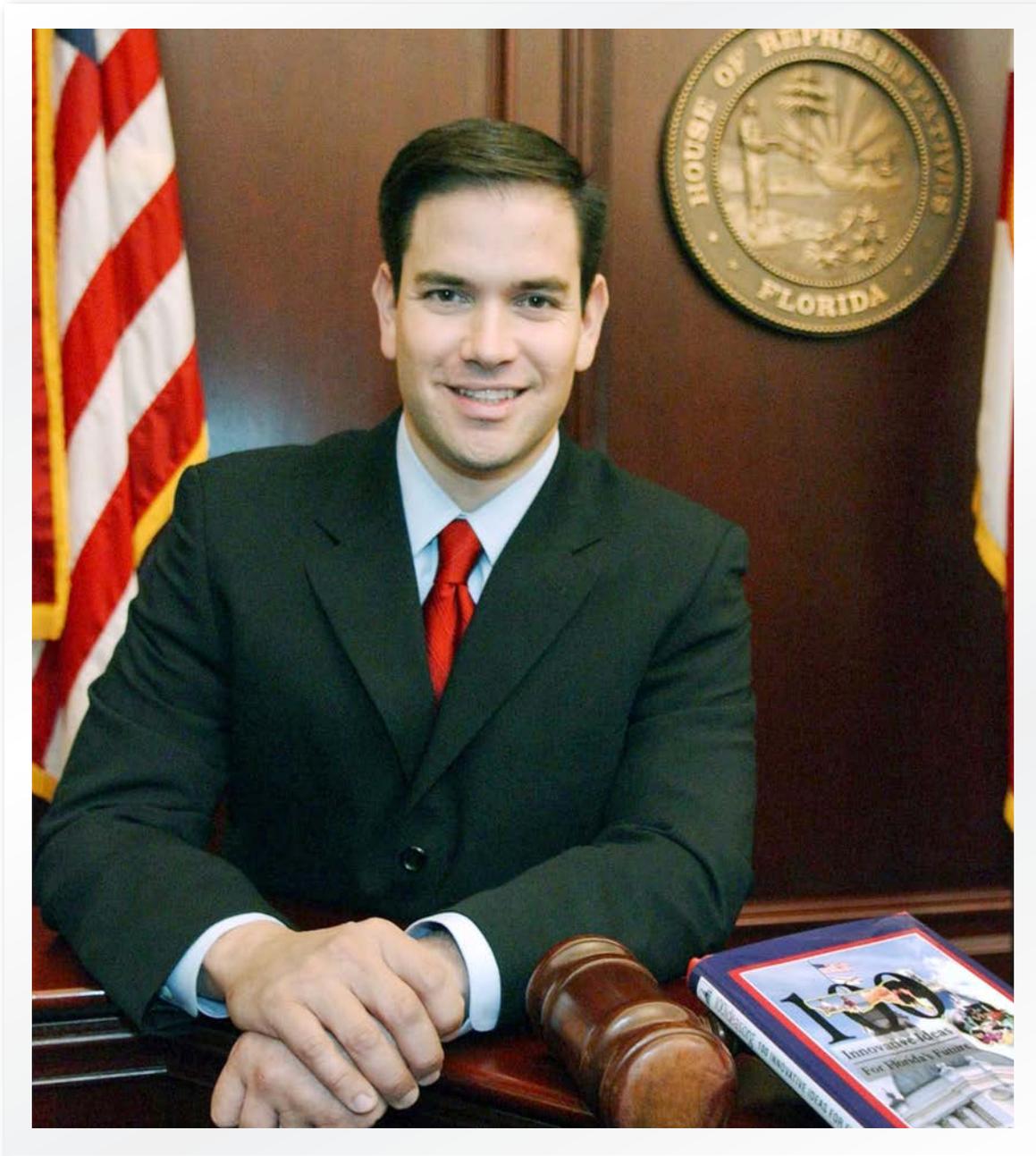


*The Speaker confers with Democratic Leader Chris Smith*



# MARCO RUBIO

Speaker 2006-2008



*“For I am the child of immigrants, an American with a history that began somewhere else and with a special place in his heart for the land of lost dreams his parents had left so their children wouldn’t lose theirs” (Marco Rubio, An American Son, New York: Penguin Books, 2012).*



According to Rubio, writing in his autobiography, *“I didn’t have a burning desire to be the first Cuban American speaker”* (Marco Rubio, *An American Son*, New York: Penguin Books, 2012). Rubio came to the House by circumstance, initially elected in a 2000 special election, filling the seat of a term-limited representative who chose to run for the Senate. Rubio had contemplated running in the regular election that coming fall for the soon-to-be open seat, but not this soon. He made a quick decision and campaigned hard through the Christmas holidays. According to Rubio, *“It wasn’t our plan. It was life.”* At the age of 28 he won a hard fought primary, running as an underdog to a well-known television personality, by a whopping 64 votes, and easily won the general election in his heavily Republican district. The young city commissioner from West Miami was off to Tallahassee.

### “YOU MAKE PLANS AND THEN LIFE UNMAKES THEM.”

While he professes to not having had the burning desire to be Speaker, he ultimately achieved being elected to that role by his peers in the House. He was the first of those who would become Speaker to feel the full impact of term limits on the process for how the House members select Speakers. Before him, there were a few who were elected in the term-limit era, but while previous Speakers did feel an impact of having more than half the membership engaged in the process of pledging or voting for who would no longer lead in the Chamber they were to now lead, Rubio was to feel the impact quite differently, finding his path to that office obstructed in several ways.

First, as a brand-new member, he entered the House with a future Speaker’s race already underway. While there are no rules that restrict who may run for Speaker, there has evolved a customary process of members being chosen from an elected class as well as a seemingly balanced shift from one part of the state to another, so that no single area of Florida has dominated leadership power. Note that the Speakers featured in this book represented, in order, districts that included Pinellas, Orange, Clay, then Orange again, Hillsborough, Bay, Miami-Dade, Okaloosa, Marion, then Orange again and Pasco Counties. Geographic rotation has become a *de facto* tradition.

As Rubio entered office as an off-year elected freshman Cuban-American legislator from Miami-Dade, Allan Bense from Panama City, Randy Johnson from



Celebration, and Gaston Cantens from Miami were in a closely contested race for the speakership for 2004-06. If Cantens were to be selected by the majority Republicans he would take office as the first Cuban-American Speaker in Florida's history. Rubio was pressed hard to support Cantens as a member of the Miami-Dade delegation, but Johnson had worked hard for Rubio in his election and raised funding for him as well, while Cantens had remained neutral, wanting to have the support of whomever won the close primary. In the end, Rubio supported Gaston Cantens in his Speaker's race.

It is often not clear and frequently difficult to ascertain why one candidate for Speaker is selected over other members of their class. We can never really know if the selection of Cantens over the ultimate winner, Allan Bense, would have prevented Rubio from achieving the election of Speaker, but due to the aforementioned history of selection it is highly unlikely the House would have selected two Speakers from Miami-Dade in a row. But clearly the path was broadened when that race ended with Bense selected and Rubio wasted no time in working the state to secure pledges for the future speakership.



*Rubio takes oath from Chief Justice R. Fred Lewis as family watches*

During the 2002-03 term of office, Majority Leader Rubio and Policy Chair Dudley Goodlette shared the same suite on the third floor, just off the rotunda.



Goodlette had a lot of responsibilities as a wide swath of key issues were coordinated through that office, including medical liability, workers' compensation reform, a raft of constitutional amendments including implementation of Article V court reforms, and all of the public security issues. Rubio, as Leader, coordinated majority concerns while also seeking enough votes for the speakership. It was a heavily trafficked suite. The hours for both members and their staffs were very long and there were many late nights where Rubio, after going home for dinner and putting his kids to bed, would return to the office, busily securing the votes for Speaker and performing his duties as Leader. His days were long, but his efforts to secure votes paid off.



*Multi-tasking in the Speaker's suite*

Rubio secured sufficient pledges to win the race for Speaker that year. He was to become the first Miami-Dade legislator to be Speaker since Richard Pettigrew in 1971. He was also to make history as the first Cuban-American Speaker. The hard work in 2003 to secure enough pledges did not come easy as the 2003 Regular Session was possibly the most tumultuous of that decade. Revisions to workers' compensation



laws and the Select Committee on Medical Liability Insurance became tipping points in the normally hard to manage relations between the House and the Senate, and more importantly to Rubio's race for Speaker, highly divisive issues within the House Chamber. These divisions spilled over into budget negotiations, even with the state having a surplus revenue year, so the budget could not be finished on time. Med-mal itself required multiple special sessions to partially resolve the issues before the Chambers.

In an odd way this made the race for the speakership easier for the candidates since very few of the members were engaged in the efforts to find resolution on these major issues, yet they were here repeatedly into the summer for the multiple special sessions. Rubio used this time fully, and as Majority Leader he had both time and proximity as tools. Rubio's closest competitor was Dennis Ross from Lakeland, whom Rubio described, "*Dennis looked and comported himself as a Speaker. He was a mature, intelligent and well respected member, and well respected by members of my class.*" Dennis Ross was also deeply engaged in the protracted debates, discussions and details on both workers' compensation and medical liability insurance. He was very busy. During the summer of 2003, Ross pulled out of the race for Speaker. Upon hearing that news, Rubio flew and drove back and forth across Florida, meeting with members both pledged to Ross and uncommitted, working to secure the total he needed. He had earlier followed a plan devised by his close ally, David Rivera, to secure what were essentially "runner-up" pledges for Ross's supporters, stating they would back Rubio should Ross leave the race. The Rubio team of Rivera, Stan Mayfield from Vero Beach and Ralph Arza from Hialeah, secured the votes. Effectively the campaign was over, although he would not be officially designated until September of 2005.

## RUBIO AS SPEAKER

Rubio was formally elected Speaker of the Florida House in November 2006, more than three years after the busy summer of 2003. He began planning for his new role soon after securing the pledges, working to build a leadership team and planning on how best to structure the committees and handle legislation. In Florida, each new Speaker traditionally offers revised Rules of the House, essentially laying the groundwork for how issues will be handled and how the committees will be structured. In 2003, he closed down his campaign account, reopened a new one as a leadership account, and he hired Richard Corcoran (currently the Republicans'



selection to be Speaker in 2016-18), a Pasco County lawyer, to advise him and to manage the fund and plan for how the House might be organized. Corcoran also had the responsibility of evaluating policy issues and forecasting which issues might have prominence moving forward. Rubio assigned him the responsibility of developing potential strategies and sifting through potentially big, bold issues they might offer for consideration. Rubio was a big admirer of Governor Bush, who although he hated acronyms often phrased these ideas as “BHAGS,” *Big Hairy Audacious Goals*, and with Bush departing, he hoped the House could rise to the role of offering creative policy options and big, bold initiatives.



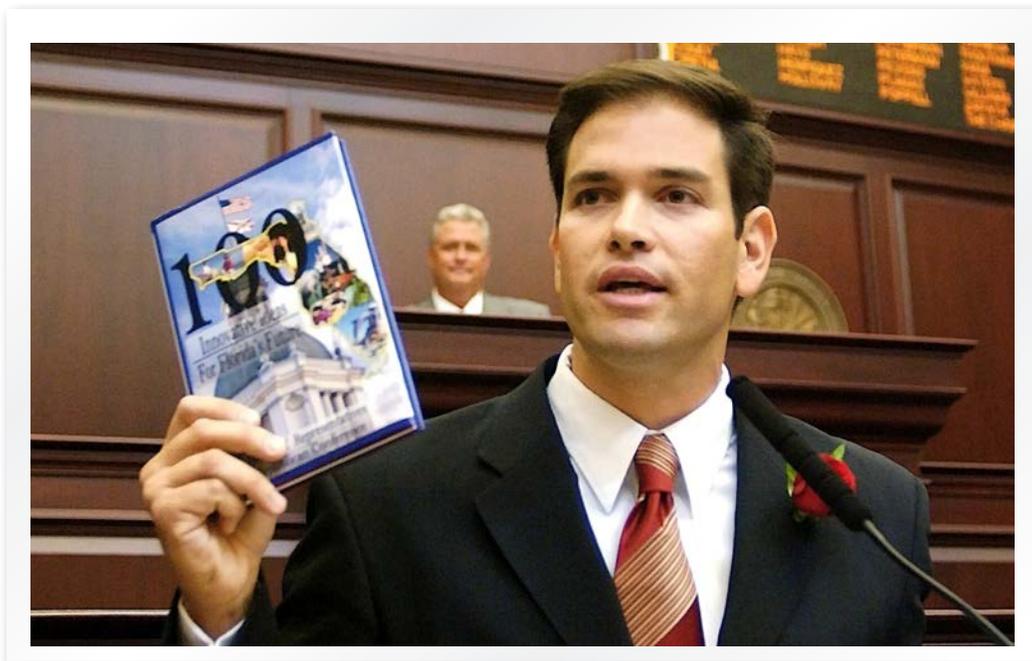
*Governor Bush presents “Chang,” a mystical Chinese sword bought off the Internet, but representing “moral values that underpin a free society”*

Rubio decided to conduct a statewide listening tour and used a website to collect ideas from the public on policy issues that should come to the forefront. He and Corcoran developed a concept for collecting 100 focused ideas and they then decided to put them into print. When the House met in organization session in November 2006 with Rubio presiding, each member had a book with a title cover but fully empty pages and he challenged them to fill the pages with ideas which the House would use to set the agenda for the coming spring session. The printed version



of the book—a collection of policy options which could also be used as a yardstick to measure the effective progress of the Legislature in meeting these House goals—was titled, *100 Innovative Ideas for Florida's Future*.

Rubio's trajectory as a member to the role of Speaker was also different than many of his predecessors, in that he never held the chairmanship of a major committee prior to being elected as Speaker. From his first appointment by Feeney as Majority Whip to Byrd's appointment of him as Majority Leader, Rubio had always served in party leadership roles and as a Chair of only the House Claims Committee. Under Bense he chaired a select committee to review and develop Florida's reaction to the *Kelo v. City of New London*, a case that rocked governments nationwide and changed long held principles about the ability of the government to seize property. This was Rubio's first policy chairmanship, coming just the year before he was to serve as Speaker.



*Rubio speaks in Conference on his book, "100 Innovative Ideas for Florida's Future"*

Rubio, working with his selected leadership team, decided to restructure the organizational chart of the House. Budget and policy were combined within each standing council and chairmen were given power to assign bills to the various committees. He allowed Minority Leader Dan Gelber to assign ranking members on each committee.



The first major policy issue addressed was the tumultuous property insurance market in Florida. Recall that this was 2006. Florida had been racked by eight named hurricanes during the two previous years. Governor Charlie Crist, newly elected, weighed in during a special session seeking to enlarge the public option, Citizens Property Insurance, and to change the role of this agent, thinking this would fill the gap in coverage available due to so many carriers fleeing Florida and with rates rising quickly from those who stayed in the market. The special session did nothing to improve the relationship between the new Governor and Speaker. This, perhaps, foreshadowed the ultimate confrontation in 2010 when Rubio was able to push Crist out of the Republican primary for the U.S. Senate seat vacated with the retirement of Senator Martinez. Rubio won the three-way race between Kendrick Meek, the Democrat, Crist as an Independent, and Rubio.

Rubio had wanted to wait until spring and give more time for consideration, so he began his term with an issue he didn't want and a Governor he didn't start off working with well. He had also lost his key ally, Ralph Arza, who did not return to the House, plus his Chief of Staff, Richard Corcoran, quickly resigned to run for an open seat in the Florida Senate, as did another member of his expected leadership, Dennis Baxley. Stan Mayfield was diagnosed with cancer and was forced to seek treatment in Texas. The leadership team he had worked with for more than two years had lost much of its membership.

No one would ever accuse Rubio of being shy or hesitant. He chose his first major issue to tackle. The complete overhaul of the Florida property tax system was his target. Florida is heavily reliant upon a property tax to fund local governments, special taxing districts and school systems. With a comparatively low corporate tax and no personal income tax, inheritance tax, or intangible tax, Florida has to rely on sales or consumption taxes as the primary source of state revenues. Needless to say it was a highly controversial proposal which became a political football between the House and the Senate, didn't receive support from the new Governor, had no minority party support, and dominated the pre-session news. Other than his personal efforts to run for both office and leadership, this was Rubio's first major political test and it was a highly substantive endeavor. He later admitted to faults in how he approached and prepared for the issues surrounding this reform effort, but not to faults in his conceptual proposal.





*Speaker Rubio with Senate President Ken Pruitt*

Rubio traveled the state pre-session, generating support for his proposal. He succeeded in making property taxes the biggest issue in the state, but found little support for his proposal from the Senate or Governor Crist. However, his travels did serve a later useful purpose. *“The seeds for my election to the U.S. Senate in 2010 were planted in the spring of 2007.”*

Even with strong House Republican support, Rubio had to abandon his BHAG; instead compromising with the Senate and Governor Crist on limited reform and the passage of a constitutional amendment to be placed on the ballot. The Florida Courts invalidated the amendment, finding it “confusing and misleading,” cutting the meat out of any high potential tax reform. A special session convened in the fall with the Senate passing Crist’s plan to double the homestead exemption, after which they promptly adjourned, leaving the House with the choice of adjourning with no reform at all or buying into changes to the old system of taxation and not the full overhaul desired by Rubio. Rubio was faced with either no progress on his premier issue or passing what he knew was a substandard bill not addressing the major tax changes



he had spent the pre-session, the session and the summer working towards. A full legislative year had passed with this as the focal issue in Florida policy discussions, and only minor changes, not huge overhauls, were made to the Florida tax structure. Rubio was not happy and the relationship with Crist was not improved.

With the waning of power that usually occurs in the second year of a Speaker's term, Rubio, although he did take a second shot at tax reform only to be ignored by the Senate, resigned himself to the running of the operations of the House. *"I spent most of my final year in the Florida Legislature managing the House rather than undertaking bold new initiatives."*



*Speaker Rubio side-bar with Democratic Leader Dan Gelber, Rep. Jack Seiler and Parliamentarian Len Collins*

After the 2008 session, Rubio went home with no apparent political plans. In his autobiography, Rubio reflected upon this period. *"I left Tallahassee the first week of May with no plans other than to return full-time to my law practice... for the first time in my adult life, I really had no idea what would come next...I was still technically speaker of the house until the November 2008 elections, but my legislative career was effectively finished when we adjourned in May"* (Marco Rubio, *An American Son*, New York:



Penguin Books, 2012). So he did as most legislators do when the term limit bell strikes and their service is done: go home, go back to full-time work in their field of choice, spend more time with family and relax. History has already shown that didn't last long for Rubio.

However, in reflecting upon his years as Speaker in his autobiography, he did take pride in several areas: not raising taxes, cutting spending, advancing autism services, raising math and science course requirement standards and the maintenance of education accountability efforts advanced by Jeb Bush during his two terms as Governor.

Governor Bush recalled the Rubio years fondly. He regretted not being able to be Governor when Rubio served as Speaker. *“He is very gifted and committed to a conservative philosophy that is hopeful and optimistic, not stern or negative. I would have loved being Governor when Marco was Speaker. We have been blessed with principle centered, ideologically sound leaders, and Marco is certainly one in that camp.”*



*Checking out the new art as Speaker pro tempore Marty Bowen looks on*



## KEY HOUSE LEADERS 2006-2008

### **Speaker – Marco Rubio**

Speaker *pro tempore* – Dennis Baxley, Marsha “Marty” Bowen

Rules & Calendar Council Chair – David Rivera

Majority Leader – Marsha “Marty” Bowen, Adam Hasner

Democratic Leader – Dan Gelber

Policy & Budget Council Chair – Ray Sansom

### **KEY STAFF:**

Chief of Staff – Richard Corcoran, Bob Ward

Clerk of the House – William “Bo” Pittman

Sergeant at Arms – Earnest “Earnie” Sumner

Rules & Calendar Council Director – Don Rubottom

Majority Office Staff Director – Todd Reid

Democratic Office Staff Director – Barry Kling

Policy & Budget Council Budget Director – Mike Hansen

Parliamentarian – Len Collins

Governor – Charlie Crist

President of the Senate – Ken Pruitt



**RAY SANSOM**  
Speaker November 18, 2008 - March 2, 2009



*“I, first, want to thank God for His blessing and His strength and purpose in my life. I will pray every day for wisdom, for calmness, for faithfulness and courage throughout these two years.”*



*“The 84<sup>th</sup> Florida House of Representatives is facing some of the greatest challenges in our state’s history. We have an economy that has slowed down and needs to be awakened. We have an over-regulated workforce; we have citizens that seem to be exhausted with government. Just talk to them, they will share that with you.” Sansom continued, “I love the book “The Purpose Driven Life” by Rick Warren, and the first sentence in that book says, ‘It’s not about you, it’s not about you.’ It can’t be about us; as we walk onto the floor of this House every single day, if we walk in here with the attitude that it’s not about us, it’s about the people we serve, we will meet the challenges for the next two years in the state of Florida, I am convinced of that.”*



*Being sworn in by circuit court Judge John Stargel, a former member*

With these words on November 18, 2008, Ray Sansom opened the brief term of office he would hold in his role as Speaker. He had outlined quickly the difficult challenges faced by Floridians as the economy was still mired in a deep recession, housing values still kept tens of thousands of homes below water, and unemployment still stubbornly stayed at unacceptable levels. The 84<sup>th</sup> Florida House faced steep challenges and there were unseen challenges to come that could have rocked the institution, but didn’t. In these most difficult of circumstances, the institution did decide that it was not about any one member, that the reason for being was to manage the ship of state and not be weighed down by the problems of one individual. Ray Sansom held the honored position of Speaker for exactly 105 days. They ended up



being very tumult-filled 105 days, yet on November 18, 2008, there was optimism and joy in the air as the newly elected members were sworn into office. Elsewhere in this book, Friedrich Hayek's phrase, "What cannot be known cannot be planned" is used. The story of Ray Sansom well reflects this phrase. No one could have known what was to soon unfold, including Speaker Sansom, so there was no planning for what was to come. It was the stability of the institution that prevailed, aided by the collective wisdom of the members who sought to keep the House focused on the challenges at hand.

Larry Cretul, the elected Speaker *pro tempore* serving with Ray Sansom and his roommate in the term prior to the unfolding of the eventful months ahead, recalled the ordeal and the discussions that took place. *"We talked at great length about how this was becoming a distraction. Ray admitted the institution has to be respected and that distractions are things that stand in the way of getting the work done."*



*Speaker pro tempore Cretul and Speaker Sansom in happier days*

*"It was the opinion of many involved, including lawyers, that he could recuse himself temporarily, step aside and relinquish the day-to-day duties, handing them to me. It would be like an illness; 'I'm going to cure my illness and then I'll be back,' and everybody was*



*fine with that. But what happened was there began to be questions put forward regarding constitutionality. What would happen if Ray didn't come back by the end of session? Could actions during the session have validity? We had opinions all over the place on that. So it was decided the best thing to do was resign, and that is what he did."*

*"As I recall," said Cretul, "there was a big sigh of relief. Most people really didn't know me that well outside the Chamber. I want to emphasize again the staff and the leadership team, we needed to make this work. So many helped to make the transition run smoothly after Ray departed: Bill Galvano at Rules, Ellen Bogdanoff at Finance & Tax, Denise Grimsley, David Rivera, and many, many others."* It was clear that Cretul still had mixed feelings about how all of this had transpired, but like virtually every former Speaker interviewed for this book, forefront in their minds was the welfare of the institution and the need to move forward, addressing the business at hand.



*The incoming and outgoing Speakers of the House*

Ray Sansom had known he was going to be Speaker since his designation ceremony. He had been included by Speaker Rubio in meetings, along with future Speaker Dean Cannon, all working tightly together to craft a consistent leadership team over the years. With a huge majority in the House, the future Speaker did not fear losing an election when his turn came. There were 79 Republicans in the House



during the preceding term, 2006-08, and after the November election in 2008, 81 Republican members were elected, so the election by his peers to the role of Speaker of the Florida House was a foregone conclusion.

When the House convened and the nomination speeches were made, Representative Franklin Sands, the elected Minority Leader, followed custom and *“moved that the nominations cease, that the House dispense with the roll call vote, and that a unanimous vote be recorded for Rep. Ray Sansom.”* The oath of office was administered by former Rep. John Stargel, who had been elected in the same class as Sansom and was a Judge in the 10<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit of Florida.

Sansom was born in Fort Walton Beach, Florida on July 11, 1962. Both he and his wife had attended Okaloosa-Walton Community College, taking advantage of the Florida 2+2 system. Like many great Floridians, he received his BS in Political Science from Florida State University in 1984, later receiving a master’s in education from the University of West Florida. Sansom married Tricia Raimey and they had three daughters. During the 1990s he served for eight years as an Okaloosa County Commissioner. In 2002, he was elected to the Florida House of Representatives, representing Okaloosa and Santa Rosa counties, as a part of a fairly large class of 28 new members, including 22 Republicans.

That is the formal part of the biography one might expect to see in the Clerk’s Manual. But the real story of Ray Sansom is far more complicated and tragic as the promised beginning was never to be fulfilled. The role of Speaker was to be filled by Larry Cretul, a classmate of Sansom’s from the election in 2002. On February 21, 2010, Sansom resigned from his District 4 seat in the House, and his days as a member came to an end. Sansom never got to preside over a regular session.

## WHAT HAPPENED?

Sansom stepped down temporarily as Speaker on January 30, 2009, as a result of a scandal that had emerged concerning his accepting an unadvertised position with the former Okaloosa-Walton Community College, now called Northwest Florida State College. Sansom had been hired as the Vice President for Development and Planning and the hiring was announced the day after Sansom had been sworn in as



Speaker. Sansom stated upon his appointment, *“Throughout my time in the Legislature, I have tried to help the college grow and prosper, precisely because its success is so important to the future of our region.”* A citizen from Clearwater filed an ethics complaint charging that Sansom had received his \$110,000 per year newly created position as a reward for including millions in the budget. Included in the funding was \$6 million for a new facility for training emergency personnel, in addition to other designated functions. It was charged that the funds actually went to build an aircraft hangar for a campaign contributor. The facility was never built and the funds were reportedly to be returned to the state by the college in 2009.

In January of 2009, Sansom resigned from his newly created post at the college. Sansom then attempted to temporarily step down as Speaker to resolve the issues that had arisen as quickly as possible and to resume his role as Speaker, with Speaker *pro tempore* Larry Cretul serving as the presiding officer in the interim.



*Speaker Sansom with Rules Chair Galvano*

In March of 2009, Sansom officially resigned as Speaker. Sansom wrote to Cretul in February 2010, resigning from his House seat saying his resignation should not be construed *“as an admission of any wrongdoing,”* claiming it was in the best interest of his constituents that he resign.

Sansom was indicted by a Leon County Grand Jury in April 2009 and



prosecuted by State Attorney Willie Meggs for official misconduct. On December 31, 2009, an appellate court affirmed the lower court's dismissal of most of the case. Six days later, Meggs again filed charges, but this time of grand theft and conspiracy.

On March 25, 2011, more than two full years after his resignation as Speaker, prosecutors dropped all charges against Sansom. They were dropped after Circuit Judge Terry Lewis issued a statement claiming he didn't think prosecutors had made any progress in proving a conspiracy among the parties to steal or misuse taxpayer funds.

A promising political career had been lost. A new position at the same college he had attended for a time as a young student had also been lost. And nothing had been proven in court. He returned home and to private life to serve as Dean of an Okaloosa County charter school.

## AN AIR OF TRAGEDY

Sansom's closing words in his remarks after being elected Speaker on November 18, 2008, strike deeply when being re-read today. One feels the sadness of the promise he never was able to fulfill and is struck by how fleeting power can be.

*"The last paragraph I hope that people will write about the Florida House is that we were smart. Not Rhodes Scholars. We're not looking at grade point averages, but that we're looking at good common sense. That we will live smart, we will think smart, and we will make smart decisions. I believe that Florida can build its future on being humble, on being hungry to know the issues, and being smart. I believe that we can and we will meet the challenges for the future." He continued, "So, I challenge all of us to stay grounded, to stay connected, to avoid distractions, to stay focused. And my commitment to you is this: that when you leave for the last session in 2010—and it will be here before you know it—and you get in your car to go home, when you drive home, that you can look in the mirror and say those two years were worth it. It was worth it to leave my family and my jobs and my friends back home to serve people in the Florida House. My commitment to all of you is to make it worth it."*





LARRY CRETUL  
Speaker March 3, 2009 - 2010



*“Before I begin my remarks today, I want to take a moment of personal privilege and thank our outgoing Speaker, Larry Cretul. Leader Lopez-Cantera referred to those qualities of humility and the use of power and the courage of your convictions and Speaker, you have embodied that for this body through some of its most trying times. And members, you may never know, and probably none of us ever will, the grace and courage under pressure of Speaker Cretul, and so sir, I thank you for your friendship and for your leadership of this House.”*

– Dean Cannon upon his election as Speaker, November 16, 2010



When Larry Cretul first was elected to the House from Marion County, defeating incumbent Perry McGriff, Democrat from Gainesville, his race was the last to be called and he quickly developed the handle, “Landslide Larry” as he won by only 35 votes out of 53,000 cast. He often referred to himself as #81 since he was the last member certified as he joined the 80 others elected to the House as Republicans.



*Speaker Cretul with President Atwater and Representative Weatherford*

Just as his close entry to the House was unusual, so was his unlikely ascension to the speakership—something that could not have been predicted by anyone. Cretul was selected as *pro tempore* by Speaker Ray Sansom. It is customary for incoming Speakers, by tradition, to select the candidate for this role, just as the Speaker picks the chairs of the various committees. When Sansom resigned from his role as Speaker, it was the choice of the membership to hold to tradition and elevate the second in line, the *pro tempore*, to serve as Speaker, even with two full regular sessions to go in the term. They were not bound to this selection, but they chose Larry Cretul to lead them for the coming two years. There were others in the House who had initially sought the position, so it was not a rash or quick decision on how best to move forward for



the benefit of the House. Then Senate President Atwater recalled, *“The timing and circumstance could not have been worse. He had no benefit of the customary gratitude that members extend to the Speakers as appreciation for their chairmanships and committee assignments or the goodwill that Speakers enjoy for having just led the election efforts of every member of their own caucus.”* Atwater also reflected upon how Cretul had inherited the design and structure of the House. He remembered how this was at the time of *“the greatest recession since the Great Depression, among those impacts was a four billion dollar budget shortfall. The odds of success for anyone stepping into the speakership in times of an international economic free fall would be difficult. Yet, Speaker Cretul guided the Florida House with extraordinary skill and success...”*

## ON BECOMING SPEAKER

*“When we realized that there needed to be a change made—now this was on a Wednesday afternoon—the following Monday morning we had to send out a communication, the press release and whatever else we needed, that a transition was going to take place,”* recalled Cretul.

The transition happened quickly, as Cretul moved from *pro tempore* to Speaker. *“I remember a lot about it and there are some things I just don’t remember. I think I was just in another dimension. Shortly after organization session and Speaker Sansom was sworn in, we went to a retreat and that’s where he announced he had accepted this position at the college.”* Cretul commented that from then forward he viewed his job as *pro tempore* as assisting the Speaker with his agenda, as well as serving the House as a whole and that he had no expectation that anything would change.

He was very loyal and close to Sansom. *“I was his first pledge. I was actually the first one to sign up for him. In the last term together we were roommates.”* They had planned to live together, in part, because they thought it would allow for some late night, relaxed planning sessions where they could work through issues and problems. But their plans were soon to be disrupted and the issues they were forced to discuss could not have been foreseen.

*“Things began to really escalate and focus was on a couple of appropriations from the previous year and his position at the college, and it was obvious that as the issue grew it wasn’t going away.”* Cretul recalled many conversations with Sansom, working to try



and see if this was a situation that would be resolved and how they could move forward with the business of the House. The first plan was for Sansom to recuse himself until



*A sizeable gavel!*

he could return, but that was found to not be acceptable. *“So after a lot of discussion, he felt like it would be best for him to step aside. It escalated into such a distraction and Ray did what he felt he needed to do in order to have the institution [the House] held in high regard. The end result was that charges were dropped... dismissed... nothing happened after two years of public criticism and speculation.”*

Cretul was obviously saddened by the totality of events and the damage done to Sansom as a friend and colleague. *“It was a heavy toll and a heavy price to pay... to have to endure. But the turmoil that was going on kept the focus not on what it was we needed to do.”*

There were a couple of months between Sansom’s recusal from duties as Speaker and the beginning of session. *“We were in the midst of committee meetings and restructuring, making employee and committee assignments, bills being filed and bill referrals. There were many issues that needed attention. Sansom had actually made all the leadership assignments, so much of the structure was in place.”*

Cretul recalled inheriting assignments and committee structure and chairs, some of which, he found over time, were not to his liking. *“The first year we had two Appropriations Chairs, David Rivera and Marcelo Llorente [appropriations was divided according to specific agencies and topics].” “Ray structured that and I think it was the first time that had been done. They were to blend their two areas and come out with a budget. I can tell you that structure might have worked for Ray but it really was a challenge for us. We had two very strong egos and two very different people. Through the course of the process they each had to negotiate with Senator JD Alexander and he took opportunity from the challenge of negotiating with two of them. The dynamics there were really wanting.”*





*Minority Leader Sands visits the rostrum*

*“We got through it, not necessarily without some really bumpy moments. I have the utmost respect for Senator Alexander. He truly knew the appropriations process. Whatever Ray’s purpose for doing that, well that was Ray’s. After session was over we stepped back and said, ‘We have got to fix this!’ The second time around I made the decision to put Rivera as Chair. I also made other changes in structure.”*

He worked closely with his leadership team to assess the first session, and seek ways to make it all work more smoothly. Some of the committees had more than 25 members, so Cretul altered both size and structure so members could focus on preferred subject matters and not be spread too thin. *“We went through the whole process again. We had a reorganization. We wanted to be sure if you were given a committee assignment, it had value. Franklin Sands was Minority Leader and Ron Saunders had a big part, too. We asked for their recommendations and we accepted most of their requests. Then, during that second session we established calmness, a sense of decorum; let’s get to work!”*

In large part due to the potential for problems and the unusual nature of the quick transition from Sansom to Cretul, members of leadership, including those who



were already set to be future Speakers, were greatly concerned about staff leadership too for that first session. When being interviewed for this book, Cretul consistently referred to the quality and professionalism of staff, especially during these difficult times. *“From the leadership to the custodial staff, business continued. The doors were open and the lights were on and people were doing their jobs—I was impressed by that... But in order to have a smooth transition and orderly House management, I needed key staff around me I could rely upon.”*

When a Speaker leaves, he usually takes his entire team with him and the incoming Speaker restaffs the Office of the Speaker. Staff within the Speaker’s Office had only been there a few months and they were not hired by Cretul. They were Sansom’s team. Leadership called upon Dudley Goodlette, a highly respected former member, and asked if he would be willing to come up from Naples and serve in the Chief of Staff role. It was Super Bowl Sunday when Goodlette decided he would take the assignment and he never looked back. He recalled, *“Serving as Larry’s Chief of Staff was a terrific high for me. In the wake of the Sansom resignation—being called back into action at this elevated staff level was an honor I will never forget. Larry was wired ‘to be cool’ and he showed willingness to seek and receive input from all of the members of his key leadership team.”*

Goodlette continued, *“Larry and I met with Jeb within a few days of Larry being elected Speaker and I will always remember the conversation between the two of them when Larry said, ‘I am the accidental Speaker’ and Jeb said, ‘No no—you are the providential Speaker,’ which was so true.”* Then Senate President Atwater recalled regarding “The Accidental Speaker” name, *“Unfortunate circumstances forced the House to quickly seek a new leader. A void of leadership atop the House now needed a wise and humble Speaker... the economic collapse in the housing industry, soaring unemployment, and a fiscal nightmare now called for a business-minded, clear-thinking, fast-acting Speaker. There was not time to waste... The fact that the House turned to a man with an accomplished business career, with uncommon humility, uncompromising principles, exceptional intelligence and a bias for action was a credit to their wisdom...the fact that they turned to Larry Cretul was no accident!”*





*The Speaker with Chief of Staff Goodlette and Majority Leader Hasner*

Cretul recalled how important this was to him personally. *“I remember calling him [Goodlette] on a Wednesday. I told him I wanted him to consider being my Chief of Staff. There was a long pause and immediately I thought, ‘well, how do I move this along?’ I said, ‘Well listen—think about it.’ We let him cook on Thursday and Friday and I called him again and asked if he was still thinking, to which he replied, ‘Yeah, I’m still thinking.’ I called him Sunday morning and I said, ‘Hey, can you be here by 4:00?’ To which Dudley replied, ‘Well I can’t be there by 4:00 because I do have to go by and leave a note for my partners that I will be gone for two years.’”*

In an interview with Brendan Farrington just days before he took office as Speaker, Cretul stated, *“I didn’t campaign for this job, never thought I would end up here, but here I am. My first concern when I came in was the Florida House, kind of settling things down and sort of calming the little bit of rough water.”*



*“I have all my life been somewhat quiet, not really seeking anything – recognition in particular. People will say, ‘Why are you in politics?’ There’s moments I ask myself that, too,”* continued Cretul in the interview.

## GETTING TO THE HOUSE

*“I ran in ’92 and I lost the election for the County Commission. I ran in ’94 and won, ended up serving almost 8 years.”* In 2002, he got caught up in the resign-to-run issue that affected several races in Florida, where if there was not a proper letter on file he could not remain as a commissioner until the time he took office as a state representative. Instead he had to resign upon filing to run for the House. However, his race for the House seat was not a sure thing.

*“Yes, 35 votes—that sure was an interesting election for everyone. Perry McGriff, the incumbent was a very good man, a pillar in his community.”* Cretul recalled how 2002 was the year of redistricting and how the seat was a little more competitive for McGriff, taking in more of Marion County with McGriff being from Gainesville.

*“Yes, we won by 35 votes in 2002. Ironically that auto-triggered a recount so the Republican Party dispatched lawyers to the three counties I was hoping to represent. The lawyer sent to Marion County was Dean Cannon. Dean came in, along with several others... all representing the party. We never got behind, as low as 22, as high as 38.”*

*“I passed the gavel to Dean Cannon when I left the House and he stepped up as Speaker. How coincidental or ironic is that? I often say to people, ‘If you didn’t like what I did, it was Dean’s fault! You enter into legislative service and it is so broad and it affects everybody and everything. It was a little bit of an adjustment. I remember in one of the orientations, they all basically said, ‘Forget about the positions you came from; you are now in the Florida House, in the freshman class and here are the things you should consider as a freshman: process and procedures, respect, understanding.’ There will be days when you will say, ‘What just happened?’”*



## OPENING DAY AS SPEAKER

*“I remember coming into the parking garage on opening day; needless to say, I had some anxiety. And I walked in and I met one of the Sergeant’s staff, Lawrence Reed. He stopped and said to me, ‘If you have a minute, I would like to pray with you.’ Wow! He was the first guy I met coming in the door. I will never forget that. Later in session, we asked him to do the opening prayer one day; he had a local ministry. I was thrilled.”*



*The leadership team seeks higher guidance*

*“That first day and then my first media availability was a rather unique experience. It was the first time I had gaggled [a large gathering of press surrounding the interview subject]. I remember going in the room on the third floor and it was full of press. Remember I was coming from being a member of the body into this role as Speaker and everything changes... but we did OK that day. I was an unknown and the press were very curious.”*

Cretul recalled that the press treated him very fairly under unique circumstances. *“But following that a reporter compared me to Barney Rubble. I thought it was humorous but he didn’t know that he gave me the perfect line in my last opening day speech. In my remarks I said, ‘You remember that Barney Rubble had the prettiest wife.’ My wife was in the Gallery and the whole place roared!”*



## FAMILY IN TALLAHASSEE

Cretul mentioned how different it was for him becoming Speaker in another way too. His wife, Lana, had not moved up to Tallahassee and had continued to work back home in Ocala. *“One day it was mentioned to us... usually the Speaker’s wife had ceremonial duties and whatever, and was also in charge of the spouses’ lounge, too. She said, ‘What?’ She was still working so we worked it out so she could be here when she needed to be here and made beneficial changes to the program. Spouses are a very important part of this process.”*

## RELATIONSHIP WITH THE GOVERNORS

Cretul served during the terms of two Governors, Bush and Crist. His first term was the beginning of Jeb Bush’s last term. *“They were two completely different styles of Governor. Governor Bush was very engaging. He was on top of everything. Governor Crist had a different leadership style. I describe our first session when I was Speaker as a peaceful coexistence. The last year was strained.”*

Cretul recalled all the speculation about Crist possibly being on the national ticket which he thought changed the Governor. *“I noticed there was kind of a different approach to things; that happens when people become a candidate for a different office while they are still serving in another office. The second session was when he decided to become a U.S. Senator and that made it even more challenging... in seeking some understanding on issues when there might have been some degree of predictability. We took up a couple of bills and CS/CS/SB 6 was one of them. Through the course of discussion and debate, even in the Senate, there were positive signals coming from the Governor’s Office: ‘get it up, get it out, get it over [out of committee, to the House floor, to the Senate]!’ The bill came up in the Senate and everybody worked that bill to be the best product we could produce and get to the Governor. We got it tuned up and pretty well situated where it was what everybody was hoping for.”*

Senate Bill 6 was a controversial bill that re-crafted the process for teacher evaluation and accountability in Florida, affecting how teacher salaries and raises would be structured moving forward, based on a comprehensive system of student testing and onsite evaluations.





*Being sworn in by Justice Canady*

*“I remember when it passed out of the Senate, President Atwater called and said, ‘We’re sending it to you. We hope you don’t amend it.’ We took that bill up and I remember it was early afternoon and my instructions to the body were that this is a very important bill and we are going to give it all the time it needs. It probably had more people speak to the bill than any in recent history. I think we had between 80 and 90, as I recall. It was close to two in the morning and after what some have said were hundreds of quorum calls, the bill came up for a vote. We thought we had the votes. We had R’s who were not necessarily on board, all for different reasons.”*

*“For example, we didn’t really know where Appropriations Chairman David Rivera was on the bill. David had a sister who was a teacher and he had gone home to talk about it with his family. David came back, we were in the Chambers about to conclude discussion and David stood up with his microphone. We thought then we had David, but we didn’t really know. So David gets up and gives one of the most eloquent, engaging debates on the bill. The Chamber was hushed and everyone was focused on his remarks. He spoke of his family discussion with quite a lot of emotion. At the conclusion he said, ‘Mr. Speaker, I am going to support the bill.’”*



Cretul recalled the Chamber erupting with cheers as he stepped down off the podium to confer with his Chief of Staff, Dudley Goodlette, and Staff Director of the Majority Office, Todd Reid. He laughed loudly as he recalled Todd's remarks, *"I sure hope he has a sister!" Which, of course, he does, but there are some of those moments where humor cuts across the tension.*"

So the bill didn't get amended in the House and went straight to the Governor. *"The pressure now moved to the Governor. He vetoed it. We were hoping for the best, but he chose not to sign it."*

## OTHER KEY POLICY ISSUES 2009-2010

There were quite a few major issues during his two years as Speaker besides SB 6. The economy was still sinking and tax revenues were still falling in Florida as home values also were tanking. Unemployment was rising and legislators had to find ways to maintain critical services while cutting billions from the budget each session during that term. In addition, Florida and other states along the Gulf Coast were harmed greatly by the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill disaster. This occurred during the regular session, on April 20, 2010. Prior to that there had been a lot of discussion about



*Speaker Cretul and Senate President Atwater in the House Chamber*

possibly opening up waters along Florida's coast for drilling, mainly in response to the rapid escalation of gas prices. The platform blowout ended that discussion for a while, but the impact on the Florida economy was real.

*"It was not a very good two years to be Speaker. Let me say, it was an honor, but the issues we were dealing*



*with were tough, very tough.” Cretul was very proud of the focused approach of the House as they took on some previously intractable issues, especially Indian Gaming. “Bill Galvano and George Levesque as legal counsel—those two guys did something no one had ever been able to do, they pushed and pushed and reached agreement for Florida with the tribes on gaming. I was very proud of how that got handled.”*

*As for budget cuts, “Our team took the approach, ‘OK, these are the cards we are dealt.’ We knew those two years were going to be tough, but also knew that the third and fourth years out were going to be even worse, much tougher for Dean Cannon. We knew that whatever we did in those two years it had to be for then, for Dean’s term of service and also for the entire state in the long run.”*

*“We did some real, gut-wrenching tough, hard decisions and cut. We weren’t very popular, but that’s one of those things that needed to be done.”*

On March 2, 2010, Cretul addressed the House from the well after being introduced by Speaker *pro tempore* Ron Reagan. He could look back upon a busy first half of his speakership knowing that the institution had been strong through adversity.

*“You know, over the past year we really have traveled some very difficult roads, but starting today, it’s my intention—and I hope you will join me—that we look through the windshield, and not through the rearview mirror. Today, I want to talk to you about the future, to talk to you about the challenges and the opportunities that we’re going to be facing over the next 60 days.”* And after some very moving and detailed remarks, Speaker Cretul ended by saying, *“I am looking forward to tackling the challenges we face with you this session. And I know with the dedication and the hard work of each and every one of you, and with God’s help, we will be successful.”* And so, as it has done now for 500 years, the Promise of Florida continued to be there and to offer the promise of leadership, integrity and continuity.

Larry Cretul seems to be the same man today as the day he took the oath as Speaker. He was not changed by the experience, but perhaps has used the experience to grow inside—just more of the same quiet man—filled with humor, humble, kind, caring and appreciative of all around him who allowed him to have a unique experience and be truly “fit for the times” in which he served. He chooses to credit



others and deeply express the importance of his friendship with former Rep. Dudley Goodlette who dropped the things he was doing back home in Naples and came up to help. *“He may not have remembered, but in my very first session I was that raw rookie who had screwed up my own bill and I needed help then. Dudley was able to help me fix it and get it on its way. I never forgot that. As a new member you are looking for a mentor, you are looking to someone for the guidance you need, who won’t make you feel you are inadequate. Dudley was that way. Not surprisingly, when I tell that story to other folks, even some Democrats, they say the same thing.”* Cretul praised members who took the time to work with others and recalled Goodlette and Bense as the most approachable for him in his first session in 2002, when Johnnie Byrd was Speaker. He hoped that others who came later would remember him in the same way.



## KEY HOUSE LEADERS 2009-2010

### **Speaker – Larry Cretul**

Speaker *pro tempore* – Ron Reagan

Majority Leader – Adam Hasner

Democratic Leader – Franklin Sands

Rules & Calendar Council Chair – Bill Galvano

Appropriations Council on Education & Economic Development Chair – David Rivera

Appropriations Council on General Government & Health Care Chair – Marcelo Llorente

## KEY STAFF

Chief of Staff – J. Dudley Goodlette

Clerk of the House – Bob Ward

Sergeant at Arms – Earnest “Earnie” Sumner

Majority Office Staff Director – Todd Reid

Democratic Office Staff Director – Barry Kling

Rules & Calendar Staff Director – Stephanie Birtman

Appropriations Council on Education & Economic Development Council Director  
– Skip Martin

Appropriations Council on General Government & Health Care Council Director –  
JoAnne Leznoff

Governor – Charlie Crist

Senate President – Jeff Atwater





DEAN CANNON  
Speaker 2010-2012



*“To question the size and scope of government at every level could truly produce a new birth of freedom. Economic freedom based on the principle that people—not the government, can and should best determine how the fruits of their labor will be used; and making people—not the government, responsible for determining their own destinies for better or for worse.”*



At the time of this writing, Dean Cannon was still freshly out of office as Speaker. He was so close to his memories that he did not have much time to reflect and filter. But he quickly responded that his two fondest memories were fresh and real, *“The day I was sworn in at organization session, and sine die of my last session were among the best. The day I was sworn in was so special because we had been through a lot of turbulence and difficulty during the years before I became Speaker. It was wonderful to finally be sworn in. Sine die of my last session stands out because I felt like I fully completed everything I set out to do, and it was time to go.”* He commented that, *“Being Speaker is the greatest professional honor I have ever received or ever expect to receive.”*

Cannon was born August 2, 1968, at Bitburg Air Base in Germany. His father was a pilot in the U.S. Air Force. Cannon later recalled that serving as Speaker was a lot like flying an airplane after first only being able to read books about how planes are supposed to work. After active duty, his family moved to Central Florida where Dean grew up. He reflected that as a kid he had read the *Federalist Papers* and other founding documents and had thought the interchange of systems and the checks and balances was genius, *“But to use an analogy, now that I have had a chance to actually ‘fly the plane,’ I am even more impressed. It is ingenious how our government is built and how the Founders set up the system. It is inefficient. It is illogical sometimes, but it is the best system in the world!”*

He is fully a Gator, having received both his BS in Journalism and his Juris Doctorate from the University of Florida. While there, he was active in campus politics, serving as Student Body President and as VP of Florida Blue Key.

## FAMILY ROLE

*“My family was crucial to surviving the speakership. My beautiful wife, Ellen [Friedley] was a rock and supplied tremendous strength, love, and support for our family while I was serving as Speaker. My children [Dean III, Katherine and Sarah] literally grew up while I was a legislator and Speaker. They were 6, 8, and 10 years old when I completed my time, and one of my only regrets from the last eight years is how many nights and hours I had to spend away from my family. I was glad they were all near me during our time in Tallahassee as Speaker.”*



## BEING SPEAKER

*“I always knew that the speakership was a public trust, a powerful position, and a really special office. Those things are all true, but I appreciate more now how difficult and complex the job is, and how it is a bit of a paradox: very powerful, but only for a brief time; it feels like a statewide office, but it is largely anonymous outside the Capitol. I realize it takes a tremendous amount of planning and effort to do it well, and can be overwhelming at times.”*



*Unveiling the portrait with the family*

He was pleased that his was the first Speaker’s race to be resolved in the “eligible” member’s first term. *“That had more to do with the impact of term limits than anything else. I followed the advice of a lot of former Speakers, who told me it was a person-to-person, member-to-member campaign, and to leave all other influences out of it. My race lasted three months.”* Cannon entered the House with the Class of 2004, along with eighteen others, fifteen of which were Republican. Allan Bense was the incoming Speaker. By the time he became Speaker, only nine of the sixteen Republicans were still in the House.





*Members and staff consult with Speaker Cannon at the rostrum*

One former Speaker looked back at the arrival of Dean Cannon on the scene. *“I look back at a young Dean Cannon and he almost had the votes to be Speaker the day he arrived.”*

*“Being Speaker is not like, for example, being the Governor, where one person is the head of the executive branch. I was 1 of 120 members. The Speaker... has a large amount of influence, but there are 119 other members who have priorities and needs and I had an obligation, under the Constitution, frankly, to respect and support them too... The complexity of the job is what I expected, but perhaps it was a little more intense. But, all in all, it was a great, once-in-a-lifetime experience.... I came up to make good policy and we got to do a lot of that. I am really proud of the House.”*

## KEY POLICY ISSUES 2010-2012

As is the case every ten years, reapportionment was the primary issue in the second session, aside from the annual passage of the budget, during Cannon’s term as



Speaker. How well this process goes often determines the direction of the Legislature for the coming decade, and who will be in control of the Legislature as well, as we saw in the last two efforts at drawing maps for Florida. Cannon recalls, *“In one sense it is technically as easy as passing a bill, but I think politically it is as complicated as anything we do. People don’t live in nice neat groups.”* The House had been at it for over a year before the second session of the term took place for debate and passage. Cannon reflected that the two Chamber Chairs for this process, also the designated Leaders for the coming term, Will Weatherford and Don Gaetz, *“got out on the road to get the public’s perception. It is like getting a Ph.D. in Florida because there are so many diverse components from demographic, economic and geographic standpoints. It’s really a Herculean task.”* Due to two new constitutional amendments that had never been tested in the courts, the process had to operate under the interpretation of the leadership as to what ultimately would be required. There was no *“opinion from the courts to give us direction and the language was not crystal clear.”* Cannon had concerns that some of the provisions had the potential for conflict with each other. *“What if one of the goals was to run contrary to advancing another one?”*

He commented that the drawing was easier than in past times since neither he nor Senate President Haridopolos were interested in running for Congress, so personal objectives did not interfere. This was especially important since the Congressional map drawing had to add two additional seats. Cannon noted that Florida has term limits and he was term limited out and not running for reelection or anything else. *“That is somewhat liberating.”*

The first session, 2011, came after a couple of pretty uncertain years, both politically and economically. Cannon recalls, *“I came in as Speaker with a tough economy, at a time when Charlie Crist was morphing into a Democrat and his hand-picked party chairman, Jim Greer was self-destructing as the party leader, the economy was still unstable and two years prior the elected Speaker had resigned. It was a difficult time with a lot of instability. I think the House and Senate, for the most part, worked well and we got a lot done. Those two prior years were brutal in a lot of ways heading into my Speakership. We ended up picking up five seats in the fall elections, plus we now knew we had Governor Scott who would govern as a conservative.”* Cannon recalls that most of the ‘hard feelings’ that first session revolved around the budget, but that for the most part the House and Senate got a tremendous amount done. *“We achieved eight-out-*



*of-eight major policy and budget objectives that first session. We took on big issues, like Medicaid reform, teacher merit pay, growth management reform, pill mill reform, etc. It was an extraordinarily successful session.”*

The first session ended with relations with the Senate being less than desirable. Cannon adjourned the House and sent members home after the Senate began voting down conforming bills they had agreed to during the budget conference. There were hard feelings at that time, but as is often the case in the process, somehow the leaders of each Chamber reconciled and formed a much stronger relationship in the interim heading into the final session. Historically, this has not always been the case as often there has been a lingering distrust and dislike that carried forward when politics, policy and procedures trumped personal relationships. The contretemps and controversies of the first session were not there in the second and especially in the budget negotiations, which went much more smoothly.

Cannon recalled, *“My experiences as a younger member were based on the oft-stated phrase, ‘the House proposes and the Senate disposes.’ As Speaker, one of my goals was to alter this so that each Chamber met equally on the playing field. We wanted to be full balanced partners. The end of the first session was unfortunate but it is insignificant compared to how much the House and Senate accomplished from a policy standpoint. We wanted the House to be an equal force in the process like it had never done before. During the interim and through the second session, President Haridopolos and I worked well together, as did our budget chairs. Governor Scott was also a strong partner in working with us to build a responsible budget with no new taxes, actually with a reduction in the corporate tax.”*

## REGULAR BUSINESS

Reapportionment consumed a lot of energy, especially in the second year of the term. *“To the extent that redistricting occupied time, it burns up time that might be available for other issues and tasks.”* Cannon reflected upon the tangential effects of redistricting. He thinks it has an effect on members who might be unsure of where their district line might be drawn as they *“might be less willing to advance bold policies... in other cases members might be more willing to be more aggressive in their rhetoric or policies.”*



Cannon served as Speaker during two tough economic years in Florida where the task of being Speaker got complicated by the need to shrink state expenditures both sessions. His focus was to *“take the money you have and then establish priorities about how to spend it. There are always many more priorities you would like to support than dollars you have available. We have to remember those are the people’s tax dollars. They sent that money to Tallahassee. We have a fiduciary duty to spend it wisely. We shouldn’t raise taxes and fees when we have an economy under duress and unemployment approaching 10%.”*

But Cannon noted that even within these shortfalls, the term saw major reforms in education, healthcare and growth management. He recalled, *“Governor Scott’s budget offered some tough but thoughtful policy choices... by suggesting cuts in the healthcare side to increase funding in the education side. I shared the Governor’s view that we should increase funding for K-12 education.”* So part of Cannon’s goal was to reach the addition of more than \$1 billion additional for K-12 education.



*Senate President Mike Haridopolos visits the Speaker at the House rostrum*



Other issues took center stage too. *“The Medicaid reform bill under the leadership of Chair Rob Schenck was the most comprehensive overhaul of Medicaid in Florida since it was implemented in the mid-’60s... focusing on getting critical care to those who need it and bending down the cost curve.”* Cannon was glad, however, that the agendas of the Governor, Senate and House were *“not as bold”* in his second session as Speaker, which *“allowed the bandwidth, so to speak, to handle the budget and reapportionment and get our work done on time.”*

## THE CHALLENGE OF NEW PEOPLE IN NEW ROLES

When Cannon took over as Speaker there were quite a few other new players in charge of Florida’s government at the same time. For the first time in the modern era we had a new Governor and new actors in each of the seats of the Florida Cabinet. Incumbents were nowhere to be found. Cannon developed a good relationship with the Governor quickly. *“Governor Scott certainly had a steep learning curve, but he is also a quick learner. He and I had a great working relationship. He wants what is best for Florida. He campaigned on a specific platform, on the economy and creating jobs, and he worked hard to deliver on it.”* Cannon contends there remained a healthy tension between the branches, *“which is good. He has a great approach, which is to stick to your principles and advance a principle driven agenda... which is how I tried to operate as Speaker.”*

Cannon served as a legislator with three different Governors, Bush, Crist and Scott, in office. In an interview post-session, Cannon commented that he entered office under a *“principled centered Governor,”* Jeb Bush, and left office while another one of principle was serving, Rick Scott. In reference to the middle four years when Crist was in office Cannon replied, *“I try to forget about the four years in between.”*

The healthy tension between the branches was also tested a bit during Cannon’s term as he put forth a very bold reform of the courts package early on. His desire was to split the Supreme Court in two, expanding it to ten justices, creating a portion that would focus on criminal cases and one on civil. He also sought to alter the merit retention process for judges. Cannon had targeted the courts, when he was sworn in as Speaker, when he criticized the Supreme Court. *“And yet over the past year, three times, we saw the work of a three-fifths super majority of this legislative branch, the elected*



*Representatives of over 18 million Floridians, demolished by five unelected Justices of the Florida Supreme Court. This was done notwithstanding the fact that there was no expressed authority in the Florida Constitution for their doing so.” He continued, “Is it the role of the judicial branch to decide political questions and to endanger its reputation for impartiality by depriving the voters of their right to vote on important questions put forth by their elected Representatives... ?” And so amendments were placed on the November 2012 ballot, with quite a lot of modifications from Cannon’s first proposals, and they, like all but three of ten others, went down to defeat, largely due to the 60% threshold that had been put into place earlier to keep citizen initiatives like the pregnant pig amendment from being placed into the Florida Constitution.*

## HIS LEGACY

*“My job was not to set an agenda or decide what bills passed. It was my job to create the environment. I really wanted the House to be strong and professional. We owe a debt to provide for and help those who will take over when we leave. I think my term as Speaker will be remembered for the level of organization and effectiveness of the House as an institution, vis-à-vis the Senate and the Governor. I worked hard to lay a foundation of organization and team play, and that paid off in the end. From a policy standpoint, we initiated and passed incredible policy changes like Medicaid reform, growth management reform, education reform, etc., and had a flawless redistricting process.”*



*Last sine die with Governor Scott, Lt. Governor Carroll, and wife, Ellen Cannon*



His advice to those who will follow is, *“Never forget that you are not the Speaker of Florida; you are just the Speaker of the Florida House. This is not a statewide office, it is a temporary trust that your fellow members entrust you with.”*

Cannon reflects that the duty of the Speaker is to create an atmosphere *“where members have a fair forum within which to advance their ideas... Being Speaker is sort of like being CEO of an intentionally dysfunctional corporation. You have a hundred and nineteen vice presidents sent up here; different people from different regions with different priorities and ideas. It’s a big challenge, but it’s also a great system.”*

*“The legacy I leave behind is the people: the men and women and the relationships I have built. The people I have gotten to work with will be the best legacy I could ask for.”* His wish is to be remembered *“as a strong, fair leader who helped the members and the House succeed.”*

Cannon took office as Speaker questioning the size and scope of government and how the growth of government power impinges upon our growth as a society. *“To question the size and scope of government at every level could truly produce a new birth of freedom. Economic freedom based on the principle that people—not the government, can and should best determine how the fruits of their labor will be used; and making people—not the government, responsible for determining their own destinies for better or for worse.”*

He opened his last session as Speaker again echoing the concepts embodied in the Founding, *“After all, politics is nothing more or less than human behavior amplified. And the defining trait of human history has always been the struggle to balance our noble and our selfish impulses. The danger comes whenever we allow that balance to be overwhelmed by a kind of political relativism that justifies our whims to the detriment of our obligations.”*





*Bringing the House to order*

## KEY HOUSE LEADERS 2010-2012

**Speaker – Dean Cannon**

Speaker *pro tempore* – John Legg

Majority Leader – Carlos Lopez-Cantera

Democratic Leader – Ron Saunders

Rules & Calendar Committee Chair – Gary Aubuchon

Appropriations Committee Chair – Denise Grimsley

Redistricting Committee Chair – Will Weatherford



## KEY STAFF

Chief of Staff – Mathew Bahl

Clerk of the House – Bob Ward

Sergeant at Arms – Earnest “Earnie” Sumner

Majority Office Staff Director – Sam Verghese

Democratic Office Staff Director – Durward Brewer

Rules & Calendar Committee Staff Director – Stephanie Birtman

Appropriations Committee Staff Director – JoAnne Leznoff

Redistricting Committee Staff Director – Alex Kelly

Governor – Rick Scott

Senate President – Mike Haridopolos



WILL WEATHERFORD  
Speaker 2012-2014



*“If you remember nothing else, remember this: we are not here to serve as passive brokers for the special interest groups. We are here to be the chamber of ideas and solutions. We are also here to lead, to govern, and to offer bold, transformational ideas... may it be said of us, we were bold, we served with a purpose, and that we fulfilled our promise to Florida.”*



In November 2012, as this book was being written, Will Weatherford became Speaker of the Florida House of Representatives. All of the other Speakers in this volume have already served and, as such, they have created history. Weatherford has presided over the organization session, during which he was elected to serve and to lead the House, and a regular session. As we go to press, neither the history nor the chapter of Speaker Will Weatherford has been written.

As the historical processes of elected government move forward, the Florida House also continues to move forward and the Promise of Florida continues unabated.



*With the family at swearing in as Speaker*

The Promise of Florida is a two-way street. It offers much to us, but in return it is up to each of us to take the blessings we have been given and use them to create a better future for all Floridians. The Speakers are a reflection of what newly elected Speaker Will Weatherford stated in his remarks on November 20, 2012, *“As you all probably noticed, in each of your offices I gave you a countdown clock. The date is set for Election Day in 2014. It is a digital reminder of the sands of time that are falling on our service here. The voters gave us two years. Not eight, not four—two. Members, our time is short. Our clock is ticking. Let us make the most of every single second.”*



## KEY HOUSE LEADERS 2012-2014

### **Speaker – Will Weatherford**

Speaker *pro tempore* – Marti Coley

Majority Leader – Steve Precourt

Democratic Leader – Perry Thurston

Rules & Calendar Committee Chair – Robert Schenck

Appropriations Committee Chair – Seth McKeel

## KEY STAFF

Chief of Staff – Kathy Mears

Clerk of the House – Bob Ward

Sergeant at Arms – Earnest “Earnie” Sumner

Majority Office Staff Director – Jeff Takacs

Democratic Office Staff Director – Durward Brewer

Rules & Calendar Committee Staff Director – Stephanie Birtman

Appropriations Committee Staff Director – JoAnne Leznoff

Governor – Rick Scott

President of the Senate – Don Gaetz





## AFTERWORD

### LOOKING FORWARD

The Promise of Florida remains bright and as it always has been, it has limitless possibilities. The Legislature will continue to meet, with newly elected members every two years bringing their collective wisdom and experiences, through term limits, biannual changes in leadership, economic ups and downs, and through all sorts of calamity and opportunity that cannot be predicted. Perhaps Friedrich Hayek said it best, “What cannot be known cannot be planned.” But the wisdom of the membership, as they go about in the selection of future leaders, has a way of usually being right. And when it isn’t and there are problems and conflicts, it still has a way of moving forward as the leadership finds that within each member is a well from which the collective can draw the energy to move forward. Weatherford captured this in his remarks to the Republican Conference on March 7, 2011, *“You see, members, the Florida House is a special place. It’s a place that each of us has the opportunity to be a part of a living and changing institution... I believe that every member in this Chamber, Republican and Democrat, believes in the promise of Florida. Our task is to debate what that promise is and how it will be achieved.”*

It is fitting that we close this effort to capture an eighteen year snippet of Florida history by using the words of each Speaker as they addressed the Chamber, sharing their visions of the Florida House of Representatives. Their words captured the times in which they served and the events that had an impact on their decision making, and also are fine descriptions of the heart of each of them.

Peter R. Wallace stated his concerns with where Florida stood under the gaze of history:

*“This year, the eyes of history will bear down on us more sharply than ever before. This is the first session that will be carried, gavel to gavel, on cable television statewide. And we will be the first Florida Legislature that the people of Florida will be able to respond to through the Internet. The technology we can now use to serve democracy can help revolutionize this process and reawaken a feeling of unity between the people and their government. But technology will take us no further than our own courage, unity, and resolve*



*to make this process work.”*

Peter R. Wallace has not changed much since he served. Actually, he looks quite the same too—unfairly having one of those appearances that always looks young. He retains a youthful optimism, too, for the future of Florida and it was a real pleasure spending time with him, capturing his recollections of a very transitional time in Florida history.

In 1996, Daniel Webster assumed the role of Speaker of the House as the first Republican in over a century. His speech was one of the shortest ever given as he accepted the role:

*“Actually, over the last couple of weeks, I’ve had plenty of time to prepare a speech. I will tell you that this is an awesome thought, and I can’t do it alone. I haven’t lived my life alone. My family, my God, my pastor, my friends in the gallery, and others have been my support. And now, for this job, I need your support. I appreciate the honor you bestowed upon me, but I take it as a position to serve you. I will do everything in my power to serve you in a way that you would be proud. Please help me do that. I accept the position of Speaker of the House.”*

Daniel Webster, too, is much the same man he was in 1996 when he became Speaker. He is unassuming, modest, faithful, focused and a great example of a servant leader. He has an historical name and lived up to the promise of being named the same as one of the most prominent U.S. Senators in U.S. history by offering up leadership that made quite significant history in Florida. He now serves our state in Washington, D.C., as a congressman, continuing to give of himself for the principles he holds dear.

In 1998, John Thrasher stepped up to the rostrum as Speaker. Today, he is the last person from that transitional era in the '90s to still be serving as a member of the Florida Legislature—serving as a State Senator from St. Augustine. He is the last surviving Republican that knows full well what it was like to sit in the back rows as a minority, experience the joy of obtaining a majority, and step up those stairs in the front of the Chamber, lift the gavel and call the House into session. On November 17, 1998, he assumed the position of Speaker and with the responsibility of the office he also brought his sense of humor. In his chapter you can see the heavy, detailed policy



issues tackled during his term. But here, the personality, humor and warmth of John Thrasher clearly shows through:

*“You know, one of the things—this is not my speech, by the way, but I will tell you—one of the things the Speaker [Webster] taught me, I asked him about some insights into being the Speaker—and I told this story to Governor-elect Bush, but I will tell it to the rest of you. I asked him, I said, ‘You know, you hear a lot of controversy and a lot of discussion about who is the most powerful, the Speaker or the President of the Senate.’ President Crenshaw, I know you have some thoughts on that, but he said to me—Speaker Webster said to me, ‘There is really nothing definitive to define that, until one day I saw a piece of paper. And that piece of paper was the group of people who are authorized to use the state motor pool. And on that list the second person is the Speaker. Bobby Bowden is number one.’ So that ended that controversy, and I am appreciative of the Speaker of giving me that insight.”*

John Thrasher exudes energy. He is filled with the joy of service and carries with him pride in his service and what he has been a part of during his time in office. With his constant credit to others, he relegated himself to the role of participant for many of the most prominent pieces of legislation in decades. Yet, it is likely they would not have moved in quite the same way or been filled with the same vigor of content if not for John Thrasher. He has not only been present in the making of history in Florida, he has been the driver in much of it.

In reflection, Tom Feeney remembered his eventful time in the corner office. His time had been likely the most tumultuous and unpredictable, with major outside events having great influence upon events within the Chamber, in the modern era. I recall one day walking through the Office of the Speaker for a planning session for Leadership Now being held in the back conference room. As I walked by Feeney’s office, he was at the desk reading, looked up and saw me and hurried to the door carrying the book he had been reading. In the midst of all the turmoil of the 2000 election he was reading his very worn copy of the *Federalist Papers* and was excited as he found a key point in his argument for legislative control in deciding electoral votes. It was fitting that Feeney, as a gift to his friends and supporters, gave each a leatherbound version of that book. Feeney spoke to the Chamber, saying:



*“... I love the Florida House. I love serving with each one of you. Representative Cusack, and all of you in the minority party, I’ll tell you that one of the things that I’ve been most appreciative about is that everybody is part of the process. If you want to engage in the process and be heard, it doesn’t mean you’ll get your way; the majority process still works for the most part in a representative body. But having said that, for two years the House has taken up some of the most historic and challenging issues, and the way we’ve debated, the level of the debate, the level of intellect—referring to the Federalist Papers, referring to Lord Acton, referring to some of the other great things that’s occurred during our debates—and the respect you’ve shown one another and me, but most importantly, this institution is something for which I will be forever grateful to each and every one of you.”*

Tom Feeney is still the same student of history he has always been. He holds tight to the principles he carried around on a small card, always willing to share them with others. He left the Legislature and was elected to Congress where he served for three terms. Upon returning to Florida, he returned to the practice of law until chosen to serve as CEO of Associated Industries of Florida, a prominent business organization based in Tallahassee. He continues to view matters of public policy through the lens provided by the Founding Fathers. Time spent with him is filled with recollections of the people who played a major role in his term as Speaker and he conveys the thrill of being in the arena when so many events unfolded that shook Florida.

When Johnnie Byrd stepped up to the rostrum as Speaker he did so as a member of one of the smallest elected classes in history. In November 1996, only Nancy Argenziano, Byrd, Paula Dockery, Lindsay Harrington and Adam Putnam, were elected as Republicans in the freshman class. Ten freshmen Democrats entered service that same year, one of which, Doug Wiles, was elected Minority Leader when Byrd was Speaker. When Byrd was elected Speaker on November 19, 2002, only two of those Republicans remained. Argenziano and Dockery had moved over to the Senate and Putnam had gone to Congress. Classmates Murman and Spratt had switched parties to become Republicans. Tradition changed with term limits, so now the Speaker was to be essentially elected from the class with whom they entered the House—this was a very small group. Byrd addressed the Chamber, with these, his first remarks as Speaker:



*“Members, thank you for letting me be your Leader. Yesterday, I told the Republican Conference that selecting a leader is a little like getting married. It can be a leap of faith. It can be a leap of faith. And my only experience with getting married was 27 years ago when I asked Melane to marry me; and she said that it was not only a leap of faith, it was a leap in the darkness. And I want to thank you for that, and I want to thank you for honoring me to be your Leader. Suffice it to say that I will pledge to bring honor to the Florida House of Representatives for the next two years.*

*This day is about you. It’s about your vision; it’s about your future; and it’s about the successes, you will have as Members of the Florida House of Representatives. . . . I intend to invest my time in your agenda as if it were my own. I intend to earn your support for the House agenda, not to demand it. I pledge to help you pursue an optimistic vision for the future of Florida: one full of promise, one full of hope, one full of choices for the people that we represent.”*

Time, tough divisive issues, and ambition in politics often have ways of altering the best laid plans. The chapter on Speaker Byrd provides some detail into how his two years unfolded. They did not work out as Byrd had hoped, which is often the case in the political arena, but in looking back on his term of office, especially his first year as Speaker, there were some pretty hefty policy changes passed that had lasting impact on the economy and policy history of Florida. He chose not to participate in the writing of this book.

Allan Bense remains the same person he was both before and during his speakership. He is as real as real can get. He relished his time in the Speaker’s Office and always gives credit to those who served with him. When he stepped up to the rostrum he always had that small introspective smile, reflecting his joy and looking across the Chamber, taking in the noise, the interaction and the energy of the room. Bense addressed the Chamber his first day as Speaker, saying, *“Wow! They said the view was nice. It’s nice. It’s nice. It’s really—it’s very nice!”* But he went on to capture his feelings about serving as Speaker on November 16, 2004, and how he viewed service as a part of life as you come to the House, serve, then go home.

Bense had asked former Speaker Hyatt Brown to be the one to present him with



the gavel, “signifying his authority as the new Speaker of the House of Representatives.”

*“And, Hyatt Brown, we brought you out of hibernation. Seriously, over the last few weeks I have been listening to audio tapes of previous Speakers... But I’ve listened to tapes of how each one of you ran the Florida House and procedural snafus that went on from time to time, but I have always admired Hyatt Brown because number one, he’s a very, very successful businessperson, and he was here for eight years and walked away. Never came back. I think this is the second time you’ve been back to the House, or maybe the third time. Second time he’s been back.”*

Bense served with distinction and left elected public service. Eight days before the end of his last session, he addressed the House, capturing in brief what his approach to the job had been, “... believe me, I eat, breathe, and sleep the Florida House of Representatives, and I will until our task is done next week.” Since serving as Speaker he has played many roles for Florida, served on boards and commissions, headed business organizations and now serves as the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of his alma mater, Florida State University—the second former Florida Speaker of the House to serve in that role. He has also focused his energy on being a successful Florida businessman.

In 2006, Marco Rubio reached several milestones when he assumed the office as Speaker of the House. He was the first from Miami-Dade, Florida’s largest population county, since Dick Pettigrew in the early ’70s. He was the first Cuban-American Speaker, and at that time, one of the youngest ever to serve in that role at the age of 35. Doyle Conner, elected as Speaker in 1957, was the youngest in the modern era, elected at the age of 28. Current Speaker Will Weatherford was handed the gavel at 33.

Former Speaker Bense handed the gavel to Rubio. After a lengthy and moving address that laid the groundwork for the coming two years, he further solidified his reputation as an orator. In speaking of the hard working constituencies of each member, Rubio said, *“They deserve leaders who will speak for those who cannot speak for themselves, who will use their influence on behalf of those who have none of their own. Leaders that will unite us through our common hopes, not divide us through our darkest fears. The great voices of this era calling us to the great causes of our time. So, make it your deepest aspiration to provide that type of leadership. Reject the political culture we have*



*inherited and in its place create one worthy of the great people that we serve and the great causes that await. And if you do, if we succeed, nothing we will ever do in public service will be more meaningful.”*

Rubio left the House only to go on and challenge the Governor-elect, Charlie Crist, sitting before him as he spoke that day in a race for the U.S. Senate. Rubio prevailed against Crist—running as an Independent since polls showed him clearly losing to Rubio in a Republican primary—and former Congressman Kendrick Meek, running as a Democrat.

Following Rubio as the Republican designated for the speakership was Ray Sansom. He was sworn in on November 18, 2008. Florida had no idea of what was to come and that day was like all the other organization sessions, full of joy and promise. Sansom focused first on God and family:

*“I, first, want to thank God for His blessing and His strength and purpose in my life. I will pray every day for wisdom, for calmness, for faithfulness and courage throughout these two years. I want to thank my wife, Tricia; you are my soulmate and best friend. We’ve known each other since the fourth grade; she’s been with me through many, many things. I love you very much. Thank you for your support and your patience. You’re my most trusted friend, you’re my most trusted supporter, and you have the most pure motives when we talk and you advise me for the future.”*

He then went on to talk about the issues facing Florida:

*“The 84<sup>th</sup> Florida House of Representatives is facing some of the greatest challenges in our state’s history. We have an economy that has slowed down and needs to be awakened . . . . It appears to me that in Florida that every time businesses seem to face the finish line, we continue to move the line further and further away for their success, and there just seems to be an exhaustion . . . The last paragraph I hope that people will write about the Florida House is that we were smart. Not Rhodes Scholars. We’re not looking at grade point averages, but that we’re looking at good common sense. That we will live smart, we will think smart, and we will make smart decisions.”*

It is unfortunate that we will never know the measure of Ray Sansom as a Speaker since he resigned before his first regular session due to legal entanglements that all



knew would distract from his term of service. Over time, all charges were dropped against Sansom. But during his ordeal he lost positions, his reputation suffered, and he was not able to fulfill his dream of leading. The House, as an institution, moved on, avoiding what could have been highly problematic.

On March 3, 2009, after election as Speaker, Larry Cretul presided over opening day of the 84<sup>th</sup> House of Representatives since statehood in 1845. Business and pomp and circumstance went about as usual, even with the events of the prior months being always present, but never intrusive or disrupting. It is interesting to note that eight former Speakers from both parties were in attendance: Tucker, Haben, Moffitt, Thompson, Thrasher, Feeney, Rubio, and Webster. Also in attendance were seven former Minority Leaders from both parties: Tillman, Richmond, Kiser, Mortham, Bowen, Patchett, and Gelber.

Cretul was brief and to the point:

*“Last November, each and every one of us was elected to serve the constituency in our district. And not only did we take on that responsibility of serving the constituents in our district, but also representing the 18-million-plus people in the state of Florida. Unless you have been out of the country or away from your district, you know the challenges that we are facing, and it is an uphill battle for all of us. But I know that, working together in cooperation with everyone in this room, we’re going to succeed. And it will be 60 days from now—actually 59 and a wake up—we’ll be going home, we’ll have passed a budget and done all the necessary things that our constituents expect us to do.”*

His remarks concluded, the House reaffirmed the appointments of Adam Hasner as Majority Leader, Bob Ward as Clerk of the House and Earnie Sumner as Sergeant at Arms, and then the House moved to taking up a resolution honoring Palm Beach County on the occasion of its Centennial celebration. The business of the House goes on, in all times and in all circumstances.

On November 16, 2010, Dean Cannon received the gavel in organization session from former Speaker Cretul. The economy in the U.S. and in Florida had not improved and the challenges were as deep or deeper than mentioned two years prior



by Cretul from the rostrum. Cannon, too, was elected by unanimous vote, Minority Leader Ron Saunders having moved that nominations cease, that the House dispense with a roll call vote and that a unanimous vote be recorded, all of which were done.

Cannon opened his term of office speaking eloquently to the proper role of government, paying homage to the Founding principles, cautioning members that:

*“It’s unfortunate, but true, that a terrible temptation when you are part of government is to succumb to the notion that we in Tallahassee can make all things better through government. It’s so easy to see people facing challenges and think if we just had more government revenue, we could create a program to fix that, or if the government would just impose more regulations, these bad things would never happen to good people. My friends, these sentiments may be well intended, but they are dangerous.”*

Dean Cannon left the speakership in November 2012. He had moved his family up to Tallahassee during his term of office and has decided to remain in Tallahassee, opening a governmental relations firm in partnership with former Speaker Cretul. When Cannon stood at the rostrum to give remarks to the House members, he looked back and gave members his personal insight on what it meant to serve and how best to comport oneself in public office:

*“And so, I would like to leave you with one simple truth, among many, that I’ve learned during my years here. I’ve learned in some of the hardest ways imaginable, but it’s this—do not be afraid. Don’t be afraid of failure or of success... It is better to fight and lose than to shrink from a worthy fight. Don’t be afraid to change. Challenge yourself to be better and be willing, gladly, to be wrong... Because the hard things in this process are really the only ones worth doing.”*

House member Will Weatherford was designated as the Republican Conference’s candidate for Speaker in a ceremony in the House Chamber on March 7, 2011. He was moved by the occasion and offered a poignant speech, reflecting his strength of faith, family, friends and commitment to service for Florida. He cited the words of Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels, *“On election nights we remind each other that victory is not vindication, it is an instruction. It is not an endorsement, but an assignment.”* Weatherford enlarged upon those key points:



*“Members, by tradition, a leader designation ceremony is not a time for me to lay out policy proposals or to talk about the challenges we face in the two months ahead. Instead, it’s more appropriate to look beyond the present and into the future and remind ourselves of the basic principles that guide us. Because you see, I believe that every member in this Chamber, Republican and Democrat, believes in the promise of Florida. Our task is to debate what that promise is and how it will be achieved. That debate is for the soul of our state. It’s a battle for the promise of Florida. And to be clear, this debate isn’t between those who are principled and those who are not. Instead, it revolves around the question of what principles should guide us, distinguish us, and define us.”*

## REAPPORTIONMENT

In looking back over the past two decades of Florida legislative history, it is easy to overlook the incredible influence of the art of drawing maps that comply with law, the Constitution, court interpretations, amendments to the Florida Constitution and the reality that every member in the Chamber has a direct stake in the outcome of reapportionment. It is important to note the critical role reapportionment has played in getting the House to where it is today. In interviews, both Wallace and Webster placed a tremendous focus on the impact of the 1992 reapportionment process on the makeup of the House and how it ended up contributing to the rise of Republican dominance for the past two decades.

The maps drawn in 1992 later determined who would control the Legislature, ending over a hundred years of Democratic control. The 2002 map added to the Republican majority, yielding more than two-thirds membership in the Republican conference. In 2012, the drawing of maps was further influenced by new constitutional amendments. Will Weatherford chaired the House efforts and the results probably yielded a record number of House members being pitted against each other. Many states have independent commissions to draw election maps, but Florida’s maps are drawn by the Legislature. Weatherford stated, *“It’s the first time in the nation this many members have been drawn [by a legislature] into the same districts where it wasn’t a court order.”* While it is difficult to determine this historically, it is clear that in Florida, according to the Florida Democratic Party, there were 58 members affected in this way.



It is not an easy process, always contentious and filled with tripwires and landmines that can ensnare those who engage in the drawing of maps. It always involves the courts as the final arbiter. Yet in 2010, the two people who had already secured the votes to lead their Chambers in 2012, Don Gaetz in the Senate and Will Weatherford in the House, each took on the challenge of chairing their Chamber's committee assigned to develop the maps by which Florida would elect members of Congress and Florida's senators and representatives. They held hearings all across Florida, taking scores of hours of testimony. This time, every group or individual who had an opinion could easily go online and draw their own map. Every block and every house in Florida could be quickly moved, which was fraught with the potential for both disaster and conflict. Yet, under this leadership the process moved smoothly, with the Senate districts needing only small tweaking after court review and the House districts being upheld in their entirety. There were no protracted legal battles, no delays in moving forward and the result was found to be fair by all involved. In the House, the Democrats gained five seats and many incumbent Republicans from the 2010-12 term were forced to run against other incumbents, with some deciding to leave public service or seek other offices.

Representative Seth McKeel, from Lakeland, credits the leadership of Weatherford in this difficult assignment claiming the results were, *"not good fortune or accident, this was the fruit of the decision of a man of character, choosing what has too often become the path least chosen, the righteous, honest and most difficult path. There were many who said it could not be done, should not be done. Will restored the faith that there can be triumph when taking the higher ground."*

Senate President Don Gaetz looked back upon the process as a positive experience all around. *"The reapportionment process is a civil, but potentially volcanic process. There was every reason to expect the House and the Senate to dissolve into bickering and posturing. That didn't happen because of Will Weatherford. He has the ability to see around corners and over hills and predict where there might be problems. He was a perfect partner in problem solving."*

President Gaetz reflected upon the constitutional system of the U.S. and the impact on the state of Florida processes. *"As you know, the Framers of the U.S. Constitution fully intended there to be a dynamic tension in the process. That's the way it*



*is supposed to work... with checks and balances and counterchecks. The Speaker and the President are not supposed to hold hands in the warm spring rain. However, as sometimes has happened in the past, personalities and other extended issues exacerbated the normally expected tensions. That didn't happen at all here."*

## THE PROMISE OF TOMORROW

The Speakers are a reflection of us all as they have led and will lead us towards capturing the benefits to be found lived within the Promise of Florida! They also reflect the divergent paths we have all traveled, perhaps more so in Florida than in other states. Seven of the eleven Speakers featured in this work were born elsewhere. Only Wallace, Bense, Rubio and Sansom were born in Florida. Our leaders mirror the family journeys of millions of Floridians, like the Weatherford family, who came to Florida in their station wagons and their mini-vans, seeking better lives, better opportunities and a better place to raise families.

As Floridians, we are all challenged each day to work towards a brighter future and the promise that each day in our great state brings. We must challenge ourselves as offered in the challenge by Dean Cannon's address to the House, where he questioned those who would avoid challenges and put off the tough things until tomorrow *"based on an assumption that we are better off if we can avoid tough situations, and sidestep difficulties and they failed to grasp that it is those very challenges and difficulties that define us... It is better to fight and lose than to shrink from a worthy fight!"*

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Legislature and other public offices, who provided way too much material for a book of limited pages covering this timeframe. I attempted to frame each two year period to give color to the people and events of the times. Much occurred that did not get included, but time and space required editorial license.





## FROM THE AUTHOR

Writing this brief history of the Speakers of the Florida House of Representatives is a singular honor for me. My adult working life after college began when in 1972 I visited a local Tallahassee legislator I knew, Carroll Webb, looking for a job as I approached graduation from FSU. He made a few phone calls and I found myself in the Speaker's office being interviewed and then referred to a newly elected legislator, Barry Kutun from Miami-Dade, for a position as an LA. Two years later, I moved back to Tallahassee and served on committee staff where I got to do my first passion, policy work, handling corrections, parole, probation and youth services.

A lifetime of many positions, moving to another state, raising a family and running a business followed until 1999, when we were able to sell our consulting and management firm and move back home to Tallahassee. From being President and CEO at the James Madison Institute, I was blessed to return to the House staff in 2002 where I served as Staff Director for the Policy Committee, the Select Committee on Medical Liability Insurance, the Select Committee on Workers' Compensation, the ad hoc Committee on Public Security and as staff coordinator for COOP and COG.

One final but important note so the readers know how deep my fondness runs for the legislative institution here in Florida. I met my wife and lifetime partner, Kathleen Armstrong Moore, in the entryway to the old Speaker's office, long ago torn down, by the set of old metal stairs that led to the old attic of the Capitol. She worked in the Minority Office then. It was love at first sight. So I guess I owe much to the House and to the Office of the Speaker. It was there where I began both my working career and the family that has provided for me The Promise that is my life as a Floridian.

*Dr. Ed H. Moore currently serves as President of the Independent Colleges and Universities of Florida.*





We often write about the people in our history as they are the ones who act upon the stage, making the sometimes tedious and often difficult decisions about our government that have an impact on who we are as a society and what we do, both as individuals and in the collective body. This book is also about the people who have served as elected leaders in Florida, but it is more. It is written to capture the spirit of Florida, the promise of Florida, and the role of one institution, The Florida House of Representatives. We often forget that our institutions also have a life of their own. Through the doors of the House have come many people from many walks of life. It has seen comedy, tragedy, times of stress and times of joy. Many have dedicated their professional lives to making it run smoothly and effectively. Many have found their life's partner within its walls. Many have made lifelong friends and many have lost friends made there, too. We all come and go about our lives but our institutions often serve as a touchstone for our experiences.

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This book is dedicated to those who have served within the walls, either elected, appointed as staff or reaching in from the outside to have your voices heard. It is dedicated to the ongoing Promise of Florida and a future filled with boundless opportunity.



WRITTEN BY DR. ED H. MOORE  
PRODUCED BY THE FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

