

Sen. Bill Nelson (D–Fla.)

Senior Senator from Florida



Residence: Orlando

Born: Sept. 29, 1942; Miami, Fla.

Religion: Presbyterian

Family: Wife, Grace C. Nelson; two children

Education: Yale U., B.A. 1965 (political science); U. of Virginia, J.D. 1968

Military Service: Army Reserve 1965-1971

Career: Lawyer

First Elected: 2000 (3rd term)

Latest Election: 2012 General (55.23%)

Political Highlights: Fla. House, 1972-78; U.S. House, 1979-91; sought Democratic nomination for governor, 1990; Fla. treasurer and insurance commissioner, 1995-2001

Committees:

- Armed Services (Airland; Emerging Threats & Capabilities; Seapower)
- Budget
- Commerce, Science & Transportation (Aviation Operations, Safety & Security; Communications, Technology & the Internet; Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries & Coast Guard; Science & Space - chairman)
- Finance (Energy, Natural Resources & Infrastructure; Health Care; Social Security, Pensions & Family Policy)
- Special Aging - Chairman

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CQ Politics in America Profile

(Updated: April 4, 2013)

The low-key Nelson casts himself as a left-leaning centrist and pays extra attention to topics frequently associated with his state: the space program, the military and old people.

Although he can claim to be the only astronaut in Congress, Nelson isn't a particularly flashy lawmaker. His parochial approach to his job and mild demeanor have made him a successful, if not beloved, politician. He's not linked to the drama of leadership battles, and colleagues describe him as both nice and careful. The only Democrat currently holding statewide office in Florida, he has dispatched a string of ineffectual Republican challengers.

Each victory earned him more clout on his Senate committees, and those committees help him tend to Florida's needs. Nelson in the 113th Congress (2013-14) is the chairman of the Special Aging Committee. That panel has no legislative authority but can hold hearings on just about any

subject pertaining to older Americans. Nelson has an interest in studying financial scams and other abuses directed at the elderly.

He's also the No. 3 Democrat on the Armed Services Committee — Nelson returned to the panel for the 113th after a two-year absence, giving up a seat on the Intelligence Committee to do so. He indicates broad support for many Obama administration plans, such as the troop withdrawal from Afghanistan. When the Pentagon saw significant budget reductions in the 112th Congress (2011-12), Nelson was his usual diplomatic self. He spoke of the need for overall fiscal restraint, but suggested putting off further defense cuts for a year so Congress could study the issue.

When he allowed himself a rare display of irritation in early 2013, it was to protest another member's perceived bad behavior. As the panel voted to approve the nomination of Chuck Hagel for Defense secretary, he said Texas Republican Ted Cruz had "gone over the line" with his attacks on Hagel.

Florida has its share of military bases, and Nelson's office lists as one of his goals "dispersing our Atlantic nuclear fleet for security reasons." That's another way of saying that Nelson wants carriers and other ships, probably in Virginia, moved to a new home base, probably in Florida. Virginia and Florida lawmakers have been engaged in a battle over aircraft carriers for years, and Virginia has the upper hand for now; the Obama administration in its fiscal 2013 budget request didn't ask for money to move a carrier from Norfolk to Naval Station Mayport in Jacksonville.

The state also has a lot of veterans. Nelson was the primary Senate sponsor of a 2012 law allowing veterans who are transitioning to civilian jobs to use their relevant military training to fulfill federal license requirements. However, Republicans in 2012 blocked a Nelson bill to create a program matching veterans with certain conservation, police and firefighting jobs; they said it was an election year gimmick.

On the Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee, Nelson tries to keep Florida tied to the U.S. space program, and it's not a passing interest. As an undergraduate at Yale University he wrote his senior thesis about the Kennedy Space Center. Nelson served in the U.S. House during the 1980s and chaired a subcommittee with jurisdiction over NASA; in that role he spent six days in 1986 orbiting Earth on the space shuttle Columbia.

He now chairs the Science and Space Subcommittee. Nelson was among the lawmakers who wrestled with the Obama administration after it proposed terminating the Constellation program, the planned successor to the space shuttle program, and shifting to commercial alternatives. He helped broker a deal to continue development of NASA's own rocket and crew vehicle, then steered it to enactment in 2010. During the 112th, Nelson questioned whether NASA was getting enough resources — or spending too much money on projects with private sector developers — to keep the rocket and crew vehicle on schedule.

The full committee has some jurisdiction over surface transportation programs. As Congress considered a two-year reauthorization of such programs in 2012, Nelson was one of the

lawmakers fighting for a provision to give Gulf Coast states 80 percent of the Clean Water Act fines related to the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill. It was included in the final law.

Nelson opposes oil drilling off of Florida's coast, citing the potential damage to the state's tourism economy, environment and military installations should a spill occur. He helped negotiate a 2006 deal that banned wells close to the Florida coast. He also sponsored a 2011 bill to prevent oil and gas companies operating in Cuban waters from getting U.S. oil and gas leases — unless they have a response plan and resources to deal with a spill in Cuba that might spread to U.S. waters.

Nelson is no friendlier to oil and gas companies on the Finance Committee, which handles tax matters. Like many Democrats, he has urged an end to credits and other tax advantages enjoyed by that industry, calling them “entitlement spending without accountability.”

Finance also looks at many of the entitlement programs that older Americans rely on. As Democrats prepared their health care overhaul in the 111th Congress (2009-10), Nelson, a former state insurance commissioner, called for a bipartisan approach and the creation of state-based insurance pools. But he couldn't drum up support for an amendment to require the pharmaceutical industry to give the government price breaks on drugs sold to “dual eligibles” — people who qualify for both Medicare and Medicaid.

Nelson often steers clear of divisive social issues. In 2010, when the Armed Services Committee considered a repeal of the ban on openly gay servicemembers, Nelson said he wasn't sure about legislating on the issue while the Pentagon was reviewing the matter. He backed a compromise that would have allowed for a repeal after the Defense Department completed a study of its possible effect. After opposing same-sex marriage for most of his career, he announced in April 2013 that he had changed his mind.

Nelson's great-great-grandfather immigrated to America from Denmark in 1829, settling near Chipley in the Florida Panhandle. Much of Nelson's family still lives there. Nelson's father was a lawyer; his mother was a schoolteacher. Nelson majored in political science at Yale, and after law school and a stint in the Army Reserve, he won and held for six years a seat in the state legislature.

In 1978, he won a bid for an open U.S. House seat. He was an early member of the moderate (and now defunct) Democratic Leadership Council that helped boost Bill Clinton to the national stage. Despite a string of re-elections and the publicity attending his adventure as an astronaut, Nelson lost the 1990 Democratic primary for governor to former Sen. Lawton Chiles. It remains his only electoral defeat. Four years later he was elected state insurance commissioner, and he dealt with the aftermath of Hurricane Andrew, which ravaged southern Florida and the state's insurance market in 1992.

Nelson was the front-runner in the 2000 race to succeed retiring Republican Sen. Connie Mack. He portrayed his opponent, 10-term congressman Bill McCollum, as too conservative for Florida, and he won the election with 51 percent of the vote. Republicans had high hopes of defeating him in 2006, but Republican Rep. Katherine Harris ran a muddled campaign and lost

by 22 points. Nelson looked vulnerable again heading into 2012. He faced GOP Rep. Connie Mack, his predecessor's son. The younger Mack ran a campaign that many analysts found limp, while Nelson stressed his moderation and attention to Florida. He won by 13 points.

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CQ Politics in America: State Description

(Updated: May 2003)

STATE LEGISLATURE

Legislature: 60 days March-May; session is often extended

House: 120 members; 2-year terms

2005 breakdown: 84R, 36D; 91 men, 29 women

Salary: \$29,916

Phone: (850) 488-1157

Senate: 40 members; 4-year terms

2005 breakdown: 26R, 14D; 31 men, 9 women

Salary: \$29,916

Phone: (850) 487-5270

STATE TERM LIMITS

Governor: 2 terms

House: 4 consecutive terms

Senate: 2 consecutive terms

URBAN STATISTICS

City	Population
Jacksonville	735,617

Miami	362,470
Tampa	303,447
St. Petersburg	248,232
Hialeah	226,419

REGISTERED VOTERS

Democrat	41%
Republican	38%
Unaffiliated	18%
Others	2%

POPULATION

2004 population (est.)	17,397,161
2000 population	15,982,378
1990 population	12,937,926
Percent change (1990-2000)	+23.5%
Rank among states (2004)	4

Median age	38.7
Born in state	32.7%
Foreign born	16.7%
Violent crime rate	812/100,000
Poverty level	12.5%
Federal workers	118,600
Military	106,092

REDISTRICTING

Florida gained two House seats in reapportionment. The state

legislature drew a new, 25-district map, which the governor signed on March 27, 2002.

MISCELLANEOUS

Web: www.myflorida.com

Capital: Tallahassee

STATE ELECTION OFFICIAL

(850) 245-6200

DEMOCRATIC HEADQUARTERS

(850) 222-3411

REPUBLICAN HEADQUARTERS

(850) 222-7920

Dist.	White	Black	Asian	Hisp.
1	78%	14%	2%	3%
2	72	22	1	3
3	38	49	2	8
4	78	14	2	4
5	88	5	1	6
6	79	12	2	5
7	81	9	1	7
8	70	7	3	18
9	85	4	2	8
10	88	4	2	4

11	48	27	2	20
12	72	13	1	12
13	86	4	1	8
14	84	5	1	9
15	78	7	2	11
16	82	6	1	10
17	18	55	2	21
18	30	6	1	63
19	77	6	2	13
20	67	8	2	21
21	21	7	2	70
22	82	4	2	11
23	29	51	1	14
24	80	6	2	10
25	24	10	2	62
STATE	65	14	2	17
U.S.	69	12	4	13

	Median	White	Blue	Service
Dist.	Income	Collar	Collar	Industry
1	\$36,738	57%	25%	18%
2	\$34,718	62	21	18
3	\$29,785	52	27	21
4	\$43,947	65	21	14
5	\$34,815	55	27	17
6	\$36,846	61	23	16

7	\$40,525	63	21	16
8	\$41,568	64	20	17
9	\$40,742	68	18	14
10	\$37,168	65	20	15
11	\$33,559	61	22	17
12	\$37,769	56	28	16
13	\$40,187	59	24	18
14	\$42,541	60	22	19
15	\$39,397	58	22	19
16	\$39,408	58	25	17
17	\$30,426	52	24	23
18	\$32,298	60	21	18
19	\$42,237	67	17	15
20	\$44,034	69	16	14
21	\$41,426	64	23	14
22	\$51,200	69	16	14
23	\$31,309	48	28	24
24	\$43,954	65	20	15
25	\$44,489	62	23	15
STATE	\$38,819	61	22	17
U.S.	\$41,994	60	25	15

Dist.	College				Sq. Miles
	Over 64	Under 18	Education	Rural	
1	13%	24%	20%	23%	4,642
2	12	23	24	38	9,425
3	11	28	13	10	1,796

4	11	24	24	22	4,118
5	26	20	14	36	4,044
6	15	23	21	31	2,912
7	18	22	25	13	1,797
8	14	23	26	8	987
9	20	22	25	6	634
10	23	18	23	0	175
11	12	25	21	0	244
12	17	25	17	16	1,956
13	29	18	24	11	2,599
14	27	18	24	9	1,057
15	20	22	22	10	2,545
16	25	21	20	15	4,538
17	11	29	14	0	97
18	18	19	26	1	355
19	30	19	26	0	231
20	17	21	30	0	160
21	13	24	23	0	135
22	21	19	34	1	268
23	12	28	13	2	3,362
24	15	23	26	9	1,583
25	9	29	20	6	4,268
STATE	18	23	22	11	53,927
U.S.	12	26	24	21	3,537,438

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Largest Companies
(Updated: January 2014)

	Company	Parent Company	Industry	Annual Income	Total Employees in the State
1	World Fuel Services Corp		aviation marine & land fuel products and related services	\$38,945,338,000	121
2	Publix Super Markets, Inc.		supermarkets chain	\$27,706,772,000	2000
3	Tech Data Corporation		whol computer peripheral equipments	\$26,488,124,000	3200
4	Jabil Circuit, Inc.		mfg circuit board assemblies and systems	\$18,336,894,000	1344
5	Autonation, Inc.		automotive retailing & automotive services	\$15,668,800,000	400
6	Carnival Corporation		operates cruise line and resorts/casinos	\$15,382,000,000	1000
7	Nextera Energy, Inc.		electric utility	\$14,256,000,000	15
8	Gerdau Ameristeel US Inc.	Gerdau USA Inc.	blast furnace-steel work mfg misc structural mtl	\$13,172,800,000	300
9	CSX Corporation		rail-based transportation	\$11,756,000,000	100
10	Office Depot Inc.		retail & wholesale office supplies	\$10,695,652,000	2400
11	Florida Power & Light Company Inc	Nextera Energy, Inc.	electric utility	\$10,114,000,000	15
12	Winn-Dixie Stores, Inc.	Opal Holdings, LLC	ret groceries gasoline service station ret drugs/sundries	\$8,813,000,000	1000
13	Darden Restaurants, Inc.		seafood restaurants	\$8,551,900,000	1400
14	Gerdau USA Inc.		blast furnace-steel work mfg misc structural mtl	\$8,092,000,000	350
15	Bi-Lo, LLC	Bi-Lo Holding, LLC	ret groceries	\$7,868,100,000	1000
16	Royal Caribbean		deep sea passenger transportation	\$7,688,024,000	3400

Company	Parent Company	Industry	Annual Income	Total Employees in the State
Cruises Ltd.				
17 Wellcare Health Plans, Inc.		hospital and medical service plans	\$7,409,032,000	0
18 Fidelity National Financial, Inc.		title insurance casualty insurance escrow agent restaurant management mfg electrical components for automobiles	\$7,201,700,000	0
19 Mortgage Investors Corporation		mortgage banker/correspondent	\$6,746,011,348	225
20 Gmri, Inc.	Darden Restaurants, Inc.	eating place	\$6,431,600,000	950
21 Brightstar Corp.		whol electronic parts/equipment	\$6,312,914,000	390
22 Ryder System, Inc.		rental & leasing services	\$6,256,967,000	1000
23 Health Management Associates, Inc.		general hospital	\$5,878,238,000	100
24 Fidelity National Information Services, Inc.		technology solutions processing services and information-based services to financial services industry	\$5,807,600,000	2200
25 Sfn Group, Inc.	Randstad North America, L.P.	help supply services patent owner/lessor	\$5,758,500,000	460

Notes:

- Only primary industries are listed for any company, although a company may be active in others.
- Annual figures for privately-held companies (including privately-held subsidiaries) are estimated.

Source: Dun & Bradstreet (D&B)

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(Updated: February 2014)

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Committees, Leadership Positions and Caucus Memberships

(Updated: February 2014)

Committee and Subcommittee Assignments

- Armed Services (3rd of 14 Democrats)
 - Airland
 - Emerging Threats & Capabilities
 - Seapower
- Budget (3rd of 12 Democrats)

- Commerce, Science & Transportation (3rd of 13 Democrats)
 - Aviation Operations, Safety & Security
 - Communications, Technology & the Internet
 - Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries & Coast Guard
 - Science & Space (chairman)
- Finance (6th of 13 Democrats)
 - Energy, Natural Resources & Infrastructure
 - Health Care
 - Social Security, Pensions & Family Policy
- Special Aging - Chairman

Leadership Positions and Party Committee Assignments

- Democratic Policy and Communications Committee

Selected Caucus and Special Organization Memberships

- Moderate Dems Working Group
- Senate New Democrat Coalition

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Elections & Vote for President

(Updated: December 2012)

Election	Candidate	Votes	Percent
2012 General	Bill Nelson (D)	4,523,451	55.2%
	Connie Mack (R)	3,458,267	42.2%
	Bill Gaylor (NPA)	126,079	1.5%
	Chris Borgia (NPA)	82,089	1.0%
	Naomi Craine -- write-in (WRI)	19	.0%
	Lawrence Sidney Scott -- write-in (WRI)	18	.0%
	Robert Monroe -- write-in (WRI)	12	.0%
	Piotr Blass -- write-in (WRI)	9	.0%
	Lionel Long -- write-in (WRI)	2	.0%
2012 Primary	Bill Nelson (D)	690,112	78.8%
	Glenn Burkett (D)	185,629	21.2%
2006 General	Bill Nelson (D)	2,890,548	60.3%

	Katherine Harris (R)	1,826,127	38.1%
	Belinda Noah (X)	24,880	.5%
	Brian Moore (I)	19,695	.4%
	Floyd Ray Frazier (X)	16,628	.4%
	Roy Tanner (X)	15,562	.3%
	write-ins	94	.0%
2006 Primary	Bill Nelson (D)		unopposed
2000 General	Bill Nelson (D)	2,989,487	51.0%
	Bill McCollum (R)	2,705,348	46.2%
	Willie Logan (I)	80,830	1.4%
	Joe Simonetta (NL)	26,087	.4%
	Darrell L. McCormick (I)	21,664	.4%
	Joel Deckard (REF)	17,338	.3%
	Andy Martin (I)	15,889	.3%
	write-ins	88	.0%
2000 Primary	Bill Nelson (D)	692,147	77.5%
	Newall Jerome Daughtrey (D)	105,650	11.8%
	David B. Higginbottom (D)	95,492	10.7%
1990 Primary <i>Fla. governor</i>	Lawton Chiles (D)	746,325	69.5%
	Bill Nelson (D)	327,731	30.5%
1988 General <i>FL-11 representative</i>	Bill Nelson (D)	168,390	60.8%
	Bill Tolley (R)	108,373	39.2%
1988 Primary <i>FL-11 representative</i>	Bill Nelson (D)		unopposed
1986 General <i>FL-11 representative</i>	Bill Nelson (D)	149,109	72.7%
	Scott Ellis (R)	55,952	27.3%
1986 Primary <i>FL-11 representative</i>	Bill Nelson (D)		unopposed
1984 General <i>FL-11 representative</i>	Bill Nelson (D)	145,764	60.5%
	Rob Quartel (R)	95,115	39.5%
	write-in	11	.0%
1984 Primary <i>FL-11 representative</i>	Bill Nelson (D)	41,232	85.6%
	Bill Roundtree (D)	6,935	14.4%

1982 General	Bill Nelson (D)	101,746	70.6%
<i>FL-11 representative</i>	Joel Robinson (R)	42,422	29.4%
1982 Primary	Bill Nelson (D)		unopposed
<i>FL-11 representative</i>			
1980 General	Bill Nelson (D)	139,468	70.4%
<i>FL-09 representative</i>	Stan Dowiat (R)	58,734	29.6%
1980 Primary	Bill Nelson (D)		unopposed
<i>FL-09 representative</i>			
1978 General	Bill Nelson (D)	89,543	61.5%
<i>FL-09 representative</i>	Edward J. Gurney (R)	56,074	38.5%
1978 Primary	Bill Nelson (D)	36,565	86.0%
<i>FL-09 representative</i>	Curtis R. Sears (D)	5,955	14.0%

[Political Party Abbreviations](#) | [Explanation of Primary Elections](#)

Vote for President

Note: AP recalculated the 2008 district vote for president to reflect new, post-redistricting boundaries.

Year	Republican		Democratic		Independent	
2012	4,163,447	49%	4,237,756	50%	72,976	1%
2008	4,045,624	48%	4,282,074	51%	63,046	1%
2004	3,964,522	52%	3,583,544	47%	--	--
2000	2,912,790	49%	2,912,253	49%	97,488	2%
1996	2,226,117	42%	2,533,502	48%	482,237	9%
1992	2,171,781	41%	2,071,651	39%	1,052,481	20%
1988	2,618,885	61%	1,656,701	39%	--	--
1984	2,730,350	65%	1,448,816	35%	--	--
1980	2,046,951	56%	1,419,475	39%	189,692	5%
1976	1,469,531	47%	1,636,000	52%	--	--
1972	1,857,759	72%	718,117	28%	--	--

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Interest Group Ratings

(Updated: May 2013)

Year	AFL-CIO	ADA	CCUS	ACU
2012	91%	90%	38%	8%
2011	79%	90%	64%	15%
2010	94%	90%	36%	8%
2009	100%	100%	43%	4%
2008	100%	95%	50%	8%
2007	95%	90%	45%	4%
2006	60%	60%	83%	40%
2005	71%	80%	50%	20%
2004	100%	80%	65%	4%
2003	77%	80%	48%	20%
2002	85%	70%	70%	30%
2001	100%	95%	43%	16%

House Service:

Year	AFL-CIO	ADA	CCUS	ACU
1990	86%	50%	0%	27%
1989	91%	60%	50%	31%
1988	71%	45%	43%	56%
1987	63%	52%	53%	35%
1986	43%	15%	61%	77%
1985	47%	30%	54%	71%
1984	15%	20%	57%	59%
1983	47%	40%	55%	57%
1982	43%	20%	45%	52%
1981	40%	10%	68%	71%
1980	37%	33%	82%	33%
1979	30%	11%	71%	69%

Source: Compiled by Congressional Quarterly based on information provided by each participating group.

[Interest Group Descriptions](#)

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