THE FLORIDA SENATE

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President

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The Florida Senate Marks Opening Day of the 2026 Regular Session

Tallahassee–The Florida Senate today marked the Opening Day of the 2026 Regular Session of the Florida Legislature.

"Again, this year, the Florida Legislature will pass a balanced budget that holds the line on state spending, pays down debt, cuts taxes, and saves for the future. That's the strong fiscal-responsibility Floridians expect and deserve, and that's the single best thing we in the Florida Legislature can do to keep our state on the right track," said Senate President Ben Albritton (R-Wauchula), who presided over the Senate's Opening Day sitting.

"Affordability is top of mind for many Florida families. Pandemic-era inflation did a number on the national and global economies. The impacts are real, and they are felt by Florida families every single day. We have a strong track record of keeping taxes low, and that will continue," continued President Albritton. "In fact, the vast majority of items needed to raise a family and retire with dignity are already tax-free. From tax-free grocery store food to diapers, clothes, and supplies for young children, key household safety items, to year-round hurricane preparedness, Florida has been laser-focused on affordability and has taken tremendous steps to keep our state affordable."

About the Senate's 2026 Opening Day Sitting

The opening prayer was given by Senator Darryl Rouson (D-St. Petersburg). The presentation of the Colors was led by the Polk County Sheriff's Office Honor Guard, Deputy Mitchell Green, Deputy Jefferson Goss, Deputy Darrell Johnakin, and Deputy Tyler Kissel, accompanied by Sheriff Grady Judd. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by the children and grandchildren of Senators. At the invitation of Senator Simon (R-Tallahassee), Senator Rouson, and the entire Senate Black Caucus, the National Anthem was played by students of the Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU) Marching 100. FAMU President Marva Johnson and Band Director Dr. Shelby Chipman accompanied the Marching 100. The Doctor of the Day was Senator Ralph E. Massullo, Jr. (R-Lecanto), who specializes in Dermatology. Senator Massullo was elected to the Senate in December. A ceremonial swearing-in ceremony was held during today's sitting. Senator Massullo also offered the Benediction at the conclusion of the Senate sitting.

Following the Senate's Opening Day Sitting and the Legislature's Joint Session, Senators and their families will attend a luncheon hosted by culinary students training at Feeding South Florida and the Treasure Coast Food Bank. For several years, the Senate has highlighted career and technical education with a focus on work-based learning linked to local employment opportunities. This year, a series of events will showcase the culinary training programs within the Feeding Florida Network.

President Albritton's Opening Day Remarks as Prepared for Delivery (following introductions of dignitaries and special guests):

It's amazing what a difference a year can make. It's not often that 10 percent of the makeup of the Senate changes between year 1 and year 2 of a term.

When we came together for opening day 10 months ago, we had just lost Senator Thompson. We all miss Geraldine. She taught me so much in the conversations we had together. She will always have a special place in our hearts, and we continue to lift up her family in prayer. We are pleased to welcome Senator Bracy-Davis – Welcome Senator to your first Opening Day in the Senate.

As we all know, shortly after Opening Day last year, Senator Fine was elected to Congress. We are pleased to welcome back to the Senate, Senator Mayfield, who previously served this body as Majority Leader and Rules Chair. Welcome back Debbie.

And, as you know, this Summer, two of our own were appointed by Governor DeSantis to lead our state in the Executive Branch.

Senator Massullo, welcome to the Senate dear Sir.

We also look forward to welcoming another new Senator in March.

I believe we can all agree serving in the Senate is a privilege like none other. We are a bonified member-driven body, and I hope each of you feel encouraged and empowered to do the work you were sent here to do.

I'm not the King of the Senate, collaboration and communication are the driving forces here. I'm here to serve Floridians and each of you, in my own way, using Biblical principles.

As we embark on a year of nationwide celebration in honor of America's 250th Anniversary, I've been reflecting on our nation's founding and the tremendous blessing, honor and responsibility that comes with service in the Florida Senate.

The early writings of our nation's founders highlight the importance of the Senate. In fact, the authors of Federalist 63 state:

“History informs us of no long-lived republic which had not a Senate.”

They refer to the Senate as an anchor against popular fluctuations, a blend of stability and liberty.

In referring to the Senate, Federalist 62 states that no government can be respected without order. In fact, the authors make the case for establishing a Senate to counter the sudden impulses and violent passions of single assemblies.

And of course, we all know the famous legend:

Thomas Jefferson coming home from France, called George Washington to account at the breakfast table for having agreed to a second, and, as Jefferson thought, unnecessary legislative chamber.

“Why,” asked Washington, “did you just now pour that coffee into your saucer, before drinking?”

“To cool it,” answered Jefferson, “my throat is not made of brass.”

“Even so,” rejoined Washington, “we pour our legislation into the senatorial saucer to cool it.”

These writings and anecdotes are a reminder that our duty as Senators is much bigger than each of us as individuals.

It’s bigger than personalities.

It’s bigger than any one issue, or any one session.

It’s an enduring commitment to the people of this state, a commitment we share with those who’ve come before us and those who will follow.

As we reflect on the historical role of the Senate in maintaining stability, let me reiterate two wise quotes I believe should govern our thoughts and actions:

“Never take down a fence until you know why it was put up.”

“Measure three times, cut once.”

We all have something to reflect on here. Whether it’s in government or in life, know what you are doing and know why.

It takes real work to understand the “why,” but that matters most.

Change can many times be a buzzword. I believe our goal as the Senate should be to see clearly where we have been, where we are now, where we want to go, and why.

The Senate should measure and ask questions.

It might take more time. In fact, it might take a lot more time, but that's the design of our form of government, and the role of our Senate.

Floridians expect checks and balances, not rash or impulsive decision-making. Data and understanding are always valuable to everyone involved in the conversation. Not just sometimes, but always.

Laws and programs can be revised. They can be changed and updated. We can add new laws and take away old ones.

In fact, that's what we do every session in Tallahassee.

But the fact is, the laws we make have lasting consequences on Floridians – they have profound and sometimes permanent impacts on families, on businesses, and on our economy.

Floridians expect the Senate to have thoughtful deliberations, and they trust we will try to understand the outcomes and consequences of the decisions we make before we make them.

They expect us, the Florida Senate, to get things right for the right reasons.

As I begin my last Session as Senate President, I'm renewing my personal focus on a rural renaissance in the State of Florida.

With your support, we made great progress last year with the passage of the Senate's Make Citrus Great Again and Farmers Feeding Florida initiatives.

Florida citrus is making a comeback, one tree at a time. The current balanced budget included $100 million for large scale field trials that combine grove management, therapeutic tools, and disease resistant varieties for new plantings and rehabilitation of existing groves.

Citrus has been a pillar of our state since the 1500's and remains a key part of Florida's Rural Renaissance. Research and new technologies offered renewed hope for the future of citrus in Florida. I'm keeping my foot on the gas – Florida Citrus is not going down on my watch.

Across rural Florida, our farm families have deep connections to our state and its people. In partnership with Commissioner Simpson, our Farmers Feeding Florida initiative is connecting hungry families with farmers who produce fresh, wholesome food, a much-needed hand-up for families when it matters most.

Linking Florida farmers in rural areas with our urban food bank distribution channels and expanding our food bank and pantry infrastructure statewide enhances rural economies by preventing food waste and supporting farm families who are producing important commodities.

In just the first quarter of operations, the Farmers Feeding Florida Program has recovered over 4.6 million pounds of fresh, Florida-grown food and distributed 3.8 million to families across the state.

I'm so grateful to the hardworking staff of the Department of Agriculture and Feeding Florida for making this program a huge success.

Attacking food insecurity unites Floridians, across the political spectrum, like nothing else can. Everyone I have spoken to about the program supports making sure children in Florida don't go to bed hungry. It's uniting, it's powerful, it's the right thing to do. It is a Biblical calling and a clear and present expression of love as an action. Love for Florida children, love for struggling Florida families, and love for the global brand of what Florida holds true.

Everyone who walking into the President's office in the Capitol passes a sign that says, "If you eat, you're involved in Agriculture."

That sign is intentional and is there for important reasons.

First, it's because that's who I am.

Second, because with all the serious, important issues and challenges we face in state government, we can't forget that Florida's agriculture industry is the key to thriving families, businesses, and communities across our state.

Florida Agriculture matters and that's a fact.

The Sergeant's Office has delivered to each of your offices a crate of Florida agricultural products from Missy and me.

Each item was carefully selected to feature a product grown or produced by the hands of Florida's hardworking farm families. We hope you enjoy it, we appreciate you all very much.

I'm grateful for strong partners in the fight for Florida's Rural Renaissance.
President Trump's Administration strongly supports Florida Agriculture and Florida's Rural Renaissance.

In fact, I've had the opportunity to discuss with USDA Secretary Brooke Rollins plans to make our legislation a national model for creating a rural renaissance across the United States.

As part of that effort, I want to thank President Trump for his emphasis on rural health care.

Through the One Big Beautiful Bill, Florida will see a $1 billion investment in rural health care over the next five years. These are generational investments in our health care infrastructure. A game changer for rural Florida.

You are all aware of the many issues before us this session, and I won't repeat all of those here today.

However, I would be remiss if I did not address the reality that affordability is top of mind for many Florida families. Pandemic-era inflation did a number on the national and global economies. The impacts are real, and they are felt by Florida families every single day.

For my part, we have to be honest with constituents. The ability of the Florida Legislature, in a 60-day session, to influence the price of goods and services within a state economy that is largely driven by national and international economic trends is pretty limited.

If we are being honest with people, hands down the best thing to happen to the pocketbooks of Florida families was the extension of the Trump tax cuts in the One Big Beautiful Bill.

Let's also be clear, if not for President Trump fighting to make many of those tax cuts permanent, people would be seeing less money in their paychecks starting this month. That's a fact.

That's not to say that we rest on our laurels here in Florida.

We have a strong track record of keeping taxes low and that will continue.

In fact, the vast majority of items needed to raise a family and retire with dignity are already tax-free.

From tax-free grocery store food, to diapers, clothes and supplies for young children, key household safety items, to year-round hurricane preparedness, Florida has been laser-focused on affordability and has taken tremendous steps to keep our state affordable.

This year, I look forward to providing voters the opportunity to pass meaningful property tax relief.

And, again this year, the Florida Legislature will pass a balanced budget that holds the line on state spending, pays down debt, cuts taxes and saves for the future.

That's the strong fiscal-responsibility Floridians expect and deserve, and that's the single best thing we in the Florida Legislature can do to keep our state on the right track.

As we begin our session, I'll leave you with this question and thought:

What are the principles that provide for good government?

The answer to that question would vary widely across Florida, even in this very Chamber. It depends on each individual's life experiences and perspectives.

How many times have each of us heard, we do too much of that or too little of something else, then, just as quickly, another will say the absolute opposite. And there before us is our goal – finding balance.

I believe Floridians are searching for government to be balanced. Yes, efficient and small, yes, responsive but not intrusive, yes, representative of Florida – balanced.

Federalist 62 tells us, "A good government implies two things: First, fidelity to the object of government, which is the happiness of the people: second, a knowledge of the means by which that object can be best attained."

There is no doubt in my mind we've all been blessed by state government cutting taxes, building responsible, balanced budgets, reducing state debt, saving for the future, making sure our business climate is great for creating jobs that Florida families need, protecting and expanding personal freedoms, standing with law enforcement, safeguarding our environment, and, supporting the most vulnerable among us. These are the foundational pieces of a successful Florida.

These are great goals, and we will continue to work together for these things this year.

But achieving those goals doesn't automatically mean we achieved great state government leadership.

There is more to it when you think about the thing that ties us all together – human nature.

I personally believe the most important factor in our human element, is Faith.
Our nation was founded on the value of faith in something bigger than ourselves. My personal faith in God is the most important factor in my life.

In my personal view, I'm a sinner saved by grace, by the blood of Christ.

When I began my tenure as Senate President, I was clear that my 1st Amendment right of the free exercise of my faith did not suddenly become limited, and I certainly didn't lose it once I was sworn in to lead this chamber.

In good faith, I put forward a mission statement for the Senate. Something we could all rally around and pull together through. 1 Corinthians 13:13 – "And then these three remain, faith, hope and love, but the greatest of these is love."

Faith – believing in something greater than ourselves.
Hope – hope for a better future, everyone needs hope, everyone thrives on hope.
Love – loving our neighbor as we love ourselves.

We should practice love, as a verb. We all need love in action. It's our most common link.

Our goals this session should be to practice love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

This should rise above any form of politics.

Additionally, Matthew 5:9 reminds us, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

And finally, a verse that I work hard to live out in my daily life. Ephesians 4:29, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."

Thank you again for the trust, confidence, and support you have placed in me to serve as your President.

I look forward to working with each of you this session. I'm blessed by each of you.

I love you all! God Bless the Florida Senate!

For more information, please visit www.FLSenate.gov.

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