

## Toni Jennings Biography



Florida's first female lieutenant governor, two-term president of the Florida Senate, successful businesswoman and former fifth grade teacher, Toni Jennings is among the most prominent public figures in Florida's history, dedicating over 27 years to the citizens of Florida.

Ms. Jennings has distinguished herself as a skilled consensus builder, shaping key policy initiatives important to Floridians for almost three decades. Ms. Jennings served as Florida's 16th Lieutenant Governor, officially taking office in March 2003. She served an unprecedented two consecutive terms as President of the Florida Senate from 1996-2000. When she took the oath of office in 1976 as a member of the House of Representatives, Ms. Jennings became the youngest woman ever elected to the

Florida Legislature and the first female Republican leader of either house of the Legislature - her first historic mark on Florida politics with many to follow throughout her political career.

Ms. Jennings' strong business acumen and years of public service contributed greatly to her successful partnership with Governor Bush as his Lt. Governor. As co-chair of the Governor's Task Force on Access to Affordable Health Insurance, Ms. Jennings helped craft reforms that apply sound principles of quality, competition and technology to increase patient access and modernize Florida's health care market. Consumer information and choice, as well as an emphasis on transparency, are cornerstones of the new system. She led the Universal Pre-kindergarten Education Advisory Council, which worked to develop recommendations for a voluntary, free pre-kindergarten education program for all Florida four-year-olds. Ms. Jennings also chaired the Governor's Hurricane Housing Work Group charged with assessing long-term housing recovery needs following one of the most active and destructive hurricane seasons in Florida's recorded history. In addition to her role in hurricane recovery initiatives, Ms. Jennings spearheaded the Governor's Commission on the Future of Space and Aeronautics in Florida to ensure the state remains the premier location for aerospace activities. Her talents were enlisted to tackle the state's insurance crisis resulting from two unprecedented hurricane seasons. As head of the Governor's Property and Casualty Insurance Reform Committee, she helped develop recommendations for the Governor and the Legislature on improving Florida's insurance market for homeowners and businesses.

Ms. Jennings' contributions to Florida have been far reaching. During her Senate Presidency, she was a driving force behind the state's welfare reform initiative. She is recognized for her work in creating a system of accountability in public education, championing solutions to Florida's sky-rocketing workers' compensation costs and launching Florida's School Readiness program. Ms. Jennings also shepherded the passage of the Workforce Innovation Act of 2000. This reform initiative re-designed Florida's workforce development system to establish partnerships among economic development, workforce development and businesses. Workforce Florida, Inc. is managed by a governing board appointed by the Governor to oversee and monitor the administration of the state's workforce policy, programs and services carried out by business-led regional workforce boards.

Ms. Jennings' commitment to education and workforce training initiatives has made a significant impact on preparing Florida's future workforce. Key to the successful integration of education standards and workforce needs were recommendations of the Task Force on Career and Professional Education chaired by Ms. Jennings. The curriculum reforms adopted by the Legislature equip middle school and high school students with skill sets necessary to maximize career and postsecondary education opportunities.

Of these accomplishments, Ms. Jennings considers the University of Central Florida Exceptional Education Institute created in 2000 as one of the most gratifying contributions of her public service. The Institute was named in honor of Ms. Jennings for her leadership in establishing and funding an exceptional education component of the UCF Academy for Teaching, Learning and Leadership. As Senate President, Ms. Jennings was able to turn into reality this ground-breaking approach to providing education and clinical services for children and adults with exceptional needs.

A native of Orlando, Ms. Jennings began her professional career as a public school teacher at Killarney Elementary in Orlando. She graduated cum laude with a B.A. in Elementary Education from Wesleyan College, the world's oldest women's college.

At the age of 23, Ms. Jennings joined her father's commercial construction company, Jack Jennings & Sons, Inc. Founded in 1948, Jack Jennings & Sons has been a longstanding corporate citizen serving the Central Florida area for over 60 years. This award-winning firm has successfully completed a diverse range of construction projects consisting of entertainment and themed facilities, office and retail, institutional and public sector work, health care and medical facilities and specialty restaurants. Ms. Jennings served as its president from the mid-1980's until becoming Lt. Governor in 2003. She currently serves as chairman of the board.

Ms. Jennings' commitment to civic duty is reflected by her many years of service on various community boards and commissions. She chaired the Florida Chamber of Commerce and was the first chair of Workforce Florida, Inc. She currently serves on the Rollins College Board of Trustees and the boards of Brown & Brown, Inc., Florida Power & Light Group, Nemours, and SunTrust Bank Central Florida.

Ms. Jennings' distinguished public career has earned her numerous awards and recognitions. She was named to the Florida Women's Hall of Fame in 2002 and recognized as the "2004 Central Floridian of the Year" by the *Orlando Sentinel* for her hurricane recovery efforts. The National Association of State Workforce Agencies honored Ms. Jennings with the William L. Heartwell Award for her workforce education and training advocacy. Her accolades also include the "Florida Guardian of Small Business" by the National Federation of Independent Businesses, Florida Economic Development Council's Distinguished Service Award, Florida League of Women Voters' "Distinguished Florida Women Award," "Friend of the First Amendment" bestowed twice by the First Amendment Foundation and the coveted "Friend of Education Award" given by the Florida School Boards Association.