

For Immediate Release

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Senator Wilton Simpson Unanimously Elected Senate President

Trilby Senator sworn in as 89th Senate President, Senator Aaron Bean of Fernandina Beach elected President Pro Tempore

Tallahassee—Senator Wilton E. Simpson (R-Trilby) was today unanimously elected President of the Florida Senate for the 2020-2022 Legislative Term. Senator Aaron P. Bean (R-Fernandina Beach) was unanimously elected President Pro Tempore. Pursuant to the Florida Constitution, the Florida Legislature convenes 14 days following the general election for the purpose of organization, election of officers and adoption of rules.

“None of us who were here last Session could have predicted what we’re facing today. Fortunately, Florida is more prepared than most other states. Over the last several years, we voted many times to set aside money to prepare for a rainy day. It will help a lot, but to be clear, it will not solve our problems. We cannot fix our situation by simply spending down our savings account. We need to make structural changes to the budget,” President Simpson said in his acceptance speech.

“There will be things that we did in times of plenty that need to be eliminated in these times of lean. We have less revenue, therefore we will have less government. That does not mean all we will do is cut the budget these next two years. There will be places where we need to make investments – like our Northern Everglades, our springs, our most vulnerable children, and our state infrastructure,” continued President Simpson. “To do our job right we need to be thoughtful, strategic, and long-term in our vision. If we do it right, and I believe we will, our state will recover and prosper in ways we cannot even imagine.”

President Simpson was nominated by President Pro Tempore Bean. The nomination was seconded by Senator Keith Perry (R-Gainesville).

President Simpson was joined at today’s ceremony by his wife Kathy and their adult son Wilton, Jr. His daughter, Luran Monbarren attended with her family, including President Simpson’s granddaughters Addy (6) and Emy (3). President-Designate and Mrs. Simpson were also joined by his brother, Jimmy Simpson, Jr. Many members of their extended family, friends and colleagues from across Florida celebrated with the Simpson Family by viewing the ceremony remotely due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The opening prayer was given by Mr. Kurt Yann, a friend of President Simpson who serves on the faculty at Saint Leo University. The national anthem was performed by Mrs. Michelle Milligan of Tallahassee, a member of the Senate Professional Staff. Representatives of the Pasco County Sheriff’s Office served as the color guard. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Ady and Emy Monbarren, and Addy and Daniel Burgess, children of Senator Danny Burgess.

The session also included a music video, produced especially for the occasion, of the song "[We Stand](#)," by recording artist Billy Dean, a longtime friend of the Simpson Family.

President-Designate Simpson was elected to the state Senate in 2012, and reelected subsequently. During his time in the Senate, President Simpson has served as Chair of the Committee on Community Affairs, the Committee on Innovation, Industry, and Technology, and the Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Tourism and Economic Development. He served as the Senate Majority (Republican) Leader from 2016-2018. President Simpson represents State Senate District 10, which includes Hernando and Citrus Counties, and a portion of Pasco County. In his private life, President Simpson owns and operates several businesses, including Simpson Farms, an egg farm located in Trilby, Florida.

Video of today's session, including acceptance speeches by President Simpson and President Pro Tempore Bean can be found via the Florida Channel at www.TheFloridaChannel.org.

Following recognition of his family, President Simpson offered the following remarks, as prepared for delivery:

Speaker Sprowls, that has such a nice ring to it. Israel was the start of a true friendship between us. And we have an MOU to prove it. You're an incredible partner and leader. The House chose the right Speaker and I look forward to working with you and the House over these next two years to do some great things.

None of us who were here last Session could have predicted what we are facing today. Our focus will be different because the world is different.

Before I talk about some of the things I'd like to see accomplished over these next two years, I want to pause for a moment and recognize those who've lost their lives as a result of COVID-19. This virus has robbed us of thousands of Floridians – mothers, fathers, friends, and neighbors. Please join me as we honor their memories.

Nobody signs up to be Governor during a pandemic or disaster.

This has been a difficult time and I thank Governor DeSantis and Director Moskowitz for the many long hours and lots of thankless work. Since the virus spreads so quickly, a rapid response makes a huge difference.

I am convinced your early actions to protect our elderly and our most vulnerable populations helped avoid thousands of deaths in Florida. Governor, thank you for your leadership!

This pandemic has been a strain on so many families and on our businesses. Some wonder if it is ever going to end. Senators, I believe it will. In the last few days we heard promising news about a new vaccine, and there is more good news on trials and therapeutics every day.

Better days are ahead, but we must continue to do what we can to personally prevent the spread. I want to thank all of you for taking our new protocols seriously. We will get through this together.

Now, I know the elections were hard fought. Elections are competitions, and that means there are winners and losers. Nobody likes to lose. Having said that, we have stepped off the field of competition and into the Senate. This is where campaigns end and governing begins.

Leader Farmer, congratulations on your election as leader of the Senate Democrat Caucus. I look forward to working with you over the next two years. It's nice to have two Farmers in the Senate.

I thank each of you for answering the call of public service. You have earned the right to be here because your constituents sent you here. We are no longer candidates, we are Senators, and we have a lot of work to do.

Fortunately, Florida is more prepared than most other states. Over the last several years, we voted many times to set aside money to prepare for a rainy day. Senators, it's raining. In fact, it's pouring. The Revenue Estimating Conference lowered the estimate of General Revenue for this fiscal year by \$3.4 billion, and another \$2 billion for the next fiscal year.

We are fortunate to have past legislatures that set aside money for emergencies. It will help a lot, but to be clear, it will not solve our problems. We cannot fix our situation by simply spending down our savings account. We need to make structural changes to the budget.

Florida has the honor of a Triple A bond rating by all three rating agencies. The rating came with an important warning earlier this year. They said, "If Florida relies too much on one-term sources such as reserves or Cares Act Funds, it could weaken our view on management and budgetary performance." Senators, that will not happen on our watch. We are going to tighten our belts. There will be things that we did in times of plenty that need to be eliminated in these times of lean. We have less revenue, therefore we will have less government. That does not mean all we will do is cut the budget these next two years.

There will be places where we need to make investments, like our Northern Everglades, our springs, our most vulnerable children, and our state infrastructure. To do our job right we need to be thoughtful, strategic, and long-term in our vision. And if we do it right, and I believe we will, our state will recover and prosper in ways we cannot even imagine. But it is going to take courage and bold action.

When I was designated, I spoke a lot about my background in farming – and how it has given me an understanding and appreciation for the importance of roots. If you want to ensure the quality of the crop, make sure the roots are healthy and strong. If you want to prepare a field for planting, you plough the field and clean it out, roots and all. I am also a businessman, and one of the most troubling things I have seen in government is the way we cling to laws or programs that are barely funded or do not work because we do not want to hurt feelings or bruise egos. We cannot afford to do it that way. I encourage us to re-examine past priorities.

Let's look at some of these initiatives that do not work, that are not moving us forward, or that are wrong for our time. Let's take them out by the roots. Let's get this budget field cleaned and plowed for the growth and prosperity that are ahead. You and I may not see the results in our two years, but we will make the difficult choices now that will impact Florida for generations to come. That is our calling. That is our duty. That is the assignment that Floridians have given this Senate.

I am deeply honored that you have made me your Senate President for these two years. We have a lot of work ahead of us. Floridians want results, not words.

If you and I seize our days like a farmer, with long-term vision, and a solid work ethic, knowing that what we plant today is for a future harvest. I truly believe Florida's best days are ahead. Thank you. God bless you and God bless the state of Florida.

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

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