

Florida's Senate Race: Does It Matter?

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Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [History](#)

In recognition that the two party system is little more than an innocuous venue for the election of empty vessels on both sides of the political spectrum, the 2018 Senate race in Florida is one such prime example.

Florida print media, in an effort to build readership, has referred to the race as the “[clash of the titans](#)” which may, in reality, be more like a contest against the [Mouse that Roared](#) as hackneyed 75 year old incumbent **Sen. Bill Nelson** (D) is being [challenged](#) by the intransigent 64 year old **Gov. Rick Scott** (R), both of whom continue to accept Big Sugar campaign money and are perfunctory [supporters of Israel](#).

Until recently, the Florida Senate race has been a safe bet for the Democrats to retain their Senate seat until Scott [announced](#) his candidacy in early April labeling himself an ‘outsider’ and Nelson a “[career politician](#)”.

What makes this race one to watch, besides the obvious implications on the [balance of power](#) in the Senate, is whether Florida voters are so self-satisfied to re-elect Nelson as an old guard, “[moderate milquetoast](#)” establishmentarian or whether Scott’s [avoidance of criminal prosecution](#) will still matter two decades later or whether thousands of newly-arrived emigrants from Hurricane Maria will register to vote; thus perhaps permanently altering Florida’s voting demographic.

Despite what might appear to be radical differences between the candidates in style, personality or occasional social policy, those differences are worth little comparative attention given that the most critical, vital issue of foreign/military policy, the cutting-edge issue of our time, continues to spiral out of control; especially as that policy relates to the Middle East and Israel.

The Nelson-Scott match up is, upon closer examination, little more substantive than peas in a pod or birds of a feather who will flock together just as the unlikely duo of **Sen. Marco Rubio** (FI-R) and Nelson have established a level of curious camaraderie.

A bona fide son of Florida whose family settled the Panhandle in 1826 and a past president of the International Kiwanis (1959-1960), [Sen. Nelson](#) has followed a political career having been elected to the Florida State Legislature (1972-1979) followed by six terms in the House of Representatives (1979-1991), then elected as Florida State Treasurer and Insurance Commissioner (1994-2000) and finally to the US Senate in 2001 where he currently serves. A graduate of Yale University and member of its “[Book and Snake](#)” society and the University of Virginia’s School of Law, Nelson joined the US Army Reserve in 1965 as the Vietnam War escalated and retired in 1971 as Captain.

In 2009, while the [Affordable Care Act](#) was being debated in Congress, Nelson attended the

Democratic Party's Nominating Convention. As Nelson took the stage to speak, the assembled delegates rose from their seats in unison with one passionate voice chanting "Public Option, Public Option" until Nelson, with no words of support, fled the stage to a safe space. No doubt a long forgotten incident, Nelson will now need those same Democrats to keep his Senate seat.

While early polls suggest a Nelson-Scott tie with Nelson at [51% approval rating](#) and Scott at 58% approval, Nelson has had the good fortune to run against a bevy of significantly lackluster Republican candidates than Nelson himself who attributes his electoral successes to "I assume nothing. [I run scared like a jackrabbit.](#)" In facing his most formidable opponent since 1972, Nelson will need every jackrabbit advantage he can muster.

By 2010, as Scott was gearing up to run for governor, many Floridians were already familiar with his name as [GW Bush's co-owner](#) of the Texas Rangers and as CEO of a company under Federal investigation for the largest Medicare fraud case in history. A political novice before his 2010 election, the aggressive Scott has proven to be a master at eking out [two state-wide election wins](#) with a 1% margin, both against conventional Democrats like Nelson.

In 1987, venture capitalist Scott began buying and merging hospitals across the country into what became [Columbia/HCA](#) as his publicly traded company grew to the nation's largest health care chain including more than 340 hospitals, 135 surgery centers and 550 home health locations in 37 states and two foreign countries.

With insider whistleblower assistance in 1997, the [Federal government raided](#) Columbia's offices and hospitals and four months after the investigation became public, CEO Scott was [forced to resign](#). The company was charged with "[systemic fraud](#)" by padding Medicare/Medicaid bills, charging for tests not ordered and procedures not conducted, falsifying diagnoses to increase hospital reimbursements and kickbacks to doctors. Four Columbia executives were indicated, the company was charged with fourteen felonies, plead guilty to three conspiracy fraud charges and paid [\\$1.7 billion](#) in fines.

By July, 2000, Scott invoked his [Fifth Amendment](#) right to avoid self-incrimination by refusing to answer seventy five questions during a [deposition](#) hearing on a [related civil case](#). In the aftermath, a former FBI agent voiced regret that criminal charges were not pursued against Scott who was never questioned by a grand jury nor ever personally contacted by Federal investigators. Scott left Columbia with a [\\$10 million severance](#) payout and \$350 M in stock and options. His [net worth](#) as of December, 2016 is estimated at \$149 Million and spent \$88 Million on his two gubernatorial races.

As the country's third largest state with a population of [20.4 million](#), the increase of Puerto Rican emigrants after Hurricane Maria may dramatically alter the state's voting patterns just in time for the 2018 election. The [2000-2010 Census](#) tallied the Puerto Rican population at 847,000 while the current total island population in Florida reached 1.06M by 2016. The [Demographic Estimating Conference](#) estimated in December, 2017 that at least 53,000 evacuees arrived from Puerto Rico at Relief Centers throughout the state immediately after Maria. Enough new voters to decide an election, Nelson has been quick to suggest that newly arrived evacuees immediately [register to vote](#) thereby increasing his own election odds.

Enter Florida's junior Sen. Marco Rubio (FI-R) who told state wide media recently that he [would not campaign against Nelson](#) stating that "I could not ask for a better partner." Rubio has, however, reconsidered his earlier purge of Scott saying that "I want to be in the majority. I want to be Chair of the Small Business Committee and then Chair of Intelligence or Foreign Relations after that." A former Rubio staffer explained that during the [2016 campaign](#) "Nelson never campaigned against Marco...there was a moment when (Dem candidate former Rep. Patrick Murphy) Murphy made some unfair attack on Marco and Nelson came to our defense."

So what can be attributed to this unusual level of [solidarity](#) between a staid Dem and an ambitious Republican and how will Rubio will tread the fine partisan line?

One perspective may be found in the US Federal Election Commission data of PACs and individual donations over \$200 as reported by the [Center for Responsive Politics](#). According to the CRP's Top 20 list of [Pro-Israel](#) PAC recipients, Nelson received a minimum total of \$662,901 beginning with his [2000](#) Senate campaign in which he received \$110,370 with donations in [2006](#) of \$324,141 and another in [2012](#) for \$228,450. These numbers reflect Nelson's donations to include him in the CRP's list of "Top 20" recipients of Pro Israel Pac money and do not identify other monies from Pro Israel PAC's that were not large enough to qualify as a Top 20 recipient.

Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FI) was elected in 2010 and became The Top 20 Senate recipient in 2016 of Pro-Israel money with [\\$468,307](#), according to the CRP.

Although Scott's Pro-Israel campaign donations as Governor have not yet been tracked, the recent announcement of his [third trip](#) to Israel to [attend the May 14th dedication](#) of the US Embassy's move to Jerusalem is indicative of Scott's priority in wooing the state's powerful block of Jewish voters. In affirming [support for Israel](#) on a 2017 trip while lobbying for Israel start-ups to join a Florida [high tech accelerator](#) project, Scott affirmed that 'it is important that our Embassy is moved to Jerusalem. We should do whatever we can to constantly support Israel. They are a great ally to the US.'

It may be assumed that Nelson and Rubio have already signed their [loyalty oath to Israel](#) and that if Scott has not yet done so, he will in the near future.

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