

CIVICS IN REAL LIFE

U.S. Senator and Governor Bob Graham: A Servant Leader

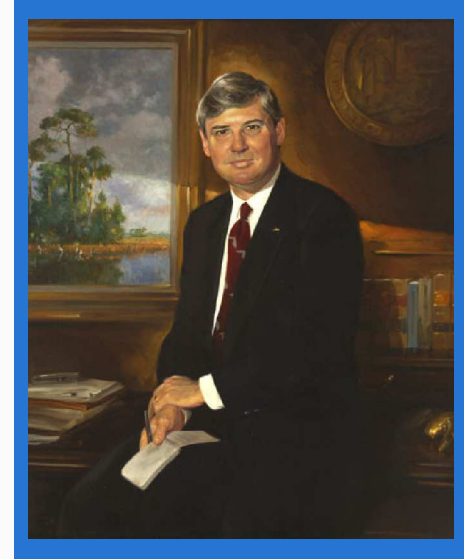
Civics is all around us. There is a lot to know about the government and how “We the People” interact with the government and each other. Let’s help each other expand our civic literacy.

On April 16th, 2024, former Florida governor and U.S. Senator Bob Graham [passed away](#). Known for his dedication to servant leadership, Graham served the people of Florida with dignity and grace throughout his elected tenure. With his methodical, thorough, and hardworking nature, Senator Graham always put country before politics, treated his political opponents with respect, and championed the state he richly loved. If there was ever a doubt about how much he cared for Florida, one only had to look at his necktie, which would become his trademark because of little silhouettes of the “sunshine state” printed on them. It was rare to find him without his “Florida Tie.”

Having never lost an election, including his bid as his high school’s class president, [Bob Graham](#) first served the people of Florida in the state legislature, then as governor (1979 to 1987), and finally as a U.S. senator, an office he held for three terms, until his retirement in 2005.

Bob Graham always demonstrated a willingness to connect with people from all walks of life, especially through his ‘[workdays](#),’ when he would spend an entire day (or longer) doing the work of a typical Floridian. Through this effort, Graham exemplified the best of Florida. Engaging this way with Floridians not only helped catapult him to the office of the governor but also helped him appreciate and relate to the everyday struggles of those in his state. Once elected governor, [his workdays did not stop](#), having worked over 400 of them throughout his career.

While governor, Bob Graham jump-started the process of [protecting and restoring the Everglades](#), an effort that continues today. As a U.S. senator, he was a leader in the Democratic Party and a leading expert on foreign policy and intelligence issues. He was perhaps best known for leading the [joint congressional investigation into 9/11](#) and his tenure as chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee. Because of his acumen on domestic and foreign policy issues, as well as his bipartisan and compromising nature, Senator Graham was considered as a vice presidential candidate multiple times. He even sought the Democratic nomination for president in 2004. Sadly, heart issues led him to withdraw from that race, and he later retired from the U.S. Senate.



Bob Graham deeply valued civic education and public service. After his retirement from the U.S. Senate, Senator Graham established the [Bob Graham Center for Public Service](#) at the University of Florida. This center focuses on training college students as citizen leaders and participants in public life. Senator Graham also collaborated with former Republican Congressman [Lou Frey](#) on pushing through passage of the [Justice Sandra Day O’Connor Civics Education Act](#) in Florida. This act established, for the first time, high-quality civic education in Florida, and the state became one of the first in the nation to have a required and assessed middle school civics education course. He firmly believed in the importance of civic education in preparing the next generation of citizens and sought to ensure its success.

Never one for the spotlight, it seems appropriate that Bob Graham’s legacy will live on in the everyday efforts of regular people trying to make a difference in their communities. Through these efforts, Senator Graham will always be remembered.

To Think and To Do: Through his workdays, Bob Graham connected with the people of Florida, giving back to the communities he cared for deeply. As a matter of service, participate in a project of your choosing that gives back to your community and helps you connect with the people of your area.

