

Who's Running for Florida Governor in the 2026 General Election

By Sandy Parker | Sparker's Soapbox | Published 2026-09-07; Updated 2026-09-28

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Republican U.S. Rep. Byron Donalds, Democratic former U.S. Rep. David Jolly, five No Party Affiliation candidates, one Libertarian candidate, and two write-in candidates are competing for Florida governor in the Nov. 3, 2026, general election. Gov. Ron DeSantis is term-limited under Florida's two-consecutive-term constitutional limit, making this an open-seat race. The winner will serve a four-year term as Florida's chief executive officer. Learn about the Executive Branch of Florida's government in my [Sparker's Civics primer post](#).

In this post, I summarize the backgrounds and stated priorities of the two major party candidates seeking Florida's governorship, along with their endorsements, recent news coverage, and campaign finance data, to help voters prepare to cast their ballots. I also include links where you can research each candidate further.

- [Byron Donalds](#) (Republican)
- [David Jolly](#) (Democrat)
- [Minor Candidates](#)
- [The Race in the News](#)
- [Polling and Campaign Finance Data](#)

Byron Donalds

Republican nominee Byron Donalds was born Oct. 28, 1978, and raised in Brooklyn, NY, in a single-parent household. He graduated from Florida State University in 2002 with a degree in finance and marketing and worked in the finance, insurance, and banking industries in Southwest Florida. ([campaign site](#); [Wikipedia](#))

Donalds served in the Florida House of Representatives, District 80, from 2016 to 2020, where he led the effort to enact Hope Scholarships, chaired the House Insurance and Banking Subcommittee, and was appointed by Governor Rick Scott to the Board of Trustees for Florida SouthWestern State College. Since January 2021 he has represented Florida's 19th Congressional District in the U.S. House, succeeding Francis Rooney, and served as a surrogate for the 2024 Trump presidential

campaign. He announced his campaign for Governor on Feb. 25, 2025, becoming the first major Republican candidate to enter the race, after President Trump had already endorsed him. He lives in Naples with his wife, Erika, and their three sons. ([campaign site](#); [WUSF](#))

Platform

Donalds's campaign website has a main "On the Issues" page with seven named priorities ([campaign site](#)):

- Enact the Trump Agenda
- Fight Illegal Immigration
- Make Florida More Affordable
- Expand Economic Opportunity
- Protect Our Conservative Values
- Improve Our Infrastructure
- Preserve Our Environment

There are also eight additional named policy pages: LaunchPad; Most Transparent Government in America; Insurer Scorecard; Zero Tolerance, Zero Dollars; Your Doctor, Your Price; Florida Means Business; Student Success Plans; and Read to Succeed. ([campaign site](#))

Endorsements

As of Sept. 7, 2026, his [campaign website](#) listed the following endorsements:

- **National figures:** President Donald Trump, Donald Trump Jr., Charlie Kirk, Elon Musk, Louisiana Gov. Jeff Landry, and Arkansas Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders.
- **Associations:** The Club for Growth, Associated Industries of Florida, and the Florida Restaurant and Lodging Association.
- **Members of Congress:** House Speaker Mike Johnson, Majority Leader Steve Scalise, Majority Whip Tom Emmer, Conference Chair Lisa McClain, Leadership Chair Elise Stefanik, and Sens. Rick Scott and Ted Cruz, along with 19 Florida U.S. House members, including Mario Diaz-Balart, whose district includes part of Collier County.
- **Sheriffs:** More than 35 Florida sheriffs, including Grady Judd, Chris Nocco, Lee County's Carmine Marceno, and Collier County's Kevin Rambosk.
- **Florida Legislature:** Nine state senators and more than 60 state representatives, including House Speaker Danny Perez and Collier County's Yvette Benarroch, Adam Botana, and Lauren Melo.

In addition, Gov. Ron DeSantis endorsed Donalds on Sept. 3, 2026, despite past tensions between the two. ([WLRN](#)) Ashley Moody, Senate President-Designate Jim Boyd, and House Speaker-Designate

Sam Garrison have also endorsed Donalds, though they are not currently listed on his campaign site. ([Florida Politics](#); [Florida's Voice](#))

In the News

- Rep. Byron Donalds announces candidacy for Florida governor. ([WUSF](#), 2/26/25)
- Firms belonging to wife of Rep. Donalds grabbed millions in charter school contracts. ([Florida Bulldog](#), 6/29/25)
- Florida charter school company run by GOP rising star left parents scrambling. ([CBS News](#), 12/2/25)
- ‘Profit is not going to be a bad word’: Byron Donalds wants to reshape education. ([Miami Herald](#), 3/24/26)
- Byron Donalds surpasses \$90M in total fundraising for Governor’s race. ([Florida Politics](#), 7/7/26)
- Lawsuit alleges Byron Donalds threatened Collier County school board member in 2022. ([Florida Phoenix](#), 7/8/26)
- Byron Donalds: Fiscally constrained counties shouldn’t ‘sing for supper’ if Amendment 3 passes. ([Florida Politics](#), 7/17/26)
- The data center and AI donors powering Donalds’ bid for Florida governor. ([Politico](#), 7/20/26)
- Data center donors have spent more than \$20 million in Florida ahead of the 2026 elections, with roughly a quarter of that money boosting Byron Donalds. ([Seeking Rents](#), 7/21/26)
- Donalds promises insurance cuts, defends data centers as race pivots to November. ([Tampa Bay 28](#), 8/20/26)
- Donalds dismisses Jolly’s call for new Hope Florida investigation as ‘politics.’ ([Miami Herald](#), 8/30/26)
- Byron Donalds says the key to preventing another 9/11 is stopping Sharia law. ([Florida Politics](#), 9/1/26)
- Byron Donalds doubles down on cutting – or even eliminating – property taxes if elected ([WUSF](#), 9/1/26)
- Donalds supports local community control over AI data centers in Florida. ([The Floridian](#), 9/4/26)
- Kelly Mason drops lawsuit against Byron Donalds over 2022 grocery store argument. ([Florida Politics](#), 9/9/26)
- Byron Donalds doubts AI regulation could clear Congress, says states should set rules. ([Florida Politics](#), 9/14/26)
- Byron Donalds says he isn’t interested in investigating Alligator Alcatraz, since it’s closed. ([Florida Politics](#), 9/14/26)

Further Research

- Campaign website: byrondonalds.com
- Active social media: [Facebook](#), [X](#), [Instagram](#), [YouTube](#)

David Jolly

Democratic nominee David Jolly, 53, was born Oct. 31, 1972, in Dunedin, FL. He earned a bachelor's degree from Emory University in 1994 and a Juris Doctor from George Mason University in 2001. Jolly worked for Republican U.S. Representative Bill Young full time from 1995 to 2006 in various positions, with a brief break for six months in 2001 when he worked at a Washington securities firm. From 2007 until first running for Congress in 2013, he worked as a lobbyist, during which time he made political donations to both Republicans and Democrats. He served as the Republican U.S. Representative for Florida's 13th Congressional District from 2014 to 2017, when he was defeated for reelection by Charlie Crist. ([Wikipedia](#))

After leaving Congress, Jolly practiced law and spent nearly a decade as a political analyst for NBC and MSNBC. He left the Republican Party in 2018 amid frustration with the party's direction under Donald Trump, registering with no party affiliation and later with the Forward Party (2022-2025), before registering as a Democrat in April 2025. ([Wikipedia](#))

He is a fifth-generation Floridian and the son of a minister. He and his wife Laura are raising their family in Pinellas County. He officially announced his campaign for Governor as a Democrat on June 5, 2025. His running mate is former U.S. Rep. Gwen Graham, who represented Florida's 2nd Congressional District, was the runner-up in the 2018 Democratic gubernatorial primary, and served alongside Jolly in Congress, where they co-sponsored legislation opposing oil drilling in the Gulf of Mexico. ([campaign site](#); [Wikipedia](#))

Platform

Jolly's campaign site presents a structured, named list of platform priorities under "[Issues](#)":

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|---|--|
| • Solving our Affordability and Insurance Crisis | • Giving Florida's Families Access to Florida's Universities |
| • Saving Our Schools | • Reducing Gun Violence |
| • Campaign Finance and Ethics Reform | • Clean Energy |
| • Strengthening Florida's Economy | • Home Rule and Direct Democracy |
| • Restoring Reproductive Freedom | • Fighting Crime, not Communities |
| • Investing in Climate Resiliency, Clean Water, and the Ocean Economy | • Delivering affordable healthcare to Floridians |
| • Restoring Services for Our Veterans | • Treating Everyone with Kindness, Dignity and Respect |

Endorsements

As of Sept. 7, 2026, no endorsements were listed on his campaign website.

Endorsements identified through an online search:

- **Federal and state officials:** U.S. Rep. Maxwell Frost, former U.S. Rep. Gwen Graham (his running mate), former U.S. Rep. Donna Shalala, former Florida Education Commissioner Betty Castor, and former Senate Minority Leader Nan Rich are among dozens of current and former Democratic officials who have endorsed Jolly, including a 60-member coalition featuring the former mayors of St. Petersburg, Tampa, and Miami Beach. ([Florida Politics](#); [The Capitolist](#))
- **Organizations:** The [Florida Education Association](#), representing more than 120,000 educators, the Florida AFL-CIO, and the Florida LGBTQ+ Democratic Caucus. ([The Floridian](#); [Watermark Out News](#))
- **Media:** The [Miami Herald](#) editorial board.

In the News

- David Jolly completes party swap, registers as Democrat and escalates gubernatorial aspirations. ([Florida Politics](#), 4/24/25)
- David Jolly, leading Democratic candidate for 2026 governor, shares views on abortion and Alligator Alcatraz. ([CBS Miami](#), 4/3/25)
- ‘We can win’: David Jolly officially announces bid for Florida governor. ([Florida Politics](#), 6/5/25)
- David Jolly rejects partisan split to focus on Florida economic issues. ([The Hill](#), 8/20/26)
- David Jolly says he would issue moratorium on data centers, if elected. ([The Floridian](#), 8/26/26)
- David Jolly pledges to reopen Hope Florida investigation; Democrats seek resignations. ([The Capitolist](#), 8/27/26)
- Democrat David Jolly promotes tourist tax reform as he runs for governor ([Orlando Sentinel](#), 9/6/26)

Further Research

- Campaign website: davidjolly.com
- Confirmed active: [Facebook](#), [X](#), [Instagram](#), [TikTok](#)

Minor Candidates

Five No Party Affiliation candidates, one Libertarian candidate, and two write-in candidates also qualified for the Nov. 3, 2026, general election ballot:

- [Dean Abrams](#) (NPA)
- Charles Burkett ([campaign website](#)) (NPA)
- Dr. Jeff Datto (NPA)¹
- Moliere Dimanche (NPA)¹
- [Frank J. Russo](#) (NPA)
- Scott Eckhard Jewett (Libertarian)¹

In Florida, the names of qualified write-in candidates do not appear on the printed ballot.

¹ no campaign website found as of Sept. 7, 2026

The Race in the News

- Where Florida governor hopefuls Donalds and Jolly stand on key issues. ([Tampa Bay Times](#), 8/18/26)
 - Florida governor candidates weigh in on Flock camera restrictions. ([Bay News 9](#), 9/1/26)
 - Donalds, Jolly call for Hope Florida reforms after report. ([WUSE](#), 9/1/26)
 - Can race help Byron Donalds, David Jolly win Florida governor election? ([Tallahassee Democrat](#), 9/14/26)
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Polling and Campaign Finance Data

On Aug. 27, 2026, after the primary, Cook Political Report moved its rating of the race from Solid Republican to Likely Republican, citing Jolly's fundraising disadvantage as the main obstacle to a more competitive contest. ([Cook Political Report](#); [Florida Politics](#))

More recently, according to [RealClearPolling's average](#) of recent general election polls (accessed Sept. 28, 2026), Donalds leads Jolly 47.0 percent to 41.0 percent, a 6.0-point margin, widening from a 3.7-point lead in mid-September. The most recent survey, Stetson University's Center for Public Opinion Research (Sept. 14-21), shows Donalds ahead by 12 points, 51 percent to 39 percent. RealClearPolling continues to rate the race a [Toss Up](#), a classification unchanged since Sept. 19.

Political committees may raise and spend money without limit to support or oppose candidates, but Florida law caps direct transfers from a committee to a candidate's own campaign account at \$3,000 per election, with the primary and general treated as separate elections. For more on how to read these figures and what this information does and does not tell us, see Sparker's Civics primer, [Understanding Campaign Finance Data](#).

Byron Donalds's Contributions

Byron Donalds raised a total of \$15.0 million (monetary contributions plus in-kind support) from 42,663 individual and institutional donors, plus \$905,242 in state public matching funds. Seventy-one percent of his monetary contributions (excluding the matching funds) came from Florida donors. Of that, \$361,750 in contributions came from political committees giving directly to his campaign account. Nearly all of his in-kind support, 98 percent of the \$1.9 million total, came from the Republican Party of Florida.

Separately, Friends of Byron Donalds PAC, a political committee supporting his campaign, has raised \$115.6 million since its formation, of which \$39.3 million remains available.

David Jolly's Contributions

David Jolly raised a total of \$7.0 million from 53,318 individual and institutional donors, plus \$2.0 million in state public matching funds. Eighty-one percent of his monetary contributions (excluding the matching funds) came from Florida donors. Of that, \$45,250 in contributions came from political committees giving directly to his campaign account. Nearly all of his in-kind support, 97 percent of the \$375,256 total, came from the Florida Democratic Party.

Separately, Florida 2026, a political committee supporting his campaign, has raised \$7.0 million since its formation, of which \$3.2 million remains available. Jolly founded the committee but does not chair it.

Campaign finance data is from Florida Division of Elections filings, cross-checked against source records. See the Division of Elections' [Candidate Listing search](#) for complete filings. Affiliated political committee data for Friends of Byron Donalds PAC and Florida 2026 is from the Division of Elections' [Committee Database Search](#).

This post was researched and drafted with the assistance of Claude (Anthropic AI). The content was reviewed, edited, and fact-checked by the author. Both humans and AI can make mistakes. Please let us know if you spot one.