

I learned the value of public service at a young age. In fact, it began before I was even born. My father, Ernest “Cap” Graham, ran for and won a seat in the Florida state senate in 1936. During that time, my mother was pregnant with me and regularly attended my father’s political rallies. From that moment on, it was a part of my life.

I grew up in the Everglades, literally. The town I grew up in, Pennsuco, was an oasis surrounded by the Everglades and as a result, I have a strong bond with the area. This connection to the region has impacted my work as a public servant. Throughout my political career, restoration of the River of Grass has been a priority for me. As governor, I launched the Save Our Everglades program and as senator, I was successful in passing a complete Everglades restoration plan.

A key part of my public service has been my Workdays. One day a month since I ran for governor in 1978, I have worked side-by-side at jobs ranging from a chicken plucker to a bellhop to an elephant washer --- almost 400 Workdays. It has given me a chance not only to get a sense of what Floridians do each and every day, it has given me an opportunity to regularly meet and talk to my constituents.

In my 38 years as an elected official, I have only lost one political campaign. It was 1955, and I was running for Freshman Class President at the University of Florida. The young man who beat me became my friend and later became a school board superintendent. In my life, I have been able to develop positive relationships with all the people I have ever run against in a political campaign. I do not carry any negative feelings about anyone I ever ran against and I do not believe they carry any negative feelings about me. I consider this to be a very positive part of a long political career.