



Shelby Scholars Lecture Series

BILL NELSON

*U.S. Senator and U.S. Representative
Astronaut and Administrator, NASA*

ABOUT OUR GUEST

Bill Nelson concluded more than five decades of public service in January 2025 when he stepped down as Administrator of NASA. His career spanned state politics, Congress, spaceflight, and leadership of the nation's space program.

Nelson earned a bachelor's degree in political science from Yale University in 1965 and a law degree from the University of Virginia in 1968. He served six years in the U.S. Army Reserve, including two years on active duty, attaining the rank of captain. After beginning a law practice in Melbourne, Florida, he entered public office in 1972 as a member of the Florida House of Representatives.

In 1978, Nelson was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, where he served for more than a decade representing districts along Florida's Space Coast. During his tenure, he chaired the House subcommittee on space and became the first sitting member of the U.S. House to fly in space. In 1986, he served as payload specialist on the Columbia shuttle mission STS-61C, which successfully deployed a communications satellite and conducted science experiments.

After leaving the House, Nelson held statewide office as Florida's Treasurer, Insurance Commissioner, and Fire Marshal beginning in 1994. In 2000, he was elected to the U.S. Senate, where he served three terms until 2019. Over nearly two decades in the Senate, he was involved in a wide range of policy areas and consistently maintained a strong interest in space and technology.

Following his Senate service, Nelson was appointed to NASA's Advisory Council in 2019. In 2021, he was nominated and unanimously confirmed as NASA Administrator. During his tenure, he oversaw the progress of the Artemis program to return astronauts to the Moon, the expansion of commercial partnerships in space exploration, and the advancement of Earth science missions.

Nelson stepped down from NASA in January 2025. He wrote, "As I leave public office today after 53 years, thank you for the great privilege of a lifetime of serving the people of our country. I am humbled and grateful."

He is married to Grace Cavert, and they have two children.

*Friday, September 5, 2025
10:30 AM at Tuomey Hall*