

# **Sam Bell**

**1939 – March 14, 2023**

Ed. Note: I have included death notices from the Orlando Sentinel, the Florida Phoenix, the Daytona Beach News-Journal, WUSF Public Media, and WFSU By The News Service of Florida. Although there are some duplications, each report has unique comments. Lucy Morgan's personal recollections in the Florida Phoenix are memorable. Sam was formerly married to Anne Moorman, daughter of Col. Moorman, the army PMST for most of our college time. Add'l material appended April 13, 2023.

## **Orlando Sentinel**

**3-15-23**

Sam Bell, a former powerful member of the Florida House from Volusia County and later a longtime lobbyist, died Tuesday night, according to an announcement from the office of his stepdaughter, U.S. Rep. Kathy Castor. He was 83.

Bell also was the stepfather of Orange County School Board member Karen Castor Dentel.

A Democrat, Bell represented Volusia in the House from 1974 to 1988 and held high-ranking positions such as appropriations chairman. He was in line to become House speaker in 1988 but lost a re-election bid in his district.

Bell was married for 34 years to Betty Castor, a former state education commissioner and president of the University of South Florida.

The announcement Wednesday from Kathy Castor's office said he died after an "unexpected health complication."

Bell lobbied for a wide range of clients after leaving the House but was heavily involved in children's health-care issues.

Wednesday's announcement said he founded the University of South Florida College of Public Health and "was considered the 'father' of the institution."

Services were not immediately announced.

## **Florida Phoenix**

## We've lost another lion in FL: Sam Bell

BY: [LUCY MORGAN](#) - MARCH 15, 2023 3:07 PM



FL House Appropriations chairman, Sam Bell,(left) speaks with Senate Rules chairman, Ken Jenne (right). 1986. Photographer Dughi, Donn (Donald Gregory), 1932-2005. State Library and Archives of Florida.

We've [lost](#) another lion.

Former State Rep. Sam Bell, a ferocious leader who fought for funds to help Florida's children, died Tuesday in Tampa.

Bell's wife, former Education Commissioner Betty Castor, said Bell's death was caused by kidney stones but was quite unexpected. Bell was 83 and served in the Florida House from 1974 to 1988.

"He was so proud of what he did for children's services," Castor said Wednesday.

Funeral services will be scheduled later at Palma Ceia Presbyterian Church in Tampa.

"He loved making comparisons about what the legislature did before and what they are doing currently," Castor added. He was so proud of that group of legislators.

Castor and Bell have been living in Tampa in recent years but maintained contacts with many of the state's educational institutions.

Bell, as appropriations chairman of the state House of Representatives, was part of a progressive group that pushed for improved help for children and educational institutions.

I was a reporter at the Capitol during those days and well recall the outspoken, highly motivated leaders of the day.

Most of all I remember a night in the state House when, late at night, Bell came dashing out of a room where the Appropriations Committee was making final state budget decisions.

Sometime after midnight, as I recall, Bell dashed into a nearby men's room. Castor (then Florida's Education Commissioner and not yet married to Bell), and I were in the hall trying to get answers from him and both of us followed him into the men's room seeking his response. He was not unnerved by the sudden presence of two women, but then-House Speaker T.K. Wetherell wandered in and was stunned to find us there.

The night ended peacefully, and we finally had an agreement on a state budget.

Here's a statement from U.S. Rep. Kathy Castor:

With heavy hearts, we are deeply saddened to announce the passing of Sam Bell, husband of Betty Castor and stepfather of Congresswoman Kathy Castor, last night after an unexpected health complication. Samuel P. Bell III founded the University of South Florida College of Public Health and was considered the "father" of the institution. He served in the Florida Legislature for fourteen years and made selfless contributions to improving children's health policy in Florida through his work at the College of Public Health among so many other accomplishments. Sam and Betty were married for 34 years and have six children and ten grandchildren. A celebration of life will be announced at a later date.

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## **A force in the legislature': Former Volusia lawmaker, lobbyist Sam Bell dies**

**Jim Abbott, The Daytona Beach News-Journal**

Wed, March 15, 2023 at 2:56 PM CDT · 4 min read

- **Kathy Castor**  
U.S. Representative from Florida
- **Betty Castor**  
American politician

[Sam Bell](#), a former powerful member of the Florida House from Volusia County with a long record of legislation aimed at improving education and the lives of children, has died, according to an announcement from the office of his stepdaughter, [U.S. Rep. Kathy Castor](#).

“With heavy hearts, we are deeply saddened to announce the passing of Sam Bell, husband of Betty Castor and stepfather of Congresswoman Kathy Castor, last night after an unexpected health complication,” said a statement posted on Rep. Castor’s website Wednesday.

Bell was 83.



Sam Bell and his wife, Betty Castor, are pictured in an undated photograph. A longtime force in the Florida House, Bell died on Tuesday at age 83, according to his family.

A Democrat, Bell represented Volusia in the House from 1974 to 1988 and held high-ranking positions such as appropriations chairman. He was in line to become House speaker in 1988 but lost a re-election bid in his district. Later in his career, [he worked as a lobbyist in Tallahassee](#) for the issues that also were the focus of his long career as a lawmaker.

He was married for 34 years to Betty Castor, a former state education commissioner and president of the University of South Florida.

“He was a force in the legislature,” said his son, Douglas Bell, who also works as a lawyer and lobbyist in Tallahassee. “He held every important chairmanship there was. He was appropriations chairman twice in a row — for four years. He passed some very meaningful legislation for children.”

Accomplishments that Bell was most proud of, according to his son, included passing the state’s first requirement that children in vehicles be placed in car seats or child restraints. He also was instrumental in creating the state’s regional perinatal program, infant metabolic screening and school health services.

“The list goes on and on of the things that Sam did for children,” his son said.

Bell also was a founder of the University of South Florida College of Public Health and considered the “father” of the institution, which he remained involved with through the rest of his life, his son said.

## J. Hyatt Brown: Bell wielded facts to change minds

Born in West Virginia, Bell was the son of a schoolteacher and Methodist minister. He moved with his family to Fort Lauderdale in junior high, where he graduated from Fort Lauderdale High School. He went on to graduate with an undergraduate degree from Dartmouth College and a law degree from Duke University, his son said.

After college, he went to work at the Cobb Cole law firm in Daytona Beach. In Volusia County, he became a professional colleague and friend of J. Hyatt Brown, now chairman of Daytona Beach-based global insurance brokerage Brown & Brown.

In the 1970s, the two men also worked side-by-side in the legislature, Brown said. In the 1980s, Bell served as a board member at Brown & Brown, a role that he would hold for 40 years, Brown said.

“Sam was a very hard worker,” Brown said, “very bright, very thoughtful in his decision-making process.”

In the legislature, Bell also had a gift for presenting his views in a way that could change the minds of those with opposing opinions, Brown said.

“He had a very nice way about getting people to do something they didn’t necessarily want to do,” Brown said. “Part of it was fact he was able to discuss issues in a way that made them more palatable and the other part was that he was just forceful. When he was making a point, he always talked about facts, and he would always present them very forcefully.”

## Outside of politics, a caring family member

Outside of the professional realm, Bell was a caring family member, who also was quick with a joke, his son said.

“He taught me my work ethic,” said Douglas Bell, who worked together in a law firm with his father for the last 18 years of his career. “He taught me how to be a gentleman and do the right thing.

“He was as tough as nails politician, but he was immensely compassionate and he had the most wonderful laugh,” he said. “He had an amazing wry sense of humor, just so witty and dry.”

Bell hadn’t been suffering from any of health problems, so his death has been a particular shock to the family, his son said.

In addition to his wife, son and stepdaughter, Bell also is survived by sons Sam Bell IV and David Bell; stepdaughter Karen Castor; stepson Frank Castor; and 10 grandchildren. A celebration of life will be announced at a later date, according to the family.

*Wire services were used to compile this report.*

*This article originally appeared on The Daytona Beach News-Journal: [Sam Bell, husband of Betty Castor, former Florida ed commissioner, dies](#)*

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## Sam Bell, the founder of USF's College of Public Health, dies at 83

**WUSF Public Media - WUSF 89.7 | By [Carl Liscandrello](#)**

Published March 15, 2023 at 1:33 PM EDT



*Betty Castor*

Sam Bell, the founder of the USF College of Public Health and a longtime supporter of the university, died on March 14, 2023 at age 83. Bell's wife, former state education commissioner and USF president Betty Castor, said in a statement that Bell died of an "unexpected health complication."

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Sam Bell, the founder of the University of South Florida's [College of Public Health](#) and a [longtime supporter](#) of the university, died Tuesday night.

He was 83.

Bell's wife, Betty Castor, who served as state education commissioner and USF president, said in a statement that Bell died of an "unexpected health complication."

Bell was elected to the state House from Volusia County as a Democrat in 1974, and was in line to become the House Speaker when he lost a re-election bid in 1988.

The stepfather of Tampa U.S. Rep. Kathy Castor went on to become a longtime lobbyist in Tallahassee, and was heavily involved in children's health-care issues.

Bell graduated from Dartmouth College and Duke University School of Law. He helped found the College of Public Health in 1984 while serving in the Florida Legislature.

"I could see there were public health issues that were affecting our communities — things like infant mortality, tuberculosis and the need for clean drinking water," Bell said during a [2018 interview](#). "And I could also see that a lot of people in the state's county health departments were aging, with no one in line to continue their work. It was clear we needed a college to train a new generation of public health professionals."

Bell was also an avid listener of public radio and served on the advisory board for WUSF.

Sam and Betty Castor — who was USF's president from 1994-99 — were married for 34 years and have six children and 10 grandchildren.

A celebration of life will be announced at a later date.

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## Former Florida lawmaker and children's advocate Sam Bell has died

WFSU | By [The News Service of Florida](#)  
Published March 15, 2023 at 11:53 AM EDT



*Dughi, Donn(Donald Gregory), 1932-2005*

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*Florida Memory - State Archives*

Representative Sam Bell talks on the phone on the floor of the Florida House in 1987.

Sam Bell, a former powerful member of the Florida House and later a longtime lobbyist, died Tuesday night, according to an announcement from the office of his stepdaughter, U.S. Rep. Kathy Castor.

Bell, a Democrat, represented Volusia County in the House from 1974 to 1988 and held high-ranking positions such as appropriations chairman. He was in line to become House speaker in 1988 but lost a re-election bid in his district.

Bell was married for 34 years to Betty Castor, a former state education commissioner and president of the University of South Florida. The announcement Wednesday from Kathy Castor's office said he died after an "unexpected health complication."

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Sam Bell, left, stands next to his wife, Betty Castor, on the balcony of their Bayshore condo on Nov. 2, 2004, in this Times file photo. [ Times (2004) ]

By [Emily L. Mahoney](#) Times staff  
Published Mar. 15|Updated Mar. 15

Sam Bell, a former longtime Florida lawmaker and a champion of children's health, died Tuesday night, according to U.S. Rep. Kathy Castor, his stepdaughter. A statement from Castor's office said he suffered "an unexpected health complication." He was 83.

Bell, a Democrat from Volusia County, served in the Florida House for 14 years and was in line to be speaker until he lost reelection in 1988. Bell is survived by Betty Castor, his wife of 34 years. They have six children and 10 grandchildren, according to the statement.

Bell, who held the powerful position of appropriations chairperson, got to know Betty Castor when she was a state senator from Tampa in the Legislature. They didn't immediately hit it off.

"They would get into these duels over who could support their local college and universities (in the budget)," Rep. Castor said in an interview, chuckling. "They were competitors. But eventually, that turned into respect and love."

Bell strongly supported the career of his wife, a former state education commissioner, Hillsborough County commissioner and the first female president of the University of South Florida.

During his time in the Legislature, Bell sponsored laws to require certain health screenings for newborns as well as car seats for children, Rep. Castor said.

Ralph Haben, a Democrat from Manatee County who was House speaker in the early 1980s, said Bell was a "legislative giant" who not only had good ideas but also the know-how to make them reality.

"If he believed in something, by God, he believed in it and you were not going to dissuade him," Haben said. "He'd give you that look, like, 'You know what I'm about to say is correct, you really ought to just believe me.'"

The strength of his convictions earned him a nickname among lawmakers, Haben said: "Bull Bell."

NASA Administrator Bill Nelson, who served with Bell in the Florida House in the '70s, said during a session when lawmakers were debating possibly demolishing Florida's Historic Capitol, Nelson quipped that he would stand in front of the bulldozers himself if he had to.

"With a big grin on his face, (Bell) walks over to me with a toy bulldozer in his hands and instructs me to ... lay down," he said. "He winds this toy bulldozer up and of course I complied, much to the laughter of all the members."

After he left the House, Bell was a longtime lobbyist who remained passionate about children's health.

"He will be missed as a friend but he will be missed as a public servant who operated on honor and integrity," Nelson added. "He was a role model for what we need today."

Bell also founded the University of South Florida College of Public Health and was considered the “father” of what was the first college of public health in the state. He was chairperson of its advisory board from 1984 until last year.

Donna Petersen, dean of the College of Public Health, said the college is forever indebted to Bell.

She said he established scholarships and partnerships with two towns in Uganda so USF students could travel and do work there. In 2021, he created a fund to help faculty better communicate health information to Spanish speakers.

“He was just a good, kind, caring person who saw things in the world that needed changing and would say, ‘Well, let’s change it,’” she said

Petersen said she’s been flooded with emails from people who remember his smile and positivity.

“Someone wrote to me this morning and they said, ‘He was a champion who made other champions,’” she said. “He left us with something very precious, and we will take care of it.”

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## **Sam Bell warned us, but too few listened** **| Steve Bousquet**

**By Steve Bousquet**

**South Florida Sun-Sentinel**

**Apr 05, 2023 at 7:00 am**

Former Rep. Sam Bell in a familiar place, at the center of the action on the floor of the Florida House in 1987. (Donn Dughi, [floridamemory.com](http://floridamemory.com))

**TAMPA** — Sam Bell excelled at many things.

But what stands the test of time is that he told people in Florida what they needed to hear — even when it wasn’t in his best political interest. That’s the big difference between yesterday’s legislators and today’s.

That’s how much Bell cared about Florida, and it’s what this state needs now more than ever. But his voice is silenced.

Bell was a legislator, lawyer, lobbyist, child advocate, public health expert and “first husband” at the University of South Florida, where his wife, Betty Castor, served as president. A Democratic member of the Florida House from 1974 to 1988, he died of health complications on March 14. He was 83.

The son of a Methodist minister, Samuel Paris Bell III was born in West Virginia but spent his formative years in Fort Lauderdale, where he became an Eagle Scout and graduated from Fort Lauderdale High in 1957. After attending Dartmouth and law school at Duke, he settled in Volusia County, started a family and befriended Hyatt Brown, an up-and-coming political leader and insurance executive.

[Bell's funeral last Friday](#), at a packed Palma Ceia Presbyterian church in Tampa, produced such an outpouring of former state leaders that it looked like a legislative reunion.



Steve Bousquet, Sun Sentinel columnist and Opinion Editor. (Mike Stocker/Sun Sentinel)

Brown, his friend and mentor, delivered a eulogy. Three other speakers were there: Jon Mills of Gainesville, Tom Gustafson of Fort Lauderdale and Peter

Wallace of St. Petersburg. So, too, were former Gov. Bob Martinez, former Senate President Toni Jennings of Orlando, former senators George Stuart of Orlando and Paula Dockery of Lakeland, former Reps. Mary Figg and Ron Glickman of Tampa, Bob Hartnett of Orlando and Winston “Bud” Gardner of Titusville, and many others.

Bell was a legislative workhorse who could be tough as nails. When he got worked up, his balding head would shine brightly red. Highly competitive, he played to win, whether it was golf, racquetball or the New York Times crossword puzzle.

“Sam did not waste a single day in his life,” his son Douglas said at the funeral. “He sucked the marrow out of life.”

He showed fearlessness in his persistent criticism of Florida’s long history of short-changing education, health care and other essential needs.

Decades after Bell exited the political stage, Florida still has among the lowest teacher salaries in the U.S., long waiting lists for human services and chronic turnover in its prison system (even with billions in the bank).

Bell was right. But too few listened.

“His passion and intensity for what he believed in is his legacy,” said Peter Wallace, the last Democratic speaker (1994-96).

Bell wasn’t always right. More than once, he said a personal income tax was “inevitable” in Florida, even though it’s prohibited by the state Constitution, and every year the prospect of an income tax seems less and less likely.

When times are good and the state has billions stockpiled in reserves, politicians can comfortably stick their heads in the sand. When times are bad, no one wants to suggest raising taxes.

Term limits have stripped away institutional knowledge and in today’s transactional Capitol, it’s a safe bet that practically nobody has any idea who Sam Bell was.

But he holds a special place in the annals of state politics. As he neared the peak of his power in 1988, [he lost his House seat](#) to a little-known challenger. It cost Bell the House speakership he had worked for years to attain. He was not alone: Senator Dempsey Barron, the archetype of a crafty backroom deal-maker, lost the same year to a political novice as well.



Sam Bell huddling in 1986 with then-Sen. Ken Jenne of Hollywood. (Donn Dughi at [Floridamemory.com](http://Floridamemory.com) )

Bell's shocking loss was widely attributed to the fact that he spent too much time in Tallahassee and not enough time in his Daytona Beach-area district, asking for votes.

But he was also clearly identified in the public mind with taxes. He was a leading proponent of a reform of Florida's regressive sales tax in 1987 that the Legislature passed, only to repeal it a year later. Democrats lost their nerve after Martinez dropped his support of taxing services amid intense business opposition — including newspapers opposed to an advertising tax.

As the door to Bell's political career slammed shut, other doors opened.

He became a leading champion of child health care, especially prenatal care, and the legal rights of the mentally disabled. He worked on adoptions, foster care and child poverty. He nurtured the College of Public Health at USF and lobbied for children for decades, increasingly fighting an uphill battle in a conservative Capitol.

Soon after Bell left the House, he told the Orlando Sentinel that wimpy political leaders too often took the easy way out, rather than confront the state's many festering problems, but he remained hopeful.

"The people who love this state will prevail," Bell said in 1989.

Maybe someday, the people of Florida will prove he was right.

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