The Final Word  

Bill Galvano  
President, Florida Senate

Attorney Bill Galvano was first elected to the Florida House in 2002 and served there until his term ended in 2010. Two years later he was elected to the Senate, serving as majority leader from 2014 to 2016 and becoming president in 2018. Galvano graduated from Manatee Community College, the University of Florida and the University of Miami School of Law. He is a law firm partner, husband and father to three children.

What inspired you to run for office?  
I attribute that to my mother. She is very patriotic. She instilled a true sense of patriotism in all of us children. As a child, I developed a real interest in politics and service and it’s what ultimately led me to law school. In 1984, I chaired Youth for Reagan at Manatee Community College. I later served as an officer in Young Republicans at the University of Florida and as president of the YRs as a young lawyer. I also spent a lot of time in various community and charity organizations, and eventually felt I should take the next step and run for public office.

Are leaders born or made?  
I think it’s a combination. We learn our entire lives, and leadership is no different. I’ve learned many lessons in my service in the legislature that I believe have enhanced my ability to lead. I’ve learned those both by experience and from others. But you have to have an innate will to want to take on the responsibility of a leadership position.

What is your approach to maintaining a strong institutional culture in the Senate?  
Relationships matter. Any institution is only as good as the sum of its parts, which are people. Building relationships with my colleagues in the Senate, the House speaker and representatives, and certainly the governor and those who come to Tallahassee to advocate—to me is the most important step to maintaining the value of the institution.

What have you learned from other legislative leaders through NCSL?  
True success in leadership comes from recognizing the talents in others and empowering others. It is a recognition that you don’t have all the answers, but if you provide the opportunity for others to develop their ideas, you can be successful.

You were tapped to lead the Senate as a freshman. How did knowing that in advance affect your approach to the job?  
I was fortunate enough to gain the support of the caucus in my first session as a freshman, but I also had the advantage of having served in the House. I had built many relationships and worked with good folks on a lot of different issues. It gave me the opportunity to plan long term, to learn along the way, to study what was working and what wasn’t, and to be better prepared.

What are your thoughts about term limits?  
There are pros and cons. As a senator and House member, term limits meant there was quick mobility through various leadership positions. I’m in my eighth year in the Florida Senate and I’ve already served a whole year as Senate president. But I do think you lose some institutional knowledge and experience, as you have a constant rotation of members terming out.

What would surprise people most to learn about you?  
I enjoy doing art—pen and ink. Stipple is my favorite. It’s where you dip the pen in the ink and create an image by making a series of little specks and dots. It’s something I enjoy. I don’t get to do it as much as I used to. I also enjoy cooking.

What book is on your nightstand?  
I’m reading “Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind.” It’s about the history of humankind, tying biology to economics, politics and religion. It’s an interesting read.

Any final words you’d like to share?  
Focus on the task at hand. Too often in politics, we plan so far ahead that we miss the details of the day. While we have to plan for the future, we must still maximize our efforts on day-to-day tasks and issues at hand.

Jane Carroll Andrade conducted this interview, which has been edited for length and clarity.