

# AL LAWSON

## *Biography*

Throughout his journey from humble roots to the Florida Legislature, Al Lawson's roots have always run deep in North Florida. In 1948, Alfred "Al" Lawson, Jr. was born in Midway, Florida, a small town which as its name would imply is located between Tallahassee and the Gadsden County seat of Quincy. Al, Sr. and Carrie Mae Lawson raised Al and his five siblings in a small, modest home located at the heart of the rural farming community, where neighbors both black and white gave a helping hand to one another. At the age of eight, a tall and gangly Al Lawson worked his first job in the tobacco fields in Gadsden County, proving him with his first real lesson in the value of hard work.

Al graduated from Havana Northside High School, where he was a standout athlete, and later received his Bachelor's degree from Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU). He played "Rattler" basketball and ran track while at FAMU. Subsequently, Al went on to earn a Master's degree in Public Administration from Florida State University. Following a brief stint as a professional basketball player, Al became an assistant coach for Florida State University men's basketball team. The highlight of his coaching career came in 1972, when the Seminoles reached the NCAA National Championship. Al married his college sweetheart Delores Brooks, and they have two adult children, Alfred III and Shani. He is also the proud grandfather of Kobe, Samuel and Cameron Lawson. As a man of faith, Al is an active member of St. Michael's and All Angels Episcopal Church, where he teaches an adult Sunday school class.

Since 1978, Al has been an insurance agent with Northwestern Mutual Financial Network, where he has been recognized as one of the company's most valued agents. In 1984, he started Lawson & Associates, a marketing and communications firm in Tallahassee, Florida. Al also founded the Capital City Classic, the region's premiere basketball tournament that provides academic scholarships to student athletes.

Al Lawson has devoted more than half of his life to public service and is guided by the belief that the greatest gift an individual can give is service to his or her community. He has served on numerous community boards and organizations such as the United Way, The Tallahassee Chamber of Commerce and as Director of the Tallahassee Urban League and has also chaired and served as the President of the FAMU Booster Club. Additionally, Al has committed personal time to the 4-H Legislature, coached little league baseball and served as a member of the Suwannee River Area Council of Boy Scouts.

The knowledge he gained from being raised in a rural and poor community and from being a small businessman helped lay the ground work for his decision to run for public office. Al realized that working families in North Florida needed a voice in the Legislature. In 1982 as

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an underdog candidate, Al was elected to the Florida House of Representatives where served for eighteen years before being elected to the Florida Senate in 2000.

During his tenure as a state legislator, Al passed legislation that received national and statewide attention. As Chairman of the House Natural Resource Committee, he authored one of the most important environmental laws in the country, Preservation 2000, which created the largest state funded land acquisition program in the United States. He also authored and passed the Apalachicola Bay Protection Act and was the prime sponsor of the Everglades Protection Act. Al has been a champion for state employees, public schools and all working people of North Florida. He fought for pay raises and benefits for state workers and vigorously strived to improve the quality of life for children and the elderly. Al received national recognition for his major role in the Rosewood Legislation, which provided remunerations to survivors of the Rosewood massacre in the 1930s. In 2005, Al sponsored and passed legislation creating the First Generation Matching Grant scholarship program, providing state university matching grants to undergraduate students who are the first in their families to attend college and who demonstrate a financial need.

Al has received numerous legislative and community achievement awards. Among his most cherished recognitions are the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Tallahassee Chamber of Commerce, FAMU Meritorious Award, FSU Distinguished Alumni Award, and Legislator of the Year Award from the Nature Conservancy. Additionally, he has been recognized as the Legislator of the Year by the Florida Police Benevolent Association, Florida State Student Government Association, the Florida Sheriff's office and AFSCME and has received the NAACP Outstanding Achiever Award and the Gadsden County Citizen of the Year Award. Al was inducted into the FAMU Sports Hall of FAME and the FAMU University Gallery of Distinction in the College of Arts and Science.

During his tenure in the Florida Senate, Al was named the "Dean of the Florida Legislature," recognizing his many years of service on behalf of the people of North Florida. During his final term, Al was elected Democratic leader of the Florida Senate, and in 2012, the Florida Legislature named Highway 90 from the City of Midway to the City of Quincy as the "Alfred Lawson Jr. Highway" in his honor.

Al continues to serve his community, remaining involved with North Florida's schools and public universities while continuing to assist those in need through generous acts of philanthropy. He recognizes that an official title is not necessary to contribute to one's community, and Al knows that his best days of public service remain ahead.