

Remarks for College of Nursing Topping Out Ceremony

Delivered by USF President Rhea Law

Thursday, April 17, 2025

As Prepared for Delivery

Good morning! My name is Rhea Law, and I am proud to serve as the president of the University of South Florida. I am delighted to welcome you to this very special celebration.

Before I continue, I'd like to take a moment to recognize representatives of our elected officials who have joined us today:

- U.S. Congresswoman Laurel Lee
- U.S. Congressman Vern Buchanan
- Florida Senate Majority Leader Jim Boyd
- Florida House Minority Leader Fentrice Driskell,
- Florida State Representative Lindsay Cross,
- Florida State Representative Berny Jacques, and
- Florida State Representative Susan Valdes

Also joining us is USF President Emerita Judy Genshaft and former Florida Senator, Education Commissioner and USF President Betty Castor.

I also want to extend a special welcome to Florida's Commissioner of Agriculture, Wilton Simpson, who you will hear from in just a moment.

As president of the Florida Senate in 2022, Commissioner Simpson's leadership was key to the approval by the Legislature and Governor Ron DeSantis of a \$33 million appropriation to support this facility expansion and a \$5 million recurring investment to support our efforts toward nursing workforce expansion.

Thank you, Commissioner Simpson, for recognizing this pressing need, for your continued support of USF, and for partnering with us to meet the health care needs of our state.

The University of South Florida is committed to being a vital resource for our community and enhancing the quality of life for those who call the Tampa Bay region home. We are extremely proud of the many contributions of Dean Usha Menon and the faculty, staff and students in the College of Nursing.

Today's topping-out ceremony is an important step in our efforts to address the critical shortage of nurses in Florida. Projections suggest there could be about 60,000 vacancies by 2035.

The shortage affects not only patient care, with longer wait times and fewer available services, it also can have significant economic impacts on families, on health care systems, and on the broader community.

This expansion of the College of Nursing will more than double the number of undergraduate students we graduate each year, providing our region and our state with a robust pipeline of capable, dedicated and passionate nurses. Our students will have the additional benefit of advanced training through the Tampa General Hospital Nursing Simulation Center.

USF has enjoyed a highly successful partnership with TGH for more than five decades — a partnership that has profoundly impacted our students, our robust research enterprise, and the world-class patient care that we provide.

We are very grateful for their generous investment, which supports the planning, construction and implementation of this new center. The result will be a healthier future for the Tampa Bay region and our state.

Thank you again for joining us for this very special occasion. It is now my pleasure to introduce the Florida Commissioner of Agriculture, Wilton Simpson.