



WEEKLY TALLAHASSEE UPDATE

Dear Venice Area Chamber Members,

Last week's visit to Tallahassee for the opening of the Legislative Session was both energizing and eye-opening, and I wanted to share an update with you. The Florida Chamber of Commerce continues to be one of our strongest partners in navigating the legislative process. Each week during Session, they ask Chambers statewide to identify our top priorities, ensuring that the voice of local business remains front and center.

In his opening remarks, Florida Chamber President & CEO Mark Wilson highlighted the top concerns reported by Chambers across the state. I'm proud to say that our members are aligned with the top three: insurance stability, property tax concerns, and affordable housing solutions through the Live Local Act. Your engagement and awareness continue to reflect the strength of our business community.

Florida's rapid growth underscores why these issues matter. By 2030, our state is projected to welcome 2.5+ million new residents, require 1.33 million new jobs, host 40+ million additional annual visitors, and see 2.1 million more drivers on our roads. That's a tremendous amount of change in a short period of time and it's driven almost entirely by migration, as Florida now experiences more deaths than births.

Innovation is also reshaping the business landscape. In 2025, 58% of businesses used AI double the usage from 2023. I always remember the saying: *Steer it, don't fear it.* When used thoughtfully, AI can help take your business to the next level.

Looking ahead to the 2026 election cycle, Florida will see significant turnover. There are four Constitutional officer positions on the ballot, 20 of 40 Senate districts up for election, and 19 House districts with term-limited seats. Here in Sarasota County alone, we have 37 election opportunities. The message from Tallahassee was clear: the state needs more qualified candidates. If you or someone you know is interested in serving, we can connect you with nonpartisan candidate training programs.

Affordability and property taxes were major topics of discussion. One proposal that stood out was HB 903, which would cap annual property tax increases at 3% across the board homestead, investment, and commercial. A uniform cap could provide greater predictability for businesses and residents alike, and we will be following this bill closely throughout Session.

Legislative leaders also shared their priorities. The Speaker of the Florida House emphasized a focus on conservative policy, fiscal responsibility, and keeping small business at the forefront of decision-making. Jennifer Canady, Chair of the House Education & Employment Committee, underscored the importance of aligning education with workforce needs, noting that *talent can't be limited by zip code* if Florida is to continue thriving.



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Florida's manufacturing sector remains a major economic engine. Our state ranks #3 nationally in number of manufacturers, #10 in manufacturing employment, contributes \$80.7 billion to GDP, leads the nation with 579 shipbuilding establishments, and ranks #3 in shipbuilding employment with nearly 15,000 workers. These numbers reflect a strong and diverse industrial base.

On the insurance front, there are 17 new companies entering the Florida market, and Citizens Property Insurance is at its lowest enrollment in years. While Florida will never be the cheapest place for insurance because we sit between two bodies of water that send hurricanes our way, increased competition is a positive sign.

From the Florida Cabinet, Attorney General James Uthmeier spoke about a renewed focus on public safety, emphasizing protecting children and encouraging parents to stay aware of their children's cell phone activity. Chief Financial Officer Blaise Ingoglia highlighted opportunities to lower costs while increasing accountability statewide.

It was a packed two days of meetings and conversations with leaders from across Florida. Each time I travel on behalf of our Chamber, I'm reminded of how exceptional our local business community truly is. I am always proud to share the strength, collaboration, and forward-thinking spirit of the Venice Area with others around the state.

Thank you for your continued leadership and engagement. Please watch for Justin Taylors weekly Tallahassee update as Session progresses.

Sincerely,
Kathy Lehner
President CEO
Venice Area Chamber of Commerce & Foundation