

The Briefing

February 13, 2026

The latest from the government and leadership office of The Chamber

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Community Scorecard

Charlie Thorpe

It was the Friday the 13th before Valentines Day. The air was heavy with fog, the coffee spilled in the truck as I backed out of the driveway, it was early morning (bad for me regardless), I was set to start the program for Community Scorecard. I was trying on my drive to the Venice Yacht Club to mitigate the number of names that I would mess up in my first public speaking assignment in a while.

What a great morning it turned out to be. I believe everyone that attended will vouch for the time well spent. The emcee, Justin Taylor, did an exceptional job of bringing focus to current and relevant topics. The panel, of County Commissioner Tom Knight, Venice Mayor Nick Pachota, and local business Guru Michael Bacon (Immediate Past Chamber Board Chair) covered the important topics of growth, local control, workforce resiliency, and others, with thoughtful realism.

The following is Justin Taylor's excellent rundown of the event, which was also sent out with our legislative update for the week:

2026 Community Scorecard (4th Annual)

Last week, nearly 100 business and community leaders gathered at the Venice Yacht Club for one of my favorite events of the year, the Venice Area Chamber of Commerce Community Scorecard.

Yes, the breakfast was excellent. The Yacht Club never disappoints. And yes, we started with a little fun. A few movie references, a couple of laughs, and then we got down to business.

Because at its core, this event is about something much bigger.

I often describe the Community Scorecard as a checkup for our region. If Venice were a patient, what would the vital signs look like? Are we healthy? Are the treatments working? Are there unintended side effects? And most importantly, what adjustments do we need to make to ensure long term strength?

Joining me on stage were Sarasota County Commissioner Tom Knight, Venice Mayor Nick Pachota, and Mike Bacon, owner of Bacon Brands Restaurant Group. We had a wide-ranging conversation about infrastructure, workforce housing, economic growth, public safety, insurance, and the relationship between local government and Tallahassee.

If you could not attend, I want you to know this. The value of this discussion goes beyond those in attendance last Friday morning. As a Chamber member, you deserve access to these conversations. That is part of the added value of your membership, and the reason for this memo.

The overall sentiment was clear. Our community is strong, but we are under pressure.

Venice and Sarasota County remain incredibly desirable places to live and work. Which is great for our businesses. But growth brings strain. Traffic congestion. Infrastructure funding challenges. Workforce shortages. Housing affordability concerns. None of these issues exist in isolation. They are interconnected, and every decision has ripple effects that stretch decades into the future.

From a business perspective, Mike Bacon spoke candidly about labor challenges. When employees commute forty-five plus minutes each way, that is not a sustainable model. Workforce housing is not just a policy issue. It is an economic one. Mayor Pachota and Commissioner Knight both highlighted the investments being made in affordable and workforce housing, but there was also an honest acknowledgment that there is no simple solution. Preserving land, managing density, funding infrastructure, and keeping housing attainable all require balance. There are tradeoffs in every direction.

Transportation and mobility were front and center as well. The County has made roadways and infrastructure a strategic priority, with particular attention to major corridors and long-term planning. There is ongoing coordination with FDOT, and conversations about how we move people more efficiently throughout the region. Mobility is no longer a background issue. It is one of the defining challenges of the next decade and beyond.

We also addressed the tension between state level legislation and local control. Policies such as the Live Local Act have real implications for cities and counties. Local leaders want to remain responsive to the communities they serve, but state mandates can complicate that balance. Regardless of where you fall politically, understanding how those dynamics work is critical for business owners.

Insurance and resilience were part of the conversation as well. From hurricanes to red tide to rising premiums, resilience is no longer optional. Businesses are investing in hardening their properties, building reserves, and planning for disruption. At the same time, local government is working on stormwater systems, infrastructure upgrades, and

long-term recovery planning. Preparing for the next fifty years requires thinking beyond the next season.

One of the most important takeaways for me was the reminder that engagement matters. Policy decisions do not begin when a project is already approved. They begin much earlier. There are advisory board vacancies at both the city and county level right now. If you care about the future of this community, stepping into one of those roles is one of the most impactful things you can do.

The Chamber's role in all of this is simple but important. We ask questions. We create the space. We bring business leaders and elected officials to the same table. We listen. And we share what we learn.

We do not host these events to create conflict. We host them to create clarity.

When you see a Mayor, a County Commissioner, and a local business owner having an honest conversation on the same stage, that is a healthy sign. It means we are willing to confront complex issues together.

When I was asked what the best year of my life has been, I said 2026. I believe the best is ahead of us. Not because challenges will disappear, but because this community continues to show up, engage, and work toward solutions.

If you were in the room, thank you for being part of it. If you were not, I hope this gives you insight into the discussion. And as always, I encourage you to stay engaged, read the advocacy updates, and keep asking questions.

If you're asking the question, how can I stay engaged? That's what the Venice Area Chamber of Commerce is here for. Open and read our weekly Tallahassee advocacy updates, attend our events, i.e., Political Hob Nob, Coffee and Conversation sessions, Community Scorecard, and don't be afraid to contact the Venice Area Chamber of Commerce with your questions and concerns from our business community.

That is how we keep Venice strong.

- Justin Taylor

Justin pointed out that there are a number of vacancies on advisory boards in the city and county... Think about it... Be in the "room where it happens."

Weekly Tallahassee update -

In the weekly legislative update, an issue I noticed among the few that we are watching closely is the proposition of **employer tax credits for homebuyer assistance**. This lines up quite well with the points Mike Bacon made about your workforce wanting/wishing/needing to live closer to where they work, and how that potentially supports longevity on your staff. Take a look and let me know your thoughts (cthorpe@venicechamber.com).

Leadership 2026 -

I am still taking names for volunteer Leadership Venice alums willing to assist with certain days of Leadership Venice 2026. Reach out if you can help me and we will find a day where you can help and join in on the newest network of Leadership Venice. It is a terrific way to meet and greet more local professionals.

Historic Photo Request -

If you or someone you know has old Venice photos of the last 100 years, we'd love to be sent copies of them. It can be photos of your business through the years, or events you were at. I know some of you have some hidden gems. Thank you in advance.