

ASSOCIATED INDUSTRIES OF FLORIDA

LEGISLATIVE DAILY BRIEF



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Week two of the 2007 Session is underway. Monday was relatively quiet with most legislators preparing to discuss property tax reform later this week. The revenue estimating conference met for most of the day in Tallahassee and announced during their proceedings that Florida's revenues for this year and next are approximately \$1 billion dollars less than expected. This represents the first time in nearly 32 years that general revenue is projected to be lower than the year before. The bottom line is that lawmakers will have \$30.9 billion in general revenue available to appropriate -- \$1.2 billion less than they started with last year.

According to state economists, this doesn't necessarily represent weakness in Florida's economy. What it represents is that Florida cannot maintain the rapid rate of growth it had been experiencing forever. This drop in revenue is mainly due to a cooling off of Florida's recently booming housing market. Luckily, government officials had been expecting this decline and therefore, are prepared to deal with it. Floridians continue to have confidence in their state's economy and Florida continues to experience the lowest employment rate in the country. This is due in part to the resilience of our state's employers and the important role they play in driving Florida's economy.

Environmental

What started off as a non-controversial presentation by the members of the Century Commission for a Sustainable Florida turned into an awkward moment when Senator Carey Baker (R-Eustis) questioned the Commission's recommendations on climate change. The Florida Legislature created the "Century Commission for a Sustainable Florida" in 2005 for the purpose of providing the legislative and executive branches with recommendations for dealing with Florida's growth management issues. Florida has been growing at astronomical rates; in fact some predict that in 50 years there will be an additional 17 million people living here – double the number of people currently living in Florida. The Commission is comprised of 15 members, with 5 each appointed by the Governor, the Speaker of the Florida House and the President of the Florida Senate. The Governor appoints the Chair, and Governor Bush appointed St. Petersburg Mayor Rick Baker as the Commission's first Chair.

By law, the Century Commission must:

- annually envision the future for the state,

- continually consider laws and regulations and make recommendations as to how we can best accommodate population growth while maintaining our "quality of life,"
- serve as a repository for our best "community-building" ideas and as a resource for all Floridians, and
- beginning in 2007, provide a written report to the Legislature and Governor addressing specific growth management issues.

Senator Baker, a member of the Select Committee to Receive Century Commission Findings, questioned the Commission's motives for discussing a topic that according to Senator Baker has not yet been accepted as fact. The presenter, a University of Florida professor, was forced to cut his portion of presentation short.

Senator Mike Bennett (R-Bradenton) has filed legislation (SB 318) that would allow the Commission to act independently of the Legislature. During the presentation today, he announced that after listening to the intense debate by committee member, "he was re-thinking his idea of not requiring the Commission to present their annual findings to the Legislature."

The Commission's first report addresses several issues of vital importance to AIF's members including energy, workforce development, and transportation just to name a few and it paints a picture of what the state of Florida might be like several years into the future.

Please send your comments or suggestions to us at aif@aif.com or call the Governmental Affairs department at (850)224-7173.

- For more information on all of the important legislative information concerning the business community, go to our "members only" Florida Business Network web site at <http://fbnnet.com>
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