WHAT SHOULD FLORIDA'S REGULATED INDUSTRIES EXPECT THIS LEGISLATIVE SESSION

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Doing Business in Florida

Florida businesses, particularly those in regulated industries such as healthcare, transportation, utilities, and financial services, play a vital role in our state's economy. Each year, during Florida's legislative session, the interests of regulated industry stakeholders are front and center, as legislators look to balance the long-term needs of our state with policies that have immediate impact. Inevitably, public policy outcomes have legal, regulatory, and strategic implications for Florida businesses. With the 2019 legislative session beginning on March 5th, an important question facing many companies doing business in Florida is: what should we expect, now and in the future?

This year, several priority issues are on the minds of the Governor and legislative leaders. Those rising to the top of the list are healthcare, transportation, and the environment.

Healthcare

In the area of health care, House Speaker Jose Oliva (R-Miami), is focused on expanding access, reducing regulation, and increasing competition which he and other legislative leaders believe are driving up costs. The House is specifically targeting a variety of regulatory issues, such as "certificates of need," which determine whether hospitals and other types of health-related facilities can be built; promoting "telemedicine," which would allow more doctors to treat patients remotely; and proposals to lift scope-of-practice regulations which would expand the ability of physician assistants and nurses to provide more care. There are also efforts underway to make it easier to open ambulatory surgical centers and recovery care centers in Florida. In addition to Speaker Oliva's health care priorities, Governor DeSantis has endorsed a bill that would return health insurance premiums to policyholders who procure non-emergency services at a lower cost than an insurance company would pay.

Transportation

Senate President Bill Galvano (R-Bradenton), has proposed an expansive transportation infrastructure plan that he believes would improve traffic congestion and assist rural counties that have lagged behind during the state's economic recovery. The proposals include extending the Suncoast Parkway and the Florida Turnpike and building the Heartland Parkway between Polk and Collier counties. The Senate President's plan includes spending $75 million next fiscal year to be used for initial research and development of the three projects, with work beginning around 2023.

Environment

Another top priority this session is the environment. In his proposed budget, Governor DeSantis is requesting $625 million to address the state's water quality issues, with a keen focus on the Everglades and the state's response to the environmental and economic crisis resulting from outbreaks of red tide and blue-green algae in Southeast and Southwest Florida. He is also requesting that the state use a scientific approach to address

sea level rise, which is a major policy shift from the previous administration.

Among the thousands of bills and budget requests, other key issues on policy-maker's radar relate to Hurricane Michael recovery, repealing the current ban on smokable medical marijuana, and addressing property insurance assignment of benefits reform.

Regardless of your political, philosophical, or policy leanings, it is clear that these legislative outcomes will have legal, regulatory, and strategic implications for Florida businesses. With Florida's population projected to grow by nearly a million people during the next 3 years, Florida businesses can expect legislators to be laser-focused on balancing the needs of Florida's diverse population with the needs of Florida businesses that drive the state's economy. For more information on this topic, please contact the author, Sha`Ron James, on the firm's Government and Regulatory team.

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