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This report was initially released electronically at www.FloridaTaxWatch.org

Recap of “Five Good Things About Florida’s Economy” Forum

While Floridians have been inundated with bad economic news during these challenging times, it is important to recognize that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. Florida TaxWatch and the National Federation for Independent Business Research Institute proudly hosted the economic forum, “Five Good Things About Florida’s Economy”, on Monday, February 15, 2010 in Tallahassee. The forum focused on discussing emerging bright spots and featured prominent public officials and noted economists who gave their analysis on Florida’s economic future and identified opportunities the state can seize for a better tomorrow.

“In these critical times, some have wondered whether Florida will return to its previous position as a global growth titan”, said **Dominic M. Calabro**, President and CEO of Florida TaxWatch. “This economic forum was convened to highlight those positive aspects of the economy so that we can focus energies on fostering their growth.”

Convened to shed light on Florida’s emerging advantages, the forum also focused on helping to make lawmakers cognizant of these opportunities in order to develop policy that will play on such promising strengths. According to the economic experts at the forum, there are opportunities and trends that exist today that can help us on the path to a brighter tomorrow. The four-hour forum, moderated by **David Royse**, Editor of the Capitol News Service, gave attendees an exclusive look at current research and projections for Florida’s economy and provided lengthy question and answer sessions.

Dr. Stefan Norrbin, Chief Economist of Florida TaxWatch, member of the Council of Economic Advisors at Florida TaxWatch, and Professor of Economics at Florida State University, gave a broad insight into Florida’s future through a national and international perspective. Nationally, Dr. Norrbin stated that the housing market is rebounding which is positive news for the state’s economy. He explained that residential housing prices are stabilizing, short selling has diminished, and housing inventories have decreased. With a more favorable housing market, people in other states, who had planned to move to Florida but weren’t able to do so, are now more able to sell their homes and migrate to the state more easily than a few years ago. In his research, Dr. Norrbin also found signs that the manufacturing sector is beginning to recover with the industry seeing some profits due to increased construction in the state.

Internationally, Florida is poised for its greatest opportunity to strengthen its economic recovery. The state’s export industry is strengthening and is emerging to become Florida’s strategic advantage. Dr. Norrbin explained that the U.S. dollar has depreciated which has made goods cheaper to foreign buyers and, with world demand on the rise, capital flows are returning to normal and exports to foreign countries are increasing.

More importantly, Florida has a great geographical advantage as the “Gateway to the Americas”. Latin America is one of Florida’s top export trade partners and the region is experiencing bright spots of their own. Some countries within the region are forecasted to have significant growth increases in the near future, especially Brazil, who is Florida’s top export trade partner. Dr. Norrbin concluded by advising Florida to take advantage of this great opportunity and utilize the state’s regional location to improve the economy before a neighboring state takes advantage it. By focusing on the international economy, Florida will be able to further take advantage of these opportunities for expansion and revenue generation.

See Dr. Norrbin’s presentation [here](#).

Amy Baker, Coordinator of the Florida Legislature's Office of Economic and Demographic Research, gave a synopsis of the current fiscal and budgetary situation. She explained that key growth variables showed Florida at a turning point where economic growth is on the upswing and indicate a full recovery by 2015. In her research, she has found that consumer spending over all sectors has increased slightly and forecasted a strengthening of the residential housing market and increases in ad valorem tax revenue. The reenergized housing market will also help the state's economy by attracting baby boomers to the state now that they can sell their homes in other states more easily. Her research has projected a substantial increase in the number of retirees moving into the state for the upcoming years as the baby boomers begin to turn 65 in 2011. Turning her attention to emerging opportunities this trend possesses, she believes that health and human related services, especially age specific technology, will be in high demand and present profitable opportunities for small business. In conclusion, she addressed the prevalent concern over the uncertainty of the future of economic recovery. In her analysis, Baker has found that most experts have moved away from the notion of a "W-shaped" recession and forecast a "V-shaped" recession instead. This has positive implications for long-term planning by businesses, the state, and its citizens with a second economic decline being unlikely in the future.

The NFIB Senior Researcher, **Denny Dennis**, gave a presentation of his outlook for Florida's small businesses. While complex and tough issues still face the state's businesses, he believes the power and strength of the entrepreneurial spirit of the people and the quest for innovation will lead small businesses through this rough time. He explained that the state and national economy have reached a bottom but issues of sales, real estate, and credit are still very real problems for business owners. However, he did mention that there will be fourteen million people who will start their own small business this year, which is sign of the continuing recovery and optimistic spirit prevailing in the nation.

To supplement the economic commentary, **Ed Goaes**, President and CEO of survey research and strategy organization, The Tarrance Group, gave insight into the current political environment facing Florida at both the state and federal level. In his presentation, he explained that voters were becoming more disgruntled with the policies of the Obama administration and the likelihood of more Republican electoral victories in the near future.

The forum concluded with special guest speakers **Florida Attorney General Bill McCollum**, **Chief Financial Officer Alex Sink**, and **Florida Senator Paula Dockery**, all of whom spoke on the continuing and promising economic recovery occurring in Florida. Attorney General McCollum spoke on the state's historical overreliance on tourism and agriculture and the need to direct more investment into improving the educational system, regulation, and tax law. Chief Financial Officer Sink gave five good things about Florida's economy that she has seen including a strengthened housing market, increased tourism, and a stronger export market with Latin America. Senator Dockery stated she believed that Florida's economy was recovering but that the future of Florida's job creation and economic vitality would rely on the entrepreneurs of the state to take advantage of these timely opportunities.

"We brought all of these important issues up for discussion today because they are things that we can do something about. We can, and must be prepared to, take advantage of these opportunities and focus our energies and resources on these emerging strengths in Florida", said Dominic M. Calabro.

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