



Senator George S. LeMieux
Chairman of the Board of Trustees

Dominic M. Calabro
President & Chief Executive Officer

Comments to the Honorable Brad Drake, Chair, and Members of the House Tourism, Infrastructure Subcommittee Regarding HB 489 --- Tourism Marketing

My name is Dominic M. Calabro and I am President and CEO of Florida TaxWatch, an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit taxpayer research institute and government watchdog which, for over 40 years, has worked to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, and accountability of Florida to promote a fair and equitable system of taxation.

Tourism plays a major role in Florida's economic strength. In 2019, more than 131 million tourists visited Florida and spent an estimated \$91.3 billion. This spending supports as many as 1.5 million Florida jobs, and generates significant state and local tax revenues Florida, helping to keep the tax burden on residents down. According to the Office of Economic and Demographic Research, for every \$1 the state invests in VISIT FLORIDA, \$3.27 in state tax revenue is generated.

In November 2018, Florida TaxWatch released an independent research report entitled [*"The Show May Not Go On: An analysis of the cost of severe cuts to Florida's tourism marketing."*](#) Our report highlights the many benefits of VISIT FLORIDA and how important its mission of promoting tourism is to the well-being of our state.

Global tourism is an increasingly competitive market. To maintain its share of the tourism market, Florida must compete for visitors against other states.

One only needs to look at the experience of other states that have reduced or eliminated their tourism marketing efforts to understand what will happen if VISIT FLORIDA is eliminated. States like Colorado and Washington that have drastically cut or eliminated their investment in travel promotion have experienced immediate and long-term negative economic impacts. Destinations that fail to invest consistently in travel promotion will see visitors, jobs, and tax revenues go elsewhere. Should Florida choose to follow suit, tourism and the economic activity and taxes it generates will certainly decline.

Florida TaxWatch research shows that continuous, targeted investment into Florida's tourism industry is critical to our state's success. We conclude that the sunset provision for VISIT FLORIDA should be removed, or at least extended, such as HB 489 does. We look forward to working with you and your colleagues as the conversation regarding VISIT FLORIDA progresses.