

# ***FLAPOL***

## **Florida TaxWatch supports full funding for VISIT FLORIDA, Sadowski Trust**

*The group also supports e-fairness but wants a business rent tax gone.*

By Jacob Ogles | January 8, 2020

Florida TaxWatch remains the state's best known watchdog calling out wasteful spending in Tallahassee. But Wednesday, the group made clear VISIT FLORIDA, affordable housing and environmental spending must be funded in the 2020 Legislative Session.

“For more than 40 years, Florida TaxWatch has been the eyes and ears of Florida taxpayers, fighting on the frontlines of state government to shepherd fair and sound policy and secure maximum returns on investment for families in every community,” said Florida TaxWatch President and CEO Dominic M. Calabro.

“In announcing our 2020 legislative priorities today, we begin this new year and decade with clear and unrivaled resolve to deliver results to taxpayers that will enhance our economy, increase the benefit and productivity of government, and protect our natural treasures for generations to come.”

Those priorities include full funding for VISIT FLORIDA, which Florida TaxWatch said will keep the key tourism industry booming. That picks a side in one of the major fights expected this year.

House Speaker José Oliva has held steadfast that the Legislature should not fund the de facto tourism bureau in state of corporate-backed theme parks and beautiful beaches. He made that point clear in a December op-ed published in the Tampa Bay Times.

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But TaxWatch produced research saying state investment into the tourism remains essential to the state. The organization said continued funding supports as many as 1.4 million Florida jobs and \$8 billion and state and local tax revenue.

Another perpetual fight in Tallahassee has been proper budgeting for the Sadowski Trust Fund. With revenue tied to title document stamps, the trust is intended to support affordable housing throughout the state but has been raided by lawmakers for years.

Florida TaxWatch, though, listed safeguarding affordable housing funding as one of its top priorities in 2020. The group urged lawmakers to “stop the routine sweeps of Florida’s housing trust funds, including the Sadowski Affordable Housing Trust Fund, and to appropriate all funds in these trusts solely for Florida’s affordable housing programs.”

On the side of reducing taxes, Florida TaxWatch supports legislation sponsored by state Sen. Travis Hutson and state Rep. Jason Fischer further reducing the communication services tax, and noted Florida has the 9th highest cell phone tax in the country.

The group also wants slashes to, if not the outright elimination of, the business rent tax, a levy assessed by Florida and no other states.

At the same time, the group supports state Sen. Joe Gruters e-fairness bill, which calls for online sales tax to be collected in Florida at point of sale.

The group also made clear that its infamous turkey list will go easy on water quality projects. Securing recurring funding that protect, preserve and restore Florida water resources will be a priority this Session. A new report from Florida Tax Watch, *We Can’t Wait on Water: The Restoration and Protection of Florida’s Water Resources is an Essential Taxpayer Investment*, suggests its prudent and essential to invest in such projects now instead of awaiting a crisis.

“Florida TaxWatch appreciates the leadership of Gov. Ron DeSantis and fully supports his recommendation for a \$2.5 billion investment in water resource restoration and protection, with \$300 million annually specifically for the Everglades, over the next three years,” reads the Florida TaxWatch priority list. “Action today will set Florida on a course toward true and lasting progress that will ensure our beloved and world-renowned natural treasures are protected for generations to come.”

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