



OUR OPINION | EXTEND AND FULLY-FUND VISIT FLORIDA

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Florida needs to re-authorize VISIT FLORIDA, the state's tourism marketing agency, if our state hopes to continue to win in the increasingly competitive global travel market.

Right now, the Sunshine State remains a major tourist magnet, a locale blessed with warm, semi-tropical weather, miles of beaches and enough iconic attractions that offer everything from themeparks to eco-tours. Unfortunately, the success of the state's No.1 industry will change drastically if state lawmakers during this session of the Florida Legislature are successful in refusing to fund VISIT FLORIDA and allow the agency to go out of business on June 30th.

The South Florida Business Council joins other prominent business organizations in calling for the passage of SB 362, filed by state Sen. Ed Hooper, R-Clearwater, that would extend VISIT FLORIDA until October 2028. The Senate also budgeted \$52.5 million for the agency, compared to zero from the Florida House. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis proposed spending \$76 million, a figure we support and believe will give the agency the resources to stay competitive in the global marketplace.

Colorado, Pennsylvania and Washington also believed that their states could get by without their states' effective, coordinated travel marketing. They were wrong, and their economies suffered as those state officials watched tourists drift off to competing states that did a better job of promoting their tourist attractions. Florida cannot afford to make that mistake.

Tourism is big business here. In 2018, our state welcomed 124.7 million visitors and, based on the latest economic impact study, those visitors added \$86 billion to our state's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which is more than the entire GDP of 12 states. Tourism supports one out of every six jobs in Florida and provides tax relief. According to Census Bureau data, tourists save every Florida household roughly \$1,512 a year in state and local taxes.

Critics of VISIT FLORIDA contend taxpayer money could be better spent, even though data from the Florida Office of Economic & Demographic Research confirms VISIT FLORIDA has one of the highest return on investment of any state economic development. For every dollar invested in the agency, \$2.15 is returned to the taxpayers.



VISIT FLORIDA is a public-private agency that matches every dollar from state coffers with private funds in working with more than 13,000 partners in the travel industry across the state to promote a wide range of tourist attractions. Besides working with airlines, hotel chains, and local businesses to develop ad campaigns and promotional material, VISIT FLORIDA also plays a role during hurricanes and other natural disasters communicating safety information to the travel public and helping impacted destination recover as quickly as possible.

Tourism is too big of an industry, and VISIT FLORIDA is too important an agency to lapse into non-existence. Florida's business community has a huge stake in this issue and a big voice in the state capitol. It's time we used it to save VISIT FLORIDA and make it a viable marketing agency again.

Photo Credit: VISIT FLORIDA