



Special Session Has Important Business to Complete

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The legislature has a big agenda for its special session that began Monday.

First, the session will adopt a new bill to implement the constitutional requirement that Florida provide a high-quality pre-kindergarten education program. The governor vetoed the legislature's previous effort, because it was inadequate. It remains to be seen if the legislature will agree to the enhanced – and more expensive – program the governor wants. The governor has met with the new leadership of the house and senate, and it is very likely that a bill will pass that he will sign. Whether or not this produces the high-quality program voters want is another matter, but some program is clearly better than no program.

Numerous studies have clearly proven that pre-kindergarten education programs produce students who ultimately do better in school, earn more incomes during their working lives, and contribute more to society. It is good that the voters insisted on a pre-k program, and it will be good for Florida's economy when one is implemented. The higher the quality, the better.

Second, the legislature will enact a number of hurricane relief bills, including property tax relief for those who lost their homes in the storms, loans to school districts and other governments with damaged buildings, funds to restore beaches and dunes, matching funds for the FEMA relief programs, and changes to the insurance regulations. The legislature is poised to provide funds for those who must pay multiple deductibles on their property insurance and to limit the payment of deductibles to one-time only during each storm season. Of course this will mean higher property insurance rates for all Floridians, but this is the price we all pay to live in a place that has hurricanes.

One thing that the legislature may not do is to authorize Visit Florida, the state's public-private tourism marketing agency, to launch a \$14 million advertising

campaign. Two recent studies by Visit Florida indicate that some 20 percent of prospective visitors may avoid coming to Florida during hurricane season and that some meeting planners are reticent about booking meetings in Florida in the summer months. While these estimates are probably overstatements of what may actually transpire, they are certainly cause for concern, especially here in central Florida. So as the legislature takes care of Floridians' current needs related to the hurricanes, it would be very beneficial to authorize a major advertising campaign to offset some of the negative publicity we received and thereby work to protect our economic base as well.

This is Hank Fishkind for 90.7 FM, WMFE News.

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