



FOCUS FORWARD

2020-2021 STATE POLICY AGENDA



SMALL
BUSINESS



TALENT



WATER
INFRASTRUCTURE



PEOPLE



Our eyes are on the future. But what do we see?

The Greater Gainesville region back on track toward a brighter future? Or a region struggling to regain its footing after a year none of us saw coming?

We believe the answer is up to all of us. Navigating our way out of a global pandemic, addressing residual economic challenges and narrowing the social divide that has plagued 2020 will take strategy, intent and focus. The good news is we don't have to wait until we have all of the answers to get started.

The 2021 Legislative Session is upon us and this year our main priority is supporting our legislative delegation in helping our region get back on track. This means taking care of unfinished business, such as leveling the playing field for small businesses by collecting sales tax from out-of-state, online businesses, and removing unnecessary barriers to professional licensing. It means optimizing our legal climate for people and business, and addressing critical infrastructure needs, particularly in the area of water. 2020 has been a tough year, and we recognize that in one way or another, all of us are recalibrating and preparing for what's next. Mental health and children's well-being are critical to our ability to recover, and get back to work and back to building the future.

At its core, the 2020-2021 Focus Forward agenda is about making life better for people in the ways that matter most in this critical moment in time - creating more and better jobs, optimizing education pathways and unleashing upward mobility in what we know will be a new and very different economy.





Stand up for Small Businesses

Small businesses are our region's economic heartbeat. Nearly 90% of Chamber members are small businesses. This year, it is critically important that we do all we can to help them recover and thrive.

- **SUPPORT EQUITABLE SALES TAX POLICY.** If a state has a tax already in place, but isn't collecting it, it is not a new tax. Florida is collecting a fraction of the taxes it should from online sales, and small brick-and-mortar businesses are paying the price. It's time for Florida to level the playing field and collect the conservatively estimated \$612 million it is missing out on each year by not collecting this tax.
- **PROTECT BUSINESSES FROM COVID LAWSUITS.** Small businesses are doing all they can to keep their staff and customers safe. Florida should protect small businesses - and the jobs they create - from frivolous COVID-related lawsuits at a time when they can least afford it.



Keep the Talent Pipeline Flowing

Ask any business owner what 10 things keep them up at night and they'll tell you nine of them are talent. Now is not the time to lose sight of the talent needs of business, or the career and technical education programs that train the individuals that keep our communities working.

- **REMOVE OCCUPATIONAL BARRIERS.** Free Floridians to pursue trades such as painting, flooring, remodeling and more without unnecessary licensing requirements.
- **FUEL HIGH-DEMAND INDUSTRIES.** Reward students and universities for coursework that prepares them to power high-demand industries.
- **HOLD THE LINE ON HIGHER ED.** Retain base funding for the University of Florida and Santa Fe College.
- **FOSTER AN INCLUSIVE WORKFORCE.** Support employment opportunities for people with disabilities.





Address Critical Infrastructure Needs

Florida is surrounded by 1,350 miles of coastline. Though we have made progress in recent years in the area of water policy, our environmental policies must do more to mitigate sea level rise, protect the Floridian Aquifer and build capacity for both today's demand for water and the additional demand we know is coming.

- **PRIORITIZE WATER PROJECTS IN ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION.** Environmental protection requires more than just purchasing land. Every day, nearly 1,000 people move to Florida. By 2030, our population is expected to reach 26 million statewide and as many as 312,000 people in Alachua County. State and local infrastructure must grow with the demand.
- **FUND SEPTIC-TO-SEWER CONVERSIONS.** Wastewater contamination is a major risk to the Floridian Aquifer and public health and safety. Helping Floridians switch from septic to sewer will protect humans and the environment, and save costs later.



Keep People at the Center

Let's face it. 2020 has been a tougher year than we could ever have imagined. As we look to the future, we must advance policies that support healthcare and innovation to improve the way we live.

- **EMPOWER HEALTHCARE INSTITUTIONS TO PROVIDE THE BEST CARE.** It's never been more important to ensure patients have access to the healthcare they need. Florida should support policies that reimburse hospitals for who they treat, not who they are, and ensure reimbursement dollars follow the patient.
- **KEEP SIGHT OF MENTAL HEALTH.** When the pandemic ends, let's be prepared to help Floridians transition to the "new normal." Florida's done great work in the area of mental health in recent years. Let's protect that progress.

