

Tricks & Treats in Tallahassee

The days are getting shorter and (hopefully) the temperature will begin to drop as well. It's officially fall in Florida! That means a number of things, including college football tailgates, little ghouls and goblins running around the neighborhood and the commencement of fall committee weeks in Tallahassee. The Legislature is heating up for the 2020 session and it will be my honor to represent FRSA in the State Capitol moving forward.

As you've likely heard, the venerable Cam Fentriss has decided to retire after 26 years representing FRSA (BOO!). I've worked with Cam for several years as a member of the Construction Coalition. She is a force to be reckoned with and leaves a tremendous legacy of outstanding advocacy on behalf of her clients. It truly is a personal honor for me to be able to carry on in her footsteps for FRSA. We won't let her ghost us too soon, as she will be advising and assisting during this transition period. To Cam, thank you for blazing an exceptional trail and for your friendship and mentorship. We all wish you a very happy retirement!

A little about myself: I am a sixth-generation Floridian hailing from the "Great Northwest" Florida Panhandle. My family has been in agriculture for generations and my grandfather also had a very successful boat manufacturing company based out of

Pensacola. Florida politics is in my blood as multiple kinfolk served in state and local government, including my late Uncle, Senator Greg Evers, who gave me my start in the political process. After spending my childhood hauling campaign signs across the Panhandle, I attended the University of Florida and earned a bachelor's degree in civil engineering (Go Gators!). From there, a desire to be in public policy led me to the University of Alabama where I earned a master's degree in civil engineering and my Juris Doctor degree (Roll Tide!). This will be my seventh session working with the Florida Legislature and Executive Branch, and I now split my time between Orlando, Tallahassee and wherever else I need to be in order to advocate on behalf of my clients.

I am tremendously honored and excited to represent FRSA. Over the last few weeks, I've had the opportunity to meet leadership and members from



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all over the state. Further, Lisa Pate and her staff are absolutely wonderful and have helped me navigate the Association as I get up to speed. FRSA has an incredible team and I am thrilled to be a part of it. Thank you all for your hospitality and warm welcome!

As I stated in the intro, the legislative process is picking up steam as we head towards the 2020 session. We have two more committee weeks in November plus one committee week in December left to go. Bills are being filed left and right and committee hearings are well underway. In the spirit of the “Spooky Season,” here’s a brief preview of some tricks and treats to watch for this session!

Deregulation of Occupations

A massive deregulation bill failed last year in the waning days of session, but the effort has been renewed again for 2020. Senator Albritton (R – Bartow) has filed the measure as SB 474, referred to as the “Occupational Freedom and Opportunity Act.” Of particular interest in the bill are provisions that would make it easier to get a Florida license if you have what is deemed to be a reciprocal license from another state. FRSA is working with the bill sponsor to address licensure concerns with the bill impacting the roofing industry. Further, the Governor recently announced his own initiative to continue lowering workforce entry barriers.

Workers’ Comp Reform

This month the National Council on Compensation Insurance (NCCI) recommended a worker’s comp rate reduction to the Florida Office of Insurance Regulation (OIR) for next year. On its face, this is great news, but concerns linger as the markets continue to react to recent Florida Supreme Court decisions and industry trends. Also, a deeper dive into the data supporting the NCCI filing shows that attorneys’ fees continue to rise and claims are taking longer and longer to resolve.

Florida Building Code

Following Hurricane Michael’s devastating impacts

to the Florida Panhandle in October 2018, murmurs have been percolating on whether it’s time to take a comprehensive look at the Florida Building Code (similar to efforts undertaken following Hurricane Andrew). Advocates for strengthening the code point to the widespread destruction wrought by Michael, including the devastation of communities a significant distance inland from the coast, as well as the perceived heightened intensity of many storms in recent memory. The opposition, however, suggests that the code performed well during Michael, with many newer structures fairing substantially better than the plethora of older construction structures in the storm’s path. Further, a tightened code could significantly raise construction costs, disproportionately impacting the low-to-moderate income communities struggling for affordable housing. At this point, legislation has not been filed.

Construction Defects/Opportunity to Cure

Multiple efforts are swirling to reform Florida’s construction defects statutes, including the opportunity to cure afforded by Chapter 558 of the Florida Statutes. Ideas range from simply cleaning up the process for handling defects claims under 558 to forcing all defects claims into mandatory, non-binding arbitration. Additionally, a parallel effort is ongoing that would place greater limits on causes of action for construction defects under Chapter 553.

The issues above are just a taste of what will lead conversations in Tallahassee during the 2020 legislative session, which kicks off in January. Many more bills will be filed, and Governor DeSantis will continue to release his priorities, including his proposed FY 20-21 state budget, in the coming days. My top priority is to ensure that FRSA has a seat at the table and a voice on all issues that impact your businesses and employees. I very much look forward to hitting the ground running on your behalf and I cannot overstate my gratitude for your trust and confidence.

FRM

What's Wrong with These Pictures?

