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**Florida Business Leaders Support Bill to Protect Florida From Tax Increase**

TALLAHASSEE, FL (April 21, 2011) – Leading organizations supporting Florida businesses—both large and small—launched [www.DontTaxMyVaction.com](http://www.DontTaxMyVaction.com), to support SB 376 / HB 493, which clarifies Florida law to keep travelers from having to pay more taxes on hotel stays.

There have been measures in the past several years from large, national hotel chains to add an additional tax onto online travel agents and travel suppliers for Florida destinations. This would create a new "service tax" in Florida statute and put Florida at a severe disadvantage to other destinations. The tourism industry (hotels, motels, restaurants, etc) and the many small businesses that depend on the travel industry are vital to Florida's economy, especially as we try to create jobs and reduce unemployment.

Supporters of this legislation include:

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|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Americans for Tax Reform              | Hotels.com                                       |
| American Legislative Exchange Council | Hotwire.com                                      |
| American Society of Travel Agents     | Independent Lodging Industry Association         |
| Away.com                              | Interactive Travel Services Association          |
| Bookit.com                            | National Federation of Independent Business - FL |
| CheapTickets.com                      | Orbitz Worldwide                                 |
| Disney                                | Priceline                                        |
| Expedia                               | Travelocity                                      |
| Florida Chamber of Commerce           | TripAdvisor                                      |
| Florida Hispanic Chamber of Commerce  | Universal Orlando                                |
| Florida Retail Federation             |                                                  |

**Statement from Mark Wilson, President of the Florida Chamber of Commerce:**

"As Florida's Business Advocate, the Florida Chamber fully stands behind our position to support the passage of HB 493 and SB 376 as a way to simply clarify a tax law that the Florida Department of Revenue has indicated is ambiguous and to ensure that no new taxes are created for travelers seeking

to visit the Sunshine State. More importantly, we support a strong tourism economy and business environment - neither of which include new taxes."

**Statement from Bruce Craul, Chairman-Elect of the Florida Restaurant and Lodging Association and COO of Legendary Inc. in Destin, Florida:**

"The Legislature needs to clarify the current law to keep the tourism development councils (TDC) and the online travel agencies (OTA) out of court. Lodging operators may opt in or out of the OTA's, it is their choice if they want to use them or not. Small independent operators benefit from the OTA's huge marketing budgets, which is greatly beneficial. We have laws in place that require bed taxes to be collected from all lodging units, and currently there is a huge enforcement issue regarding the collection of taxes from VRBO (Vacation Rentals by Owners). If the legislature would like to add tax dollars to the TDC's and or CVB's they simply have to require VRBO units to purchase a license for their rental unit when they pay their real estate taxes."

**Statement from Julio Fuentes, President of the Florida State Hispanic Chambers of Commerce:**

"As President of the Florida State Hispanic Chambers of Commerce, I represent thousands of Hispanic business owners in the tourism industry across the state. These hardworking Floridians provide jobs in this critical time as well as crucial sales-tax revenue. I strongly support the effort to protect these business owners and pass HB 493."

**Statement from Allen Douglas, National Federation of Independent Businesses:**

"Lawmakers are quick to emphasize the importance of small business owners when talking about unemployment, job loss or economic recovery. However, to ignore the impact that additional taxation would have on Florida's independent hoteliers, travel agents and vendors is to ignore Florida's small business impact. To vote against this bill is to vote for a tax increase."

**Statement from Art Sackler, Interactive Travel Services Association:**

"It's time to clear up the facts: This bill would have no revenue impact at all, let alone cause a revenue loss to the state, because consumers have never paid a tax on travel agent service fees. To reject this legislation would create a new services tax on tourism where a tax currently doesn't exist, starting Florida down a slippery slope of new taxes during a time when the state can ill afford it."

**Statement from Bobbie Singh-Allen, Independent Lodging Industry Association:**

"On behalf of the Independent Lodging Industry Association and its small hotel members, I respectfully urge the Florida Legislature to pass HB 493 and Senate Bill 376, which would prevent consumers from having to pay a new services tax when they book hotel rooms through their favorite online web sites.

"Proposals to raise taxes on consumers who book their travel through online travel company websites threaten to cause disproportionate harm on the small business owners who operate independent hotels. By making Florida more expensive to visit than the 48 other states that have not imposed such a tax, we would be putting Florida's hardworking hoteliers and small business owners at a disadvantage. "For the sake of Florida tourism and the small business owners who operate independent hotels in the state, I urge you to vote for this common-sense legislation to prevent discriminatory, burdensome taxes from being applied to online travel companies."

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