

ORLANDO BUSINESS JOURNAL

7 things to know today and exactly how free are you if you live in Florida?

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August 17, 2016

Good morning, Orlando!

We all cherish freedom, right — but how free are you if you live in Florida?

Libertarian think tank Cato Institute's 2016 edition of "Freedom in the 50 States" ranks the Sunshine State No. 8 in the nation for freedom, down one spot from its last report in 2012. Rankings are based on an investigation of personal and economic freedoms.

The report says Florida "now appears well below average, but the state can expect to enjoy a substantial boost from the Supreme Court's nationalization of same-sex marriage."

On the positive side, Florida's "regulatory policy is slightly freer than the national average. Despite the temptations posed by high housing demand, homeowners have been unable to enact exclusionary zoning on anything like the levels of California or New Hampshire." In addition, "the civil liability system is better than average and has improved significantly since 2000." But on the other side of the ledger, "the state is far below average on occupational freedom, and the homeowner's insurance market is the most regulated and dysfunctional in the country."

The report has some recommendations for Florida to improve:

Fiscal: Trim spending on sanitation and sewerage, public parks, and police and fire protection, which are all significantly higher as a share of income than the national average. Use the proceeds to cut general and utility sales taxes.

Regulatory: Abolish the Citizens Property Insurance Corp. and remove all price controls on private property insurance.

Personal: Enact a medical marijuana law.

New Hampshire is the freest state, while New York is the least free.

And be sure to check out these other Wednesday headlines:

Walks on the beach painful? That may be plantar fasciitis

Sponsored: Here in the Sunshine State, we're fortunate to have some of the most picturesque beaches in the world. From Miami's iconic, art-deco clad South Beach to the powdery-soft dunes of Destin, Florida offers a different beach for every personality. While there are certainly some benefits to walking on the beach, including improved cardiovascular health and decreased stress levels, walking barefoot in the soft sand for long distances can take an unexpected toll on your feet. In fact, it can cause a condition called plantar fasciitis. [Find out more about plantar fasciitis here.](#)

Millions of dollars flow to Florida's lobbying firms

With five firms topping \$1 million, lobbyists reported earning at least \$28.4 million during the year's second quarter for their legislative work — an initial estimate that appears certain to increase in the coming days. The five-highest earning firms, [Ballard Partners](#), [Capital City Consulting](#), [Greenberg Traurig](#), [Ronald L. Book PA](#) and [Southern Strategy Group](#), represent dozens of clients that anted up tens of thousands of dollars each for representation from April 1 to June 30. Firms that reported earning \$500,000-\$999,999 during the quarter were [Buchanan Ingersoll & Rooney](#), [Corcoran & Johnston](#), [Floridian Partners](#), [Johnson & Blanton](#), [Metz Husband & Daughton](#), [Smith Bryan & Myers](#) and [The Rubin Group](#).

Stetson first in Florida to launch new Certified Financial Planning track

This fall, [Stetson University's](#) School of Business Administration will offer a new concentration — the first of its kind in Florida — that allows undergraduate finance majors to meet all the requirements necessary to sit for the Certified Financial Planner designation exam upon graduation. “This program is a huge opportunity for our business students hoping to successfully enter the finance industry,” said Christopher Tobler, chair of the Department of Finance at Stetson. The need for personal financial advisors is expected to grow 30 percent through 2024, according to the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#).

Sides line up as workers' comp rate hike weighed

State regulators listened to hours of testimony Tuesday as they decide whether to approve a 19.6 percent increase in workers' compensation insurance rates. The proposed hike stems mainly from an April ruling by the [Florida Supreme Court](#) that said a limit on attorneys' fees in workers' compensation cases was unconstitutional. Business groups have harshly criticized the ruling, arguing it will saddle businesses with higher insurance costs. The rate proposal, offered by an organization known as the National Council on Compensation Insurance, said premiums should increase 15 percent because of the attorneys' fees ruling, with the rest of the increase pegged to other issues. The [Florida Office of Insurance Regulation](#) will decide whether to approve the rate increase, which is proposed to take effect Oct. 1.

Florida tops nation in home purchases by foreigners

A new report from the [National Association of Realtors](#) shows that five states — Florida, California, Texas, Arizona and New York — accounted for over half of all residential real estate activity in the United States by foreign buyers, as Florida topped the list with 22 percent of all sales. Between April 2015 and March 2016, 214,885 residential properties were purchased in the

United States by foreign buyers, accounting for \$103.9 billion in sales. Buyers from Europe, Canada and Latin America looking for a warm weather vacation retreat more often bought real estate in Florida than any other state. [See the full report here.](#)