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**GUEST COLUMN
BY
SPEAKER OF THE FLORIDA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
JOHNNIE BYRD**

Florida small businesses deserve a stable environment in which to survive and thrive. Over the years, well-intentioned mandates from Tallahassee have impeded your ability to hire more employees and provide economic strength for the communities that you serve.

In the Florida House, we intend to make government live within its means. The last "favor" that employers need right now from their state government is an increase in taxes. We pledge to hold government to the same standards that you face in balancing your books and making a monthly payroll. We will oppose any attempts to raise taxes. While some might suggest that those are radical words, fiscal responsibility is not extreme public policy.

Another problem facing small businesses is workers' compensation insurance. Time and again, we return to the dilemma employers across Florida have in finding affordable workers' compensation insurance. Premiums are high and rising. Some are finding trouble just getting a policy written, and small businesses know this more acutely than anyone.

I recently held roundtable discussions on workers' compensation with small business owners. The consistent message from the participants was simple: get the costs down so that we can put Floridians to work.

With the reforms of the early 1990's, the Legislature temporarily relieved the difficulty employers were having. Yet, premiums continue to rise, underwriters continue to leave the state, and many of the same struggles that the last wave of reforms attempted to address persist.

Understanding the plea from small businesses across Florida, I have recently appointed the **House Select Committee on Workers' Compensation** to address these concerns legislatively. The committee's ultimate goals are to:

- Improve availability and affordability of workers' compensation insurance
- Reduce fraud
- Assure that benefits for injured workers are adequate and equitable
- Streamline the administration of the system

We have listened to small business owners convey their real struggles to make ends meet for their employees. We will come out of the 2003 Legislative Session providing options for fiscal restraint, continuing to reform workers' compensation insurance, and keeping Florida working.

FUBA's Editorial note: Speaker Byrd is dedicated to addressing the needs of Florida's small businesses. You can contact Speaker Byrd by emailing him at speakerbyrd@myfloridahouse.com. Or, you can call his office at the state Capitol in Tallahassee by dialing 850-488-1450.

REMINDER: ARE YOU FILING YOUR UNEMPLOYMENT AND SALES TAX ELECTRONICALLY?

As we have explained in previous editions of this newsletter, certain businesses are now required to file and pay their sales tax and unemployment compensation tax electronically.

Sales Tax: Florida businesses that collected \$30,000 or more in state sales in 2002 have to file their tax report and also remit their tax electronically. This requirement started on January 1st of this year. If you meet this requirement, you should already be filing electronically.

Unemployment Tax: Effective this month (April), businesses that had 10 or more employees in any quarter from June 30, 2001 to June 30, 2002, must begin filing their unemployment compensation returns (also known as UCT-6's) and sending in their unemployment tax electronically.

Electronic Filing Methods:

- **Internet:** You can transmit your tax return and even pay tax on-line through the Department of Revenue's web site at www.myflorida.com/dor. Click on e-Services to begin. The online application allows you to enroll for all applicable taxes at the same time. The information you provide is used to create your account. Once you have successfully enrolled, you will receive an information package within 30 days. This package will contain detailed instructions for electronic filing and/or payment, your user ID, a personal identification number/password, and a schedule of payment dates.

When you are ready to make a payment, you log on to the Department's secure web site, enter your bank account information, including the 9-digit routing number and the withdrawal date on a "check" displayed on the payment page. A confirmation number will be displayed upon completion for you to print for your records.

- Instead of paying your tax over the Internet, you can sign up for Electronic Funds Transfer ("EFT"). This allows you to submit your tax return using the computer, then you use the telephone to tell your bank to transfer the appropriate amount of funds

to the State of Florida. The recommended EFT method is called ACH-Debit, which is free. With ACH-Debit, you place a toll-free call to the authorized data collection center and follow the instructions.

After entering in your user ID and pin, you provide the payment amount, collection period ending date, payment type, and bank withdrawal date. You receive a confirmation number for your records to provide you authorized the transfer of funds. Funds are then transferred and deposited into the State's account on the date you specify.

Waivers from the filing requirement: No business is required to buy or upgrade a computer or other software to comply with this new law. You are eligible to receive a waiver from filing your tax returns electronically if:

- Your business does not have a compatible computer that meets or exceeds the minimum standards required to file on-line; or
- You need more time to program your computer to begin filing on-line; or
- Complying with the requirement to file on-line would cause you financial hardship; or
- Complying with the requirement to file on-line conflicts with your business procedure.

Remember that waivers only apply to filing tax returns electronically. Even if you receive a waiver, you will still need to remit your tax to the state electronically, either by using EFT or Tele-file. Waivers are good for 2 years. If you would like the forms to request a waiver, please contact the FUBA offices at 1-800-262-4483. Also, if you have requested a waiver from the Department but have not heard back from them, please give us a call so we can have someone help you.

For more information about the requirement to file electronically, you can call the Florida Department of Revenue at 1-800-352-3671. Ask for "e-Services."