



## Happy Thanksgiving!

Thanksgiving is just a few days away and I am looking forward to spending time with my family and rejoicing in our many blessings. I wish you and your family a happy and blessed Thanksgiving! My offices will be closed for the holiday on Thursday, November 28th and Friday, November 29th.

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## Visit Florida Introduces Military Friendly Travel

Visit Florida has launched a new military-friendly travel section on their website [VisitFlorida.com/Military](https://www.visitflorida.com/military). The section is a consolidated source of Florida travel information for service members, veterans, and their families. The site includes information about discounts and experiences available to military members and their families, monuments and memorials, military-related events, museums and more.

*"Through this new addition to our website, VISIT FLORIDA is showcasing the many military-friendly experiences available throughout the state,"* said VISIT FLORIDA President and CEO Dana Young. *"We are honored to provide our country's servicemen and women with tailored visitor information, and will remain committed to ensuring military members, veterans, and their families feel welcome when creating lifelong memories in the Sunshine State."*

Florida is a diverse destination that last year attracted 127 million travelers from around the world. Tourism remains the state's leading industry and, based on the latest economic impact study, visitors to Florida contributed \$85.9 billion to the state's economy and supported 1.5 million Florida jobs.

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## Increasing Transparency in Florida's Health Care System

The Agency for Health Care Administration recently announced a number of transparency initiatives to significantly improve Florida's health care system, including the launch of Florida's updated transparency web tool.

*"Under Governor DeSantis' leadership, our Agency has worked to dramatically increase the amount of health care information available to consumers,"* said Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA) Secretary Mary Mayhew. *"Floridians for the first time will have access to health care costs for procedures at hospitals and ambulatory surgery centers on Florida Health Price Finder. Our mission is to drive affordability and value across Florida's health care system and by eliminating barriers to health care cost transparency we empower the consumers to make well-informed decisions and create increased accountability for providers."*

This new transparency tool offers facility-level pricing and quality information for the most common health care services, and can be easily accessed on [FloridaHealthPriceFinder.com](http://FloridaHealthPriceFinder.com). County cost averages are also available for over 200 services typically provided in a health care provider office or clinic.

The expansion of Florida Health Price Finder enables Florida consumers to review and shop costs for frequently sought health care services such as knee replacements, hip replacements, or rotator cuff repair at facilities in their area. This cost data is linked also to quality information, thereby empowering Floridians with the transparency necessary to make fully informed health care decisions.

In my efforts to empower patients and improve transparency, I have filed [Senate Bill \(SB\) 672: Cancer Coverage](#) to remove obstacles to treatment, like step-therapy or fail first protocols, for patients with Stage 4 Metastatic Cancer. I have also filed [SB 696: Prescription Drug Coverage](#) to provide additional consumer protections to patients, improve reporting and transparency. SB 696 requires a 60-day notice be issued to the patient, and their healthcare provider, prior to any change to their prescription drug formulary during a policy year. The bill also prohibits an insurer or HMO from reclassifying a drug to a more restrictive tier, increasing the cost-sharing of the insured, or reclassifying a drug to higher cost-sharing tier during the policy year.

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## District 17 Highlights

### Five Star Schools

The Florida Department of Education recently released its list of Five Star Schools. These are schools that have demonstrated their commitment to community involvement and have gone above and beyond in developing meaningful business partnerships to improve educational outcomes. To earn Five Star recognition these schools achieved benchmarks in the areas of Business Partnerships, Family Involvement, Volunteerism, Student Community Service, School Advisory Councils, and earned a grade of "C" or higher.

Sixty-One of Brevard Public Schools were recognized as Five Star for the 2018-2019 School Year. Indian River County School District had 12 schools recognized as Five Star. For a full list of five star schools in your community, or for more information on the Five Star School Program visit [FLDOE.org](http://FLDOE.org).

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### Fellsmere Boys & Girls Club

This past week the Boys and Girls Club of Indian River County celebrated the opening of their new Fellsmere facility. The new 8,000-square-foot building is located adjacent to the Fellsmere City Hall complex and faces County Road 512. The Fellsmere branch had previously been operating out of the Old Fellsmere School building, however a larger facility was needed to meet the needs of this growing program.

A significant portion of funding for this project was made possible with support from the Vero Beach community and Fellsmere Club volunteers Larry and Karen Mulder. The Mulder's generously pledged \$1 million toward the project. The Boys & Girls Club of Indian River County works to inspire and enable all young people, especially those in need, to realize their full potential as productive, responsible, and caring citizens. The Club serves more than 1,200 children each year through their clubhouses in Vero Beach, Sebastian and Fellsmere. While at the Clubs, kids participate in educational programming, complete their homework and can play outdoors. For more information, visit [www.bgcirc.org](http://www.bgcirc.org) or call (772) 299-7449.



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## Palm Bay Audit Findings Released

The Florida Audit General recently released the findings from the audit of the City of Palm Bay. According to the report, Palm Bay officials did not formally document efforts to secure contributions from developers or governmental entities to help fund the I-95 St. Johns Heritage Parkway (SJHP) Interchange project.

The SJHP was developed to provide a 5-mile arterial roadway extending from the Palm Bay city limits north to Ellis Road. The goal of the Parkway was to reduce congestion on I-95, provide more efficient access for local motorists, and connect roadways that will serve as emergency evacuation routes. The City of Palm Bay entered into an agreement with the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) in 2013, which outlined the construction schedule for the project. FDOT completed the \$27.8 million Interchange in summer 2019, however, the City has not completed the connection to the public roadway. Due to the delays by the City, FDOT has incurred more than \$475,000 in additional costs to keep the interchange closed until the connecting road is complete.

The audit report notes that in August 2008, one developer submitted a report to the FDOT stating, "the developer intended to fund all required phases of the Interchange and SJHP Projects." Which did not happen.

The audit reported that "although the Interchange will likely provide benefits to the City and its residents, through an increased tax base, opportunities for economic growth, and enhanced emergency response times, the Interchange clearly also directly benefited developers who stood to profit from various new developments, which heightened the need for the Interchange. As such, it was not apparent, of record, why the City did not make a more concerted effort to compel developers benefiting from the Interchange to contribute towards costs related to the Interchange or SJHP Projects."

The City also was "unaware whether the City Council or City Management ever considered withholding such approvals (for permitting) in an effort to get developers to contribute towards costs related to the Interchange or SJHP Projects. Additionally, developers not paying their share of costs for projects needed to remedy transportation capacity deficiencies is not consistent with the (City's Comprehensive) Plan..."

City officials have 30 days to submit a written response, including proposed corrective actions. To view the audit findings report, please visit [PalmBayFlorida.org](http://PalmBayFlorida.org).

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## Contact Information

**Melbourne Office**  
900 E. Strawbridge Ave.  
Melbourne, FL 32901  
(321) 409-2025  
Staff: [Adrienne Cronebaugh](#)  
[Frank DiMarco](#)

**Vero Beach Office**  
Administration Building B  
1801 27<sup>th</sup> St, Vero Beach FL  
(772) 226-1970  
Staff: [Kaitlyn Currey](#)

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