

Orlando Sentinel

BUSINESS

DeSantis attacks \$15 minimum wage push

By JIM TURNER
News Service of Florida

TALLAHASSEE — Gov. Ron DeSantis on Monday questioned a proposal to increase Florida's minimum wage to \$15 an hour through the constitutional amendment process, warning about effects on the restaurant industry.

DeSantis focused on the minimum wage proposal as he railed against policy-oriented constitutional amendments that he said put "handcuffs" on future legislation. He made the comments as he opened an Associated Industries of Florida conference in Tallahassee.

DeSantis, speaking in a closed-door meeting that his office streamed live on Facebook, pointed to part of the proposed minimum-wage amendment that would increase the amount of wages that restaurants would have to cover for tipped employees. He said it is "going to cause big, big upheavals for the restaurant industry. It just will."

"When you put that in the Constitution, we can't just go back and say, 'Oh, let's tweak it, let's do that,'" DeSantis continued. "You literally would have to go back and do another constitutional amendment."

Orlando attorney John Morgan, who chairs and has largely bankrolled the political committee Florida For A Fair Wage, strongly disagreed with DeSantis' assessment of the process. Morgan's committee was on the verge Monday of submitting enough petition signatures to the state to get the minimum-wage measure on the November 2020 ballot, though it also needs the Florida Supreme Court to sign off on the proposal's wording.

"Had voters not weighed in (by passing a constitutional amendment) we would not have medical marijuana. The pharmaceutical industry would have ensured that. Felons would not have the right to vote," Morgan said in an email. "He (DeSantis) has a chance to have a fair minimum wage enacted in the next session."

Morgan also disputed DeSantis' assessment of amendment backers.

"This is not a game to me. It is a matter of morality and dignity," Morgan said. "Our democracy gives power to the people. Special interests don't like that. Tell the governor to tell me what he would propose. So far it is zero. He is a very smart guy. Show us something real!"

Florida For A Fair Wage is seeking voter support to increase the state's minimum wage to \$10 an hour on Sept. 30, 2021, and increase it by \$1 each year until it hits \$15 an hour on Sept. 30, 2026.

The state's minimum wage this

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Business briefing

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE



Arrowsmith

Natalie Arrowsmith, NextHome Arrowsmith Realty, was elected 2020 president-elect of the Orlando Regional Realtor Association.



Soderstrom

Tansey Soderstrom, Real Estate Firm of Orlando, was elected treasurer of the Orlando Regional Realtor Association.



Hill

Lisa Hill, Keller Williams Winter Park, was elected secretary of the Orlando Regional Realtor Association.

Submit professional appointments, management-level promotions and significant awards for individuals (not companies), along with photos, online at OrlandoSentinel.com/submit-peopleonmove. Or email them to peopleonmove@orlandosentinel.com with photos as .jpg attachments.



MARCO SANTANA/ORLANDO SENTINEL

Sebastian Peralta, regional VP of operations for McKibbon Hospitality, which oversees the Hampton and Homewood Suites by Hilton.

Hotels near airport see growth in pursuit of business travelers

By MARCO SANTANA

A new, full-service bar at the Hampton Inn & Suites near the Orlando International Airport could seem to be little more than a minor facelift.

But hotel officials hope the lounge will keep customers in the building, spending more time and money there rather than at nearby establishments.

It's an effort to compete in what has become a growing hotel and restaurant community in and around the airport, one that expects to expand even more when OIA opens a new terminal during the next couple of years.

Anchored by the Hyatt Regency inside of the country's 10th busiest airport, there are more than two dozen hotels in the immediate area.

Restaurant chains such as TGI Friday's, Chili's and Cracker Barrel line Semoran Boulevard leading into the airport, as does the Epic Theaters at Lee Vista, which opened in early 2016.

Leaders at the renovated Hampton Inn & Suites say the changes at the 7-year-old prop-

"If you are coming to Orlando for reasons outside of traditional tourism, most find it better to be in an area where you don't have attraction distraction."

Jessica Sherbert, director of sales and events at the Renaissance Orlando Airport Hotel

erty could help it pursue more of the business traveler's dollar.

"We think this is a very strong market, and there are more hotels coming," said Sebastian Peralta, regional vice president of operations for McKibbon Hospitality, which oversees the Hampton and nearby Homewood Suites by Hilton.

The expansion comes in one of the world's most popular tourist destinations, with more than 75 million visitors coming to Orlando last year.

Visit Orlando, the publicly funded tourism-marketing agency, says 85% of visitors come here for the theme parks and other attractions. Hoteliers near the airport estimate that the number drops to 35% around the airport, with the other 65% being business trav-

elers.

Peralta expects a similar split with Hyatt House Orlando Airport, a new property McKibbon recently broke ground on just south of the Hampton property.

Mount Dora-based Southern Hospitality Management & Development also is planning a 164-room Towneplace Suites by Marriott on Butler National Drive near Semoran Boulevard.

Appealing to traditional tourists, many of whom stay on International Drive near Universal Studios or on Walt Disney World properties, would be a wasted effort for hotels near the airport, said Paul Pedone, general manager at La Quinta Inn & Suites at 7160 No Frontage Road, about a mile from the airport.

"You really have to grab your

business here," said Pedone, who has been in the industry more than 20 years. "You're not going to get the Disney business because families don't typically stay here. I'm looking for flight crews."

Pedone said his hotel also has established an informal partnership with nearby JetBlue University, a training facility that has kept a steady flow of students coming through.

But a huge \$2 billion variable airport expansion that will add 19 new gates by 2021 could lead to more growth, Pedone said.

"There won't be enough hotels," said Pedone, whose 148-room hotel opened in August 1998. "We probably won't have enough when it gets to be that time."

The cluster of hotels around the airport has seen periodic growth since the 1980s. The largest expansion came when eight new properties added 1,097 rooms to the area in 1998 and 1999.

The neighborhood has 27 properties that contain 4,875

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Iconic Amex card revamped

Green Card, turning 50 this year, gets a new look and benefits

By KEN SWEET
Associated Press

NEW YORK — For 50 years, the American Express "Green Card" has been the card many people wouldn't leave home without.

Launched in 1969, the Green Card gave travelers a sense of importance they didn't feel carrying travelers' checks. For many people, it was their first Amex card. Over time, however, the Green Card became neglected in favor of its fancier siblings, the Gold and Platinum Cards.

Now, the Green Card is getting a much-needed revamp, with a new look and more travel benefits — and, yes, a higher annual fee.

In probably the most radical of changes, the card will no longer be a charge card, but function more like a traditional credit card with the ability to revolve a balance and pay over time. This is the final nail in the coffin for American Express' charge card model, which defined the company's image for decades.

Analysts say change was overdue. While American Express would not share details on how many Green Card customers there are, industry analysts



BEBETO MATTHEWS/AP

The original American Express Green Card, top, shown with the latest version of the card.

say the card's popularity has been on the decline. Popular credit card review websites generally do not recommend the card in its current iteration, citing its annual fee and lack of benefits.

"The Green Card is iconic.

Often, it was the first product that our card members had with us, and it carried a certain cachet. Now we want to bring it back in a modernized way," said Rachel Stocks, executive vice

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Survey: US hiring hits 7-year low as sales slow

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A measure of hiring by U.S. companies has fallen to a seven-year low and fewer employers are raising pay, a business survey found.

Just one-fifth of the economists surveyed by the National Association for Business Economics said their companies have added to their workforces in the past three months. That is down from one-third in July. Job totals were unchanged at 69% of companies, up from 57% in July. A broad measure of job gains in the survey fell to its lowest level since October 2012.

The hiring slowdown comes as more businesses are reporting slower growth of sales and profits. Business economists also expect the economy's growth to slow in the coming year, partly because tariffs have raised prices and cut into sales for many firms.

"The U.S. economy appears to be slowing, and respondents expect still slower growth over the next 12 months," said Constance Hunter, NABE president and chief economist at the accounting firm KPMG.

Hiring may also be slowing be-

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