

# Bank-credit Union Battle, Insurance Clash Likely in Tallahassee

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By: Yolanda Cash Jackson

It's still early in the year, and the 2017 session of the Florida Legislature won't begin until March, but observers already have some ideas about what state legislation might affect Miami's financial services community.

"There will be a fight between the banks and the credit unions, because there always is," said Yolanda Cash Jackson, a shareholder with the Becker & Poliakoff law firm who concentrates her practice on governmental relations. "On the insurance side, PIP [personal injury protection] is going to be huge, and there will be discussions about workers' comp."

The highest-ranking leaders of the Legislature are all trial lawyers, she said. "This is going to be the year of the trial lawyer, both in the House and the Senate. We haven't had that in awhile. Trial lawyers are very good to trial lawyers, so consumers had better brace themselves for some revisions" to laws about court actions, insurance and the like. By the end of February, she said, more bills will have been filed, giving a clearer vision of what the legislature might do. "You can generally expect it to be a pretty productive session after an election year."

Last year's election brought in a new crop of legislators, Ms. Jackson added. "You have so many new members who think that they have a novel idea that's never been thought of before," she said wryly.

John Allen, vice president of Home Financing Center and chair of the Coral Gables Chamber of Commerce, said the chamber will send a delegation to Tallahassee on Feb. 12; members will attend 22 meetings in two days.

A top priority is removing the state sales tax on commercial leases, he said. The tax is 6%, which gets passed on to the renter, he added. "We'd like to see a 1% reduction per year until it's eliminated, and we think we can gain traction during this session."

Other important issues are health care, including Medicaid, and what will replace the Affordable Care Act. "We're looking out for the best interests of businesses here, and we're very interested to see which way the wind's blowing," Mr. Allen said.

An expansion of international banking "could affect all of Florida," said Alcides I. Avila, founding partner of the Avila Rodriguez Hernandez Mena & Ferri law firm and member of its corporate and financial services practice.

According to federal law, as soon as its charter is approved, a foreign bank can open branches. Florida, however, imposes the same application process for each branch an international bank wants to open “as though it were a completely new bank.”

If that regulation were done away with, “these banks could expand throughout Florida,” Mr. Avila said. “Orlando, Tampa, Jacksonville – cities which have trade and would like to have international banking – would be able to have offices there.”