

## Lobbyist takes local issues to Legislature

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*Author: Staff, JAMES DEAN*

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By JAMES DEAN

FLORIDA TODAY

VIERA -- Insurance and tax reform, though important, don't top the Brevard County Commission's list of priorities for the 2007 Legislature.

That's because state lawmakers asked commissioners to narrow issues specific to Brevard, instead of providing the usual laundry list of statewide issues.

During a workshop with their lobbyist last week, commissioners agreed on the following four priorities, which they will present to state lawmakers this afternoon:

--- Roads: Provide more money for roads that have been delayed because of cost increases.

Commissioners also want state help resolving a dispute with Florida East Coast Railroad that delays the Pineda Causeway extension, and they need help with development of the St. John's Heritage Parkway (formerly the Palm Bay Parkway). The county has a backlog of more than \$400 million in road projects.

--- Space industry: Support policies that promote Florida and the Space Coast for new federal and commercial space investment. Plan for expected loss of jobs when the space shuttle is retired in 2010.

--- Mental health: Request money to provide more beds for patients who have a mental health crisis and are hospitalized involuntarily. Brevard currently has 28 "Baker Act" beds -- the same number as in 1980. Patients can be housed at the jail if no beds are available.

More beds also are needed for cases involving substance abuse.

--- Medical transportation: Improve a privatized system that transports eligible Medicaid recipients to medical appointments. Patients have been dropped off late, left at the wrong locations and forced to wait weeks for rides to essential medical care.

The fifth priority, dropped from the list, was a project to pump sand onto beaches in Satellite Beach and Indian Harbour Beach. County staff said legislative involvement no longer was needed because of progress in permitting and designing a new solution.

Emergency Operations Director Bob Lay also wants about \$2 million to expand his cramped headquarters in Rockledge.

"I applaud you for prioritizing," said John Thrasher, the county's lobbyist. "So many counties haven't learned to do that. They have 120 issues, and they're all equal."

Contact Dean at 242-3617 or [jdean@flatoday.net](mailto:jdean@flatoday.net).

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If you go

Brevard County commissioners will discuss their legislative priorities at the local delegation at 1:30 p.m. today. The

meeting takes place in the Florida Room of Building C in the Government Center, located at 2725 Judge Fran Jamieson Way, Viera.

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