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Caucus wants to lure film industry to Florida

Democrat staff report

Florida's Film, Entertainment and Television Caucus will make its debut Tuesday in Tallahassee as an advocate for the movie and TV business, aided by actor Jeffrey Donovan of the hit USA Network show "Burn Notice," which is filmed in Miami.

Initiated by state Rep. Michelle Rehwinkel Vasilinda, D-Tallahassee, the caucus is a bipartisan coalition of state legislators formed to raise awareness about the film and entertainment industry's positive impact in Florida and to help return it to a competitive level.

Rehwinkel Vasilinda, Donovan and casting director and Florida Film Production Coalition Board member Ellen Jacoby will be joined by State Film Commissioner Lucia Fishburne and others from the Florida Legislature to discuss the state of the industry in Florida and what the caucus plans to do to support it.

According to the latest report from the Haas Center for Business Research and Economic Development of the University of West Florida, the film and entertainment industry had an estimated economic impact of \$29.2 billion in 2007, up from \$27 billion in 2003. The industry employed more than 207,000 Floridians in 2007. In 2008, every \$1 of entertainment incentives provided by the state was associated with \$22 in additional gross state product and \$1.44 in additional tax revenue, according to the Haas Center's analysis.

"There is such an upside to this industry for Florida. What's sad is that in the last year alone, more than 600 film industry craft workers living in Florida have been lured to other states because Florida has failed to offer a stable system of incentives or credits compared to the majority of other states," Rehwinkel Vasilinda said. The caucus hopes to help reverse that trend.

The competition is keen. States such as Alabama, Georgia and Michigan compete vigorously for a share of the business, which relies not only on a skilled, technically-educated work force, but numerous support business in catering, lodging, equipment, building trades and other needs.

"Burn Notice" has had that effect on Miami-Dade County, where the show will start its fourth season in 2010. The producers spend between \$18 million and \$20 million in Florida during each production cycle.

Donovan plays Michael Westen, a U.S. spy whose agency blacklisted or "burned" him, ending his career but not his adventures. Co-stars include Gabrielle Anwar, Sharon Gless and Bruce Campbell.