



OP-ED

Florida's technology ties to Israel will make us a more innovative state

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Not only are America's national security interests dependent on its global engagement, but so is the American economy — after all, 95 percent of the world's consumers live outside the United States.

Florida is key to this worldwide involvement. Thanks to its geographic location, well-developed port infrastructure and multilingual workforce, Florida is a commercial crossroads of the Americas, exporting \$52 billion in goods in 2016.

Notably, nearly \$290 million of Florida's trade was with Israel, making it one of the top U.S. states doing business with the Jewish state. And that's a relationship that can expand exponentially, as evidenced by the focus on the emerging high-tech sectors in Florida and in Israel during the large trade mission that Gov. Rick Scott led to Israel in December.

The mission yielded several important initiatives connecting Florida businesses to Israel's unique entrepreneurial ecosystem. One was a Memorandum of Understanding signed by Florida-based Venture Hive and Tel Aviv-based AGW, an Israeli technology commercialization company. This agreement will help create, promote and implement technology commercialization and corporate innovation programs supported by the two organizations.

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“This agreement is just one of the many ways that we are actively working to build on Florida and Israel's strong relationship and encourage continued economic growth and new opportunities for our families,” Scott said.

Venture Hive CEO Susan Amat visited Israel in 2015 with a delegation of Miami tech entrepreneurs. The trip was hosted by Project Interchange, an institute of the American Jewish Committee (AJC). The 12 Miami-based entrepreneurs and technology community leaders went to learn from their counterparts in Israel's thriving tech and innovation sector, and to share their own best practices.

Israel has developed a tech-incubator system that fosters entrepreneurship through government policies that champion innovation and invest in the country's start-up culture. The Israeli government assists both technology and other companies by subsidizing research and development and capital spending through the Office of the Chief Scientist, which grants hundreds of millions of dollars annually to select companies. Learning from this model is essential to the growth of this sector in Miami, the state of Florida and the United States.

Around the world, technology has transformed the landscape of both higher education and job prospects for college graduates. Therefore, sharing best practices and building links between innovative institutions and countries are essential. Israel's world-class research and innovation, its renowned academia-to-technology transfer programs, and its emphasis on integrating immigrants are universally acknowledged. With these principles in mind, Miami Dade College (MDC) signed an agreement with Tel Aviv University after the director of MDC's Idea Center at that time visited Israel in 2015 with AJC's Project Interchange. The collaboration led the following year to Tel Aviv University's Entrepreneurship Center (StarTau) and The Idea Center @MDC co-sponsoring the first Startup Nation Conference, bringing members of Israel's high-tech community to Miami and connecting them with leading innovators in south Florida.

A second Start-Up Florida-Israel conference will take place at Miami Dade College on Feb. 27. The more than 300 people participating will build upon this productive relationship. And another delegation of 12 Miami-based technology entrepreneurs will travel to Israel with Project Interchange in the spring.

This growing relationship is also evident in the work of the Florida Israel Business Accelerator (FIBA) which had eight Israeli companies participate in their first cohort at their business accelerator based in Tampa. One of the companies after completing the program established their U.S. operations in Tampa. This program received \$1 million from the state of Florida.

Florida is also bringing value and expertise to Israel. For example, an agreement signed during the recent trade mission between the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine and the Israeli Trauma Society expands the partnership between the Israeli Trauma Society and the University of Miami's Jackson Memorial Hospital, which has trained many of Israel's trauma surgeons.

Florida and Israel are building a strong innovation ecosystem. Miami and Florida are transforming into a robust center of entrepreneurship. Imagine what more we might do if we Floridians harness our talents and vision together with Israel.

As the governor said, "Working with international partners like Israel is critical to strengthening Florida as a global destination for trade and to ensuring that our economy will continue to grow for years to come."

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