

Depending on whose view of the economy you listen to, one day we're in a turnaround and the next we're heading toward an even larger slump. Predictions about how and when the economy will be revived are akin to guessing what team will go all the way during March Madness: We're seeing signs of greatness, but it's still too early to predict the final outcome.

To shed light on how private and public companies, entrepreneurs, and governments can contribute – within the context of an uncertain recovery – to the development of key sectors of the economy, the Palm Beach Strategic Forum will conduct its first annual conference in West Palm Beach on April 4.

A non-profit with the mission of fostering dialogue on national and global issues, the Palm Beach Strategic Forum's parent organization is the International Economic Forum of the Americas. Founded in 1995 and based in Montreal, Toronto and Palm Beach, the Forum aims to promote an exchange of views and perspectives on pressing economic issues of our time among world leaders, renowned experts and business executives. The International Economic Forum of the Americas also publishes a magazine and several books on a variety of issues, including corporate management, world economics and approaches to governance.

The theme for the first conference of the Palm Beach Strategic Forum is Thriving Within the New Economic Cycle, and the goals of the event are to address the following:

- Provide a realistic and comprehensive portrait of today's and tomorrow's international economy: What are the new rules of the game in terms of finance and innovation?
- Give participants strategic information on how to succeed in the changing international marketplace: How can businesses take advantage of these new rules?
- Provoke productive thinking on the part of participants by focusing discussions on finance and innovation.

The scope of perspectives presented at the conference will come from a variety of speakers, all highly regarded in their fields. In addition to keynote speaker Martin Torrijos, former president of Panama, other thought leaders who will share their views at the forum include Dennis Lockhart, president and chief executive officer of the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta; Jonathan Spector, CEO of The Conference Board, Inc.; Jim Adams, vice president for the East Asia and Pacific Region of The World Bank; Karen Harbert, president and CEO of the Institute for 21st Century Energy, U.S. Chamber of Commerce; Hisham Elsherif, chairman of Nile Capital; Jose Barrios Ng, deputy administrator of the Panama Canal Authority; Mthuli Ncube chief economist and vice president of the African Development Bank Group; and Rick Scott, governor of Florida.

Most conferences of this significance would be conducted in Miami or Orlando; however, we chose Palm Beach County for its world-class atmosphere and quality of amenities. Not only will the Forum provide a venue to discuss stimulating economic growth and diversity, it will be an engine for economic development for the county, South Florida and the state of Florida.

Predicting the direction of the world's economy is still anyone's guess. Our objective is to provide insights and suggest solutions by bringing together well-respected thinkers with a variety of opinions and backgrounds. Just as with previous conferences in Montreal and Toronto, we anticipate spirited dialogue and a free-flowing exchange of ideas. We don't expect to answer all of the great questions facing today's economy, but we do expect to start a conversation that will continue on -- for years to come -- in Palm Beach County.

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