

Amendment 4 Would Create Chaos

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The debate over Amendment 4 seems to intensify daily. With an unprecedented coalition of business, environmental, labor and civic groups aligned against it, the proponents of Amendment 4 are turning to fanciful rhetoric and imaginative half-truths to distract voters from the facts.

Let's get this debate back on track by focusing on those facts - before voters make the final decision this November.

Amendment 4 is a proposed change to our state's constitution that would require taxpayers to fund elections for every revision to local government comprehensive plans. That means every revision. Not just major issues. Not just important projects. Not just big decisions. The Florida Supreme Court has already brought clarity to this point, having interpreted Amendment 4 broadly in a 2005 decision.

Citing statute, the court indicated that everything from "drainage" and "solid waste" to "traffic circulation" and "intergovernmental coordination" items would appear on the ballot.

What exactly would that mean for voters? Chaos at the polls. Under Amendment 4, Floridians would be expected to vote on hundreds - even thousands - of comprehensive-plan amendments each year. According to Florida's Department of Community Affairs Sunset Review, there were nearly 6,500 changes to local government comprehensive plans in fiscal year 2006-2007. And that figure appears to be on the low side because a 2003 Department of Community Affairs brief shows that there were 16,581 plan amendments in 1999.

Amendment 4 is so extreme that it does not even provide exceptions for schools, hospitals or police stations. The result: thousands of minor, technical plan amendments would litter ballots while vital community needs could be neglected for years - or ignored altogether.

How would this work? It wouldn't. Amendment 4 is poorly written, badly designed and full of unintended consequences. That's why the Florida American Planning Association calls Amendment 4 "a single, expensive and unwieldy solution to a complex and important set of issues."

The Florida Federation of Independent Businesses says Amendment 4 is like "putting a torpedo in the Titanic, just for good measure." And the Florida Chamber of Commerce calls Amendment 4 a "jobs killer."

They're all right.

Leading environmental groups also point out that Amendment 4 may encourage sprawl - the very thing amendment supporters aim to stop. By transforming each plan amendment into a high-priced campaign, Amendment 4 will impede responsible growth strategies, encourage short-term thinking and lead to piecemeal planning.

That is why 1000 Friends of Florida - one of our state's leading growth watchdogs - has raised serious concerns about Amendment 4, including the fact that it would "limit efforts to pass plan amendments intended to lessen sprawling patterns of development."

We know that Amendment 4 will lead to higher taxes, fewer jobs and an even weaker economy. A study conducted by The Washington Economics Group shows that Amendment 4 will put more than a 250,000 Floridians out of work while shrinking our state's economic output by more than \$34 billion a year.

As Florida struggles to recover from the deepest recession in a generation, the last thing we need is Amendment 4 - an extreme measure that promises to turn the current recession into the "new normal."

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