

Hometown recession- maker

By MARK WILSON

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The Florida Supreme Court recently approved a financial impact statement for Amendment 4 - a "vote-on-everything" proposal that would require Floridians to decide thousands of technical land use issues at the ballot box.

The statement, which will appear alongside Amendment 4, also known as Hometown Democracy, on the 2010 ballot, describes some of the "additional costs" that the amendment would impose on Florida's taxpayers. While these costs would be significant, they represent only a tiny fraction of the total cost of Amendment 4.

The court approved a "financial" impact statement, not a "jobs" impact statement. It is not intended to address the extraordinary toll that Amendment 4 would take on Florida's businesses, taxpayers and families.

Over the last year, our state has lost nearly a half-million jobs. With unemployment now approaching 11 percent, Florida's greatest challenge lies in the uncertainty of our economic future.

Indeed, the Florida Chamber of Commerce has appealed to our state's elected leaders to "do no harm" when setting economic policy. However, no legislation or policy change has the potential to do more economic harm than Amendment 4.

If passed, this proposal would dismantle the local planning process and discourage our communities from building new schools, parks, hospitals and highways. Amendment 4 would not only make it extraordinarily difficult for local businesses to grow, it would also deter new businesses from bringing jobs to Florida.

Any economy needs predictability. Without it, businesses cannot plan; they cannot hire; they cannot survive. Amendment 4 would require that small business owners not only navigate our state's tricky land-use process but also wage costly and unpredictable political campaigns simply to survive.

In the long run, Amendment 4 will not only cost taxpayers millions in countless elections and endless lawsuits; it will cost Florida's economy billions in lost business, higher consumer costs and fewer jobs.

If Florida is to remain competitive, we must actively compete for new, high-paying jobs. To do so, we must promote a stable business climate. We should strive to make entrepreneurship easier, not harder. We should support small businesses and encourage them to provide jobs, rather than punishing them with red tape and costly litigation.

However, dramatic job loss, endless litigation and red tape are the hallmarks of Amendment 4. In 2006 the small Pinellas County town of St. Pete Beach passed a local version of Amendment 4. Since then, many businesses have been forced to close or leave town. And in the midst of a recession, taxpayers have been forced to pay over \$500,000 in legal fees related to the amendment, and more litigation is on

the way.

Worse still, St. Pete Beach now suffers from a wildly unpredictable economy that makes its economic future questionable at best.

Although it is a bad idea in any economy, Amendment 4 is a uniquely destructive proposal in the midst of a recession. As Floridians struggle to recover from the current crisis, the special interests behind Amendment 4 are preparing to lead us into a new one.

Florida needs its business and community leaders to get involved today.