



# Gov. Rick Scott must stop raiding housing trust funds | Editorial

By **Sun Sentinel Editorial Board**

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Gov. Rick Scott has been in a pitched political battle with Florida House Speaker Richard Corcoran over the fate of the state's economic development and tourism marketing agencies. Last week Scott said House members who voted to eliminate Enterprise Florida and Visit Florida "didn't care about jobs." Hasn't the governor heard the old warning about throwing stones from glass houses?

In the budget proposal Scott submitted to legislators in December, he called for diverting \$224 million from affordable housing trust funds to spend for other purposes. That's more than three-quarters of the \$292 million projected to flow into the funds next year under a 1992 law that reserves a share of documentary stamp taxes on real-estate transactions to invest in affordable housing.

If Scott left that money alone, it would be enough to create \$3.78 billion in positive economic impact for the state's economy and 28,700 jobs, according to the Sadowski Housing Coalition. The coalition includes groups representing business, local governments and churches, along with advocates for veterans, senior citizens, people with disabilities and the homeless.

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Counties throughout the state will be hard hit by the trust fund raid — with Broward being particularly hurt.

"We have a huge affordable housing crisis (in Broward County)," we were told by County Commissioner Nan Rich, who is also the chair of the Coordinating Council of Broward, composed of state and county entities responsible for funding and implementing a broad array of human services. "Housing is the most critical issue facing a lot of residents."

"The word is 'trust'," Rich added. "It's really upsetting when you see this constant (raiding of the trust fund)."

It's also extremely unfair in the case of Broward, which has sent approximately \$81 million in doc stamp revenue to Tallahassee the past five years for use in the trust funds.

"We give into the trust fund and we don't get our fair share back," Rich said.

This is a bad time to be diverting any dollars at all from affordable housing in Florida. A recent survey from the National Association of Realtors ranked Florida as the nation's sixth-least affordable housing market — a reflection of rising real-estate prices amid lower-than-average wages in the Sunshine State.

Housing in South Florida and much of the state is unaffordable not just for low-wage workers, but also for many recent college graduates struggling with debt and entry-level salaries. It's an issue for teachers, nurses, social workers and first responders, among many other essential workers. Sometimes they can't afford to live in the communities where they work. Rich said there are some Broward workers who have to live in Palm Beach County and commute because they can't find affordable housing in Broward.

The money that Scott called for diverting would boost the state's short supply of affordable housing by multiple means. Down payments and closing costs for first-time homebuyers. Repairs for low-income homeowners. Construction and rehabilitation of rental housing. It's a flexible approach that communities can adapt to fit their unique needs.

And when the state invests in affordable housing, businesses jump in. Every \$1 spent by the state attracts \$4 to \$6 in private investment, according to the Sadowski Coalition.

Legislators could prove, contrary to Scott's accusation, that they do care about jobs by fully restoring next year's state funding for affordable housing.