

Tax plan may limit access to housing

NOVEMBER 09, 2017 11:57 PM

The tax reform plan being considered in Congress would harm affordable-housing efforts in Florida and make it harder to repair and rebuild many homes damaged by Hurricane Irma. Congress must act immediately to address this problem.

The Florida Housing Coalition's Home Matters Report for 2017 reveals that nearly 1 million Florida households spent more than 50 percent of their income on housing, and that rental housing had virtually no vacancies. This was before the loss of housing caused by Irma. We must now ensure that the post-Irma rebuilding push is not left without any necessary resources.

The current tax reform plan would damage these efforts because it would eliminate private activity bonds (PABs), which play a central role in financing affordable housing construction.

Between 2011 and 2015, PABs accounted for the construction of nearly 25,000 affordable homes here. In 2015, nearly 40 percent of affordable housing built in the state was financed with PABs.

PABs are also needed to support the First Time Homebuyer Program, an initiative that makes it easier for low-to-moderate-income Floridians to become homeowners. Ending PABs would mean putting this program on the chopping block.

This issue becomes even more troubling for those affected by Hurricane Irma. More than 2 million Floridians applied for FEMA assistance after the hurricane, 700,000 of whom are already approved. Many of their homes were damaged; some had to relocate.

PABs will play a critical role in repairing and rebuilding damaged homes, especially in the Keys. By eliminating that source of financing, Congress will make it harder to advance these efforts.

Congress must rework its tax reform plan to ensure that PABs — and many struggling Floridians — are protected.

*JAIMIE ROSS, PRESIDENT, CEO, FLORIDA HOUSING COALITION,
TALLAHASSEE*