



EDITORIAL: Study shows need to protect Sadowski funds

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Our View

A new study should prove to Florida's Legislature why they should keep their hands off Sadowski funds — the state's bank account for affordable housing.

The William E. Sadowski Affordable Housing Act was established in 1992. Its promise was to use money derived from doc stamps initiated on every property transaction in Florida to help fund affordable housing projects.

The idea, in our opinion was a great one. Florida is one of the top two or three destinations for baby boomers and others who want to escape the cold and high taxes up north and either move or retire in the sunshine. The flood of newcomers — many of them well-heeled or at least comfortable — only escalates housing prices.

There is no better example than what is going on right now in Florida with construction booming and demand for houses overwhelming the supply. That is not a formula for affordable housing — which, we should point out, is housing that a minimum-wage working family or someone making just above the minimum wage, can afford.

Florida — and especially Southwest Florida — relies on restaurant, hotel, landscaping and other low-wage workers to keep its economy humming. But when it comes time to find a place to live, those workers who are so vital to our communities, are often forgotten.

Unfortunately the Sadowski funds that should go to help build affordable housing are regularly raided by our state lawmakers. Each year, legislators find other needs and tap into the accumulated funds to pay for other projects.

Even this year, Gov. Ron DeSantis has already talked about using funds from doc stamps to pay for an environmental package — something we agree is needed, but take issue with where the money would come from.

In 2019-2020 we reported legislators raided \$125 million from the Sadowski fund and dropped it into the general fund to balance the budget. With this year's budget expected to fall short by \$5 billion, we can't imagine the same thing won't happen again.

The money they take each year would make a difference here in our tri-county area.

For example, if lawmakers had left the Sadowski fund untouched last year, Charlotte County would have received \$2.1 million to build much-needed multi-family housing. What did we get instead? How about \$360,000.



Venice Gondolier

Sarasota was robbed too. Sarasota County should have received \$5 million based on its donations into doc stamps but instead received only \$654,000 from the Sadowski trust.

Taking money from the fund is not only an attack on the people's trust of government, but short-sighted.

An analysis of Florida housing, funded by the Sadowski Coalition and produced by the Regional Economic Consulting Group, analyzed the economic impact of using the state and local housing trust funds solely for housing.

To put the report's findings in simple terms, the study showed the trust fund would create jobs and return 40% on the investment for every dollar spent.

It claims more than \$167 million in taxes would be collected and returned to Florida by using \$423.3 million for housing. Overall, the study concludes that by leaving the trust fund alone, the money could be used to build homes for as many as 47,845 people, create 33,286 jobs and have a \$5 billion economic impact.

That's a pretty good bang for our buck.

Lawmakers need to consider those numbers when they begin looking at the Sadowski trust fund for their budget shortcomings this session.

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