

SPECIAL REPORT: Amendment 4 to cost over 260,000 jobs, study says

By Ryan Houck

Business, civic and labor leaders gathered in Tallahassee recently to hear the report of a top Florida economist indicating that Amendment 4—a proposed re-write of our state constitution—would lead to massive job loss.

With unemployment nearing 12 percent, that's the last thing Florida needs.

Tony Villamil, founder of *The Washington Economics Group* (WES), which conducted the study, reported that "Amendment 4's passage will have potentially devastating consequences to Florida's economy at a time when the economic situation at both the state and national levels is uncertain and at a time when attracting new businesses to Florida is essential for the future recovery and prosperity of the state and its residents."

The WES study indicates that Amendment 4 will lead to severe job loss in numerous sectors of Florida's already struggling economy as well as have major impacts on Florida's "economic dynamism," ultimately causing a "steady decline in the standard of living for all Florida residents." The resulting economic gridlock would erode Florida's tax base, forcing state and local governments to either "raise taxes or cut services."

The impacts of Amendment 4 would not be limited to a few sectors of our economy. According to the WES study, the negative impacts of Amendment 4 would "affect the whole economy of Florida." In particular, efforts to diversify Florida's economy by attracting "high-wage and high-skill jobs" would be jeopardized.

Florida Chamber of Commerce president Mark Wilson summed up the situation pointedly: "If you like the recession, you'll love Amendment 4."

The gathering in Tallahassee also reflected an unprecedented show of unity, as labor and business leaders agreed to jointly oppose Amendment 4. "It's not too often that a union leader and a business leader agree on something," said Frank Ortis, President of the Florida State Council of Machinists and Aerospace Workers. "But we can all see how much Amendment 4 would hurt Florida's working families. And we are working together to defeat it."

If Amendment 4 is adopted in November, Florida would become the guinea pig for a measure that has never passed in any other state in the country. However, Floridians are beginning to hear the story of St. Pete Beach, a small Florida town that adopted a local version of Amendment 4 in 2006. Since then, the town has seen fewer jobs, higher tax rates and endless litigation at taxpayer expense. Former St. Pete Beach Mayor Ward Friszolowski was in Tallahassee to hear the major economic announcement.

"Our experiment in Amendment 4 has turned St. Pete Beach into a battleground for special interests," said Friszolowski. "And at a time of economic hardship, it has caused extraordinary damage to our economy. I ask the voters of Florida to learn more about St. Pete Beach—and to learn from our mistakes. Amendment 4 supporters promise that they'll give you a 'say on growth.' Don't believe it. Don't let them do to Florida what they already did to my hometown."

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