

PalmBeachPost

Monday, March 29, 2010

Palm Beach Post

Cretul's plan to pull money out of DOT fund would be disastrous

With the unemployment rate in excess of 11 percent and thousands of Floridians facing the worst economic conditions since the 1930s, is it any surprise that a state agency might be in deep water? If the Florida Legislature moves forward with House Speaker Larry Cretul's announced budget allocations, the Florida Department of Transportation could be bankrupt before Thanksgiving, causing thousands to become unemployed.

Speaker Cretul's recommendation to pull \$428 million from the State's Transportation Trust Fund, which funds Florida's transportation infrastructure, goes against all the Legislature's job-creating initiatives.

My company, Ranger Construction Industries, directly relies on FDOT transportation construction projects to make ends meet. If money is diverted from the trust fund, our 600-plus employees' livelihoods will be put in certain jeopardy. Over the past two years, my company has reduced its workforce by 40 percent and sold 25 percent of our equipment fleet — all of that was without FDOT budget cuts.

Both directly and indirectly, a raid of the STTF means a loss of between 80,000 and 100,000 Florida jobs. Not only will this greatly contribute to the state's rising unemployment numbers but the impact on our state will go far beyond pure job loss. The proposed budget allocations will ultimately cause additional strain on Florida's weakened economy as displaced transportation infrastructure workers will be forced to seek unemployment compensation and Medicaid costs will skyrocket.

MICHAEL SLADE

West Palm Beach