



Keynote Address from Senator Ken Pruitt

The Florida Housing Coalition was honored to have former Senate President Ken Pruitt give the keynote on September 13th as the kickoff to our Sadowski Coalition panel and legislative advocacy roundtable. These are excerpts from his comments.

We are all fully aware of the consequences of SHIP not being funded and the gravity of the situation we face. Let there be no mistake, we have a challenge ahead of us, the deck is stacked against us and it's going to take the collective efforts of everyone in this room to persuade our legislative leaders to alter their mindset, not only about SHIP, but of housing programs in general.

What are the challenges? One is philosophical and the other is plain and simple, misinformation, misinformation that has become fact to some legislators.

Although there are some in the legislature that say raiding the doc stamp trust fund is a budget necessity during these tough fiscal times, I believe it is more fundamental and philosophical to them now. And as you know, dealing with a philosophical mindset is always more of a challenge than dealing with a temporary budget shortfall mindset. So we have our work cut out for us.

I was there when SHIP started and the doc stamp was increased. I was a newly elected wild eyed freshman, a businessman who ran on a less government, no new tax platform. So you can imagine the looks I got from my fellow republicans when I voted for a doc stamp tax increase in committee back in 1992. Here was a republican voting for a tax increase and a member of the minority party. I honestly thought my political career was over almost before it had hardly begun.

Had I followed a narrow minded "don't confuse me with the facts my mind is already made up" thought process, I wouldn't have voted for that doc stamp increase, but

I did and as I look back on my legislative career it was one of the best votes I ever took as a legislator. It was about home ownership, giving families a "hand-up, not a hand-out," it was an investment in what I call "societal infrastructure," that priceless increase in a person's self-worth and the ripple effect that enhanced self-worth had on their children and families.

Don't get me wrong, the economic numbers of investing in affordable housing was as overwhelmingly positive back then just as it is now and while the economic benefits and jobs certainly got my attention, I based my vote primarily on the long term benefits to society, a public/private sector partnership that would be one major solution to improving blighted communities. The results have been positive, profound and impactful, unfortunately, due to term limits, the institutional knowledge and history is quickly disappearing in the legislature and with it the reasons why we passed the landmark Sadowski Act legislation.

This leads me to my next point; legislators didn't differentiate SHIP from the other mortgage-related programs that contributed to the housing and mortgage crisis. And in this 24/7 social media age if you aren't controlling your message, it's being controlled for you. The fact is, SHIP has had very few defaults and its track record is a very impressive one.

*We assumed our legislators knew what an efficient and effective program it was, we were so confident that even when it was spoke of at delegation meetings and other venues we had it lumped in with a myriad of other county and municipal issues. We may have taken for granted that we had legislative champions who would protect it even if it were attacked, after all, it was housing, it created jobs (lots of 'em) and is community-based, what could be more American and apple pie than that. **HNN***