

Double blow for condos?

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Protected by a 100 percent termination clause, owners were asked in October 2005 to consider a high-priced unit-by-unit takeover offer.

Mamula said no to the \$1.25 million offer for her third-floor unit, for which she and her now-deceased husband paid \$134,000. She knows her view would be nearly impossible to replace and she is quick to note that she pays only \$2,817 in property taxes each year.

Illustrative of the degree to which snowbirds populate Harbour East, one of the buildings in Mamula's complex has only one person now living in it.

In a May 4 letter to Crist, Mamula urged the governor to veto the condo termination bill.

"With the optional termination clause I will be forced to give up my home and never be able to live in an affordable waterfront property again," she wrote.

It is impossible to say to what degree a particular 100 percent-termination condo deal would become more vulnerable to a takeover by the combination of the two laws.

But Gerry Brissenden, president of the 80,000-member Canadian Snowbird Association, thinks he is well situated to make an educated guess. His members would be more inclined than any time before to accept a developer's offer now that they know they are not getting much tax relief on their Florida homes, he said.

"They are not getting any break from the property tax and they realize that," Brissenden said. "If they do get a better offer than they could otherwise expect, that would give them a chance to relocate. And they're not losing any homestead or anything."

His members, clustered heavily in the Toronto area, generally prefer Florida as a winter destination because they can get here in a two- to three-day drive.

"A lot of people are going to be upset," Brissenden said.

Fitzgerald, meanwhile, voted in favor of the property tax rollback and cap, which provides some modest tax relief to most property owners. But he voted against the proposed constitutional amendment -- to be put before voters in a January referendum -- that would offer homesteaders enjoying the protection of the Save Our Homes tax assessment cap the option of instead going with a "super" homestead provision that would exempt from taxes 75 percent of the first \$200,000 in market value of their homes.

During the property tax debate, Fitzgerald talked to "not dozens but hundreds of people who are being priced out by their taxes," he said.

At a gathering in Bradenton, he heard from one after another nonhomesteaded property owner from Anna Maria, including one out-of-towner who claimed he used to pay \$1,000 a year in taxes for his nonhomesteaded home and now he pays \$12,000.

A staffer from Crist's office called Fitzgerald last week to ask about his reasoning for voting against the condo termination bill.

"Let's put it this way: They were paying attention," Fitzgerald said. "We had a long and detailed conversation about it."

"It made me think they are taking a hard look at it."