

# Where Our DEP Money Goes – to Pay for our Governor’s Violations

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As if we didn’t have enough problems with our DEP, now our governor’s actions are taking our much-needed funds to the tune of \$455,000. Continue reading here for the details, or go to this [link](#) to see the original story in the [Gainesville Sun](#).

## Editorial: Paying for public records violations



Florida Gov. Rick Scott gestures during a cabinet meeting in February. AP Photo/Chris O’Meara

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Gov. Rick Scott wasn't fighting for some high-minded ideal in a legal battle over his email records. As a settlement released last week reveals, he had simply been caught circumventing public records laws but stubbornly refused to concede defeat.

Instead, he fought the allegations in lawsuits that were finally settled last week for \$700,000 in taxpayer money. That's \$700,000 that could have been saved if Scott and his staff hadn't used private email accounts to shield their communications from public view.

As the Herald/Times Tallahassee bureau reported, the settlement is the first time in state history that a sitting governor and attorney general has been successfully sued for violating Florida's public records laws. Scott has suffered three legal defeats in recent months and twice used public money to end a lawsuit against him, the bureau reported.

In June, Scott and the Cabinet agreed to pay \$55,000 in legal fees to settle a suit alleging they sidestepped the Sunshine Law in firing Gerald Bailey as commissioner of the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. The suit had been filed by St. Petersburg lawyer Matthew Weidner, open government groups and media organizations including The Sun's parent company.

That case cost the state more than \$225,000 in legal fees – in addition to legal fees from Scott's office that it has refused to reveal despite repeated requests, the Herald/Times Tallahassee bureau reported.

"It is clear this governor has made a calculated decision that violating the constitutional rights is the cost of doing business – a cost he doesn't have to bear," Weidner told the bureau. "While these numbers are shocking, you can't calculate the cost to citizens of the state for government that is operating in darkness. The real costs will be borne in years to

come for a government that operates in contempt for (the) fundamental right to records.”

Scott, a former chief executive of a hospital chain, has never shown he appreciates that public service has different obligations than private business. Instead, he’s been outright disdainful of public records and open meeting laws.

Scott promised a dedication to transparency when first starting as governor, but instead created a culture of secrecy in his administration. His meetings and travel have been shielded from his official schedule, while records requests have been met with delays, excessive costs and other barriers making them harder to obtain.

The cases settled last week involve Tallahassee attorney Steven R. Andrews, who first sued the governor in 2012 over violations involving a contract for a building that houses Andrews’ firm near the governor’s mansion. In trying to obtain emails and documents for the case, Andrews found that the governor and his staff had used private email accounts to conduct public business – and then tried to hide it had done so.

The money used to settle the suits will come from four agencies – \$445,000 from the Department of Environmental Protection, \$120,000 from the governor’s office, \$75,000 from attorney general’s office and \$60,000 from the Department of State. As the Herald/Times Tallahassee bureau reported, the governor’s office offered no explanation about how those payments were divided.

Scott acts like he doesn’t understand that the law requires the people’s business to be done in public. Let’s hope that his business background at least shows him that the costs of violating the law aren’t worth it.