

# [***Florida Approved $92 Million For Project Backed By DeSantis Donor, Report Says***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:68KC-GM71-DXVP-53V4-00000-00&context=1516831)

Forbes.com

June 29, 2023 Thursday

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**Length:** 953 words

**Byline:** Sara Dorn, Forbes Staff

**Highlight:** The developer, Mori Hosseini, donated more than $360,000 to the governor s 2022 re-election campaign and political organizations backing him, according to the Washington Post.

**Body**

**Topline**

The DeSantis Administration used $92 million in leftover federal Covid-19 relief money to help fund a project that aids a close political ally to DeSantis who controversially loaned a pricey golf simulator to the governor s mansion, the reported another tie between the Florida governor-turned-presidential candidate and a wealthy real estate developer.

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Republican presidential candidate, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis speaks during a press conference on the banks of the Rio Grande on June 26, 2023 in Eagle Pass, Texas. (Photo by Brandon Bell/Getty Images)

Getty Images

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**Key Facts**

The Florida Department of Transportation directed the money to fund a highway interchange backed by developer Mori Hosseini, who is building 1,300-some homes and an outdoor shopping mall on land abutting the planned interchange.

The interstate project includes several partial access roads onto Hosseini s property, plans that were not included in the initial design for the Woodhaven development, according to the**Post,** which noted other developments will also benefit from the new exits.

The Florida Department of Transportation announced plans to use federal funds for the $126 million project about three weeks after DeSantis s re-election in November, one of several transportation projects selected to receive the funding, in part, because it was ready for construction, Florida transportation secretary for the state s central district, John Tyler, told local planners in Volusia County at a meeting in January, the**Post** reported.

The interchange project has been in the works for decades, long predating Hosseini s development, and the access roads to his property were included in the plans to ensure adequate drainage patterns for the surrounding waterways, state Transportation Department spokesperson Jessica Ottaviano told the**Post,** noting the interchange will help keep up with Florida s growing population.

**Crucial Quote**

Hosseini, who has reportedly called Woodhaven his best project yet, acknowledged the highway project would benefit his plans in a 2019 interview, telling the with or without the interchange, we would have built Woodhaven there, but it certainly helps.

**Key Background**

The revelation that Hosseini would benefit from the project adds to ethical questions raised by a previous**Washington Post**reportthat found Hosseini donated a golf simulator valued at more than $25,000 to the governor s mansion shortly after DeSantis, an avid golfer, moved in. The paper also reported Hosseini allowed the DeSantises to use his private planes and donated more than $361,000 to the governor s 2022 re-election campaign and political organizations backing him. Employees of the governor s office are prohibited from accepting gifts intended to influence political decisions, including those from "parties who have pending matters awaiting decision by the state, but the simulator was technically a loan and private plane travel for political purposes, along with campaign donations, are not considered gifts, according to the**Post**. Redfern acknowledged Hosseini donated the golf simulator in a statement toCNNearlier this month, noting it was approved by legal counsel and in line with precedent set by many previous administrations that have accepted donations to the residence and grounds. The state Ethics Commission has ruled previously that a public official can accept a donation as long as it is under control of a government agency, the**Post** reported. The Governor s Mansion is property of the State of Florida and overseen by the Department of Management Services.

**Contra**

DeSantis spokesperson Jeremy Redfern posted screenshots to Twitter late Wednesday of emails from the**Post** seeking comment about the story, which a reporter laid out in detail to the governor s office. Redfern attacked the story in a series of mocking Tweets, includingonethat features a photo of the**Post** reporter edited to show him wearing a clown costume. The premise is false, and there s nothing to answer, Redfern tweeted, referring to the reporting, which he claimed is a nothing-burger and product of the corporate media.

**Chief Critic**

Some local groups and environmentalists oppose the project and its potential impact on the nearby Spruce Creek waterway. Powerful developers want the interchange so they can more easily build on nearby land they own, former Republican Gov. Charlie Crist, who challenged DeSantis as a Democrat in last year s election, wrote in a 2022op-edin the**Daytona Beach News-Journal.**

**Tangent**

Hosseini, who is chairman and CEO of ICI homes, has numerous ties to DeSantis. The governor reappointed him in 2021 to the University of Florida board and he co-chaired DeSantis s gubernatorial transition team, along with his inaugural committee s finance team. On at least a dozen locations, he has lent his private plane to DeSantis and his wife, Casey, and arranged for DeSantis to play golf at Augusta National Golf Club in Georgia. The relationship raised eyebrows among ethics watchdogs and political observers who were quick to point out that the benefits are at odds with the blue-collar, salt-of-the-earth roots DeSantis has touted on the campaign trail. He also routinely rebukes elites and promised to drain the swamp, invoking former President Donald Trump s term referring to pay-to-play ***politics***.

**Further Reading**

DeSantis Received High-End Golf Simulator, Private Flights From Donor, Report Says(Forbes)

Casey DeSantis took GOP donor s plane to attend mental health event(Politico)

Air DeSantis: The Private Jets and Secret Donors Flying Him Around (The New York Times)

DeSantis office acknowledges golf simulator from wealthy donor, raising ethics concerns (CNN)

**Load-Date:** June 30, 2023

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