



CAPITOL REPORT

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By Matt Puckett, Deputy Executive Director
LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY FOR THE WEEK ENDING FEBRUARY 22, 2008

LAST WEEK OF INTERIM COMMITTEE MEETINGS BEFORE THE OFFICIAL START OF SESSION

Interim Committee Meetings are over. The next time Legislators are in Tallahassee, it will be for the official start of the 2008 Legislative Session. Despite all the pomp and circumstance of opening week, tempered enthusiasm will hang over the Capitol.

A budget shortfall in the billions has everyone scrambling to protect what they have even before they can ask for more regardless of just how desperately it is needed. Our lobbyists have been doing their level best just to keep funding for vacant positions, protect certain agencies' jurisdictional authority or prevent the abolishment of entire agencies. When they are not busy with those tasks, they are asking for salary increases, new funding sources and extensions to your pension benefits.



(From left to right) Florida PBA Deputy Executive Director Matt Puckett, Senate President Ken Pruitt and Florida PBA Executive Director David Murrell met to discuss the PBA's Legislative Agenda

Although a fierce competition for revenue sources is underway, please do not fall into the trap of thinking the Florida PBA, along with its various chapters and charters, will turn on itself to secure a money source. Our association is focused on everyone as a whole during this period and we simply will not spend precious hours responding to the various rumors that point to the contrary.

PRIVATE PRISON INDUSTRY WANTS MORE WHILE EVERYONE ELSE WILL RECEIVE LESS

Representatives from GEO Group and Corrections Corporation of America, the two companies operating Florida's six private prisons, had quite a deal to offer the Legislature at Thursday's meeting of the **Senate Criminal and Civil Justice Appropriations Committee**... expand their enterprises in Florida and they will give you, the taxpayers, a discount. Both companies are looking to add more inmate beds, expand prison capacity with new construction and extend their contracts beyond three years.

Florida PBA Executive Director David Murrell posed the obvious question to the committee, "Why aren't they feeling the pain like the rest of us?"

Mr. Murrell stated that every public agency in the state is faced with reducing its operating expenses, but here we have the private prison industry being held harmless while also asking for more money. Seems unfair doesn't it? Staff members were quick to point out that in fact the industry had taken a hit during the budget reduction session in 2007, but had no answer for the current recommendation to shield the industry.

The issue should continue to simmer until the latter part of the session. Of course, our recommendation to squash the idea will be voiced at every committee that hears this proposal; however in all likelihood, it will take a decision by the budget conference committee at the end of session before we will know the final outcome. We will keep you posted.

SUNSET COMMITTEE WILL NOT CHANGE JURISDICTIONAL AUTHORITY FOR THE HIGHWAY PATROL

The review of the **Florida Highway Patrol** has already come and gone after only one formal meeting on the topic by the entire **Legislative Sunset Committee**. The only option that was recommended by the staff for consideration was to possibly change the Patrol's jurisdictional authority exclusively to state highways and enter into official agreements with the local law enforcement for any enforcement outside of state roads. All other options such as abolishment or consolidation with FDLE were not recommended as feasible.

PBA's FHP Chapter President Bill Smith, PBA's FHP Chapter Legislative Liaison Tim Roufa, FHP Colonel John Czernis, and DHSMV Executive Director Electra Bustle each testified before the committee in support of maintaining the current arrangement. Their testimony, along with testimony of sheriffs from two counties, illustrated that the current arrangements specific to a particular county or region are working just fine. The committee, on the recommendations of **Senators Don Gaetz, Dennis Jones and Al Lawson**, moved to table the issue from further consideration.

In a similar move, **Senate Transportation Committee Chairman Senator Carey Baker** moved to table any consideration to cut 75 vacant positions and to change jurisdictional authority during his committee meeting the next day. Although, it ain't over til it's over... we believe this issue has been put to rest.

PBA LEGISLATIVE AGENDA FOR 2008

- Equitable pay increases for state correctional, correctional probation, and law enforcement officers represented by Florida PBA, including but not limited to, pay compression and retention issues.
- Legislation extending the period of DROP participation for Law Enforcement, Correctional and Correctional Probation Officers, at the rank of Captain and below, an additional 36 months (**Representative Julio Robaina HB 501 and Senator Carey Baker – SB 706**)
- Legislation including Institutional Security Specialist to the definition of Certified Correctional Officer. (**Representative Pat Patterson – HB 427 and Senator Ted Deutch – SB 924**)
- Legislation allowing for purchase of Special Risk credit for certain academy time. (**Representative Anitere Flores – HB 379 and Senator Mike Fasano – SB 106**)
- Legislation changing the Special Risk upgraded credit from two percent to three percent. (**Representative Ed Hooper – HB 397 and Senator Dave Aronberg - TBA**)
- Support for the Officer Malcolm Thompson Act. (**Representative Frank Attkisson – HB 57 and Senator Steve Oelrich – SB 1024**)
- Support for legislation to place security cameras in certain late night business parking lots (**Representative Ari Porth HB 325/HB 327 and Senator TBA**)
- Support for legislation to add fleeing/eluding a law enforcement officer to list categories for felony murder (**Representative Will Snyder – HB 321 and Senator Paula Dockery - SB 1064**)

With reference to other legislation, the Board of Directors gives authorization to the Director of Legislative Services to support legislation favorable to the membership or oppose legislation harmful to the membership.

