



Matt Puckett

From Your Deputy

Executive Director

Legislative Agenda 2008

Perhaps it's because I'm writing this article during the college football bowl season or maybe I'm just slightly suffering from holiday post traumatic stress, but I am truly excited that the Florida Legislature is gearing up for another session. I used the football reference for one simple reason... every team, except the one that wins the national title, is saying, "there's always next year." Of course, after last year's disappointing session, that's been our mantra too. Clearly, given Florida's economic situation last year and the pressure on the Governor and Legislature to reform property insurance and taxes, something would have to give. Unfortunately for us, it was money to fund decent pay raises for our state bargaining units and enhancements to pensions. The sobering part to all this is that we have not seen the worst of it yet, or so the economic forecasters say. Seems hard to believe, it was only back in 2006 that we were enjoying a nice string of successful legislative sessions.

Today's cold, hard truth is the economy is BAD. Florida's housing market, one of two major components to filling the state's General Revenue coffers, is tanking at historic levels with two major cities (Miami and Tampa) literally leading the slump nationwide. The budget chiefs in the Legislature have already told the members no local projects will be funded, which in an election year is the equivalent to telling your children Christmas has been cancelled. Not to mention, the Governor has already ordered his agency heads to do another round of budget reductions. Simply put, it's not a pretty scene.

So if you decided to keep reading along, you might be wondering why I am actually excited that the session is rolling around. Well, I'm like a Duke football fan. I just think we have a real chance to get something important accomplished this session. And so... without further ado... I present you with the Florida Police Benevolent Association's 2008 Legislative Agenda:

As is always the case, we are requesting the Legislature fund 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. After everything written above, we should still recognize that funding public safety is the top priority of our Governor and many of the leaders in our Legislature.

Here's one for you. We are proposing legislation to extend the period of DROP participation in the Florida Retirement System 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). You read that correctly, we are going to lobby for an EIGHT YEAR DROP. Let's face it, recruitment of highly qualified officers will never rebound unless there's more money for salaries, but we can keep the best veteran officers by extending the period they are allowed to remain in the DROP. Plus it actually is considered a nonmonetary benefit enhancement to the FRS, because this money is already allocated to pay for pension benefits to the retiree.

To clear up some confusion, we are going to update the definition of Correctional Officer in Florida Statutes Chapter 943 to include Institutional Security Specialist **(Representative Pat Patterson - HB 427 and Senator Ted Deutch – SB 924).** This issue clarifies the Legislature's intent to have Institutional Security Specialists continue to be certified correctional officers, which is the current

practice at the Department of Children and Families, and to retain Special Risk and other benefit coverage.

We hope this is the year we pass legislation allowing for purchase of Special Risk credit for certain academy time **(Representative Anitere Flores – HB 379 and Senator Mike Fasano – SB 106).** Briefly, this legislation allows officers affected by a misclassification during their academy training back in 1978 through 1984 to purchase an upgrade of Special Risk retirement credit.

Our dear friend, **Representative Mike Davis**, lost his battle with cancer in 2007; he had been our sponsor in the House of Representatives for the last few years on this issue. We all truly miss his friendship and commitment us.

Just like the Academy Legislation, we are crossing our fingers that this is the year for legislation changing the Special Risk upgraded credit from two percent to three percent for municipal officers entering into the FRS **(Representative Ed Hooper – HB 397 and Senator Dave Aronberg).** We are seeing an increase in the number of cities closing the local pension plans in favor of the currently more affordable FRS pension. The catch here is officers can only purchase all their previous service accrued within the local pension plan at a 2% accrual rate in the FRS instead of the standard 3% for Special Risk retirement. That results in a tremendous loss to the officers' retirement monies.

We are supporting local officers in Broward County in their efforts to change legislation that will place security cameras in certain late night business parking lots **(Representative Ari Porth - HB 325 and Senator TBA).** The legislation is designed to prevent murders similar to **Sergeant Chris Reyka's** in Broward County. For those of you not familiar, Sgt. Reyka of the Broward County Sheriff's Office was checking abandoned automobiles in a store parking lot when he was viciously murdered. Unfortunately, the store had no cameras in the parking area to record the crime and, with no leads, the killer/killers remain at large.

2007 was a horrific year for law enforcement and their families. Tragedy struck repeatedly in Florida's densely populated cities, where the criminals were increasingly brazen in their attacks against law enforcement. There are a number of officer safety legislative proposals this session and rest assured the Florida PBA will play a role in the passage of each of them. One that we have already assisted with is the support for legislation to add fleeing/eluding a law enforcement officer to list categories for felony murder **(Representative Will Snyder – HB 321 and Senator TBA).** This proposal is in response to the incident in Palm Beach that cost that lives of **Deputies Donta Manuel and Jonathan Wallace.** A suspect fleeing deputies in a stolen car will not be charged with the murders of these officers and we intend to see that this tragedy does not happen again.

Representative Will Snyder, our 2007 **Ed Hoffman Award** winner, has filed the Murder of Law Enforcement Officers bill, which will increase the minimum mandatory sentences for anyone who even attempts to kill an officer. We have asked him to amend his bill to add our fleeing and eluding proposal... he graciously accepted.

Please bear in mind there are a number of issues we will be involved in during the session which are not listed on the official agenda. One issue of keen interest this particular session will involve the proposed property tax reform and the reaction of local and state governments to it. We are prepared to play defense this year to ensure we maintain statutorily guaranteed pension benefits for our municipal officers in the event that local government decide these benefits are too expensive.

In February, we will begin our *Capitol Report*, which is a weekly summary of the events of the week at the Capitol. Please feel free to contact us with any questions.

As always, stay safe. ●

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State Representative Will Snyder (center) receives the Ed Hoffman Legislative Award. This award is given to the hardest working legislator for Law Enforcement.