

A Guest Article from Florida's Agriculture Commissioner

Honoring Those Who Paid The Ultimate Price

I recently had the honor of participating in the unveiling of the Officer Down Memorial in the Capitol courtyard along with other state leaders and law enforcement officials. The bronze statue depicts a wounded officer in the arms of a colleague who is radioing for help. It is a vivid portrayal of a scene that has played out in real life in cities across Florida.

As a former sheriff's deputy, I am very aware of the dangers officers face every day they put on their uniform. These protectors of the public deserve our support, our respect and our gratitude. I have heard it said that courage is not the absence of fear, it is the willingness to do the right thing even in the face of fear. The 12 officers in Florida who lost their lives in the line of duty in 2008 did the right thing and paid the ultimate price in their efforts to keep the citizens of this state safe from violence and crime. I pay tribute to them.

But as I looked out among the guests and visitors, I got a stark reminder that there are heroes left behind. The families of the 12 officers spent every day of their lives knowing that could be the day they would receive a knock on the door, a knock they dreaded, feared, but knew was always a possibility. Then it happened. Their lives changed forever. Their somber faces could not hide the pain of their loss, but the wives, husbands, children and parents of the fallen officers came to honor their loved ones and accept our heartfelt thanks. They must pick up the pieces and carry on. We honor them by ensuring the officers will not be forgotten. We also honor them by continuing to support the men and women who wear a badge and without regard for their own safety, put their lives on the line for our safety.

We can do this by contacting and urging our friends and neighbors to contact state and local government leaders and voicing support for pay increases, improved benefits and for

maintaining a certain level of officers in the field. It is important not only for our safety, but for the safety of law enforcement officers who must be able to rely on fellow officers in the field. That's why I was very disappointed with the legislature's decision to cut the pay of state employees, many of whom are in law enforcement. I know my own law enforcement officers work long days, are often on the job after hours, on weekends and on holidays and are dedicated to carrying out the critical missions of the department. I have no doubt that officers employed in other state agencies and local government also put in extensive hours for not enough pay.

I am also concerned about the continued cuts in the workforce, including at FDLE, the Department of Corrections and my own Office of Agricultural Law Enforcement. With 18 million citizens to protect, we cannot expect to maintain an adequate level of service while at the same time eliminating hundreds of positions. The public wants and expects to be protected and I believe people are willing to fund law enforcement. I support increased funding and urge people to make their positions known to the policy makers who hold the purse strings at the local and state level.

I understand we are in a recession, but we cannot balance the budget on the backs of those who work to prevent crimes and respond when crimes do occur. State and local leaders have to make the tough choices necessary to ensure all law enforcement agencies are adequately funded and staffed.

I'd like to close by thanking the PBA members for their dedicated service and the leadership for its commitment to working with policymakers to pass legislation that enhances the criminal justice system and to improve the compensation and benefits of officers across the state. ■



*Charles H.
Bronson*

I would like to thank the Police Benevolent Association for inviting me to write a guest column for your fine organization. My roots in law enforcement extend back many years. I served as a Metro Dade County reserve deputy in the late 1970's and continued to support law enforcement issues as a state senator. Specifically, I supported bills increasing benefits for police officers such as the presumption bills and pay increases. I sponsored legislation allowing for a deputy sheriff to hold active their law enforcement certificate if they held elected office; co-sponsored legislation expanding the rights of officers during internal review investigations; sponsored legislation enhancing the penalty of using a police scanner to avoid detection during a crime or for impersonating an officer; and cosponsored legislation enhancing retirement benefits based on prior service.



FDLE Agents Association Chapter President Telly Sands, and State Law Enforcement Officers Chapter's Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission Director Jeffrey Gier, Vice President Chris Kirkland, and Office of Attorney General Medicaid Fraud Control Unit Director John Koutsoupis meeting with Commissioner Bronson at the Capitol.



Commissioner Bronson, the only active law enforcement officer on the Florida Cabinet, was one of the invited speakers at the "Officer Down" Memorial unveiling in Tallahassee on March 9, 2009.

A man entered a busy florist shop that displayed a large sign that read "Say It With Flowers."

"Wrap up one rose," he told the florist.

"Only one?" the florist asked.

"Just one," the customer replied. "I'm a man of few words."

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