

From the Florida House of Representatives

Legislative News for PBA



*Joe Negron
Representative and
Candidate for
Attorney General*

Joe Negron was first elected to the Florida House of Representatives in 2000 and was re-elected without opposition in 2002 and 2004. Joe serves as Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, which oversees the state budget. Joe has an undergraduate degree from Stetson University and a law degree from Emory University. He and his wife Rebecca have three children: David, a sophomore at Florida State University; Jonathan, a freshman at South Fork High School; and, Becca, who attends seventh grade at Murray Middle.

Joe has concentrated his legislative efforts on insurance issues, education reform and appropriations.

Last year, The St. Petersburg Times named him as one of Speaker Bense's top three legislators in the Florida House.

The Florida PBA has endorsed Joe Negron as the Republican Candidate for Attorney General. If you would like to help with Joe Negron's Campaign, see page 3.

The last time I spoke to you through the *Roll Call*, the 2006 Legislative session was about to begin. I covered a number of pending issues and encouraged you to continue the grass-roots efforts that had served you so well in the past. Now that the session has ended, I am happy to report that your efforts yielded impressive results.

Perhaps most impressive are the special pay provisions included in the state budget for bargaining units represented by the PBA. These include the following:

- \$621,148 for special retention and merit based pay raises for workers at the Department of Law Enforcement.
- \$9.6 million for retention adjustments for the security services unit. This will provide a 2% pay increase for employees with at least 5 years of service and 3% for employees with at least 10 years of service.

These raises, by the way, are on top of the 3% across-the-board increase provided to all state employees.

This is the third year in a row that units represented by the PBA received special pay increases over and above the general pay package provided to other state employees. While this reflects the Legislature's commitment to public safety, it also provides compelling evidence of the Florida PBA's effectiveness.

As I have stated throughout my Legislative career, my top priorities for the state budget have been education, public safety and the courts. As chair of the House Fiscal Council, I was in a position to ensure that these priorities were adequately addressed. As a result, the state budget approved by the Legislature for public safety and the courts is at an all-time high of \$4.6 billion. This is an increase of over \$400 million compared to the budget we passed last session.

Specific items of interest include the following:

- \$74.5 million for new prison bed construction. This will complete construction of the Wakulla Annex and Lowell work camp which will be state-operated facilities.
- \$25.4 million increased funding and 501 new positions in the Department of Corrections to supervise new inmates and provide support services for facilities scheduled to come on-line during the next fiscal year.
- \$47 million for major repair and maintenance of facilities owned by the departments of Corrections and Juvenile Justice.
- \$1 million increased funding and 15 new positions to provide probation officers to continue implementation of the **Jessica Lunsford Act**.
- \$22 million to increase mileage and per diem rates for all state employees (see SB 428).
- \$18.6 million for new state attorneys and public defenders to expedite processing of criminal cases.
- \$7 million for 55 new judges which includes (see HB 113).

While I am proud of what we accomplished for public safety and the courts, I would be remiss not to mention a few highlights in other areas of the budget. The budget includes a record level of funding in the area of public education, my other top spending priority. In addition, substantial increases were approved for other areas of state government such as health and human services, economic development, transportation, and environmental land acquisition.

Finally, I had two other priorities for the state budget that didn't involve spending. One was to increase state reserves so

that we will be better able to cope with any future economic downturns. The second was to give money back to the taxpayers who sent it to us to begin with. On both counts we were successful. We increased state reserves to historic levels exceeding \$6 billion in total. We provided \$298 million of tax relief to Florida citizens.

Accomplishing these two goals required a conscious decision not to go on a spending spree just because we could. It also required the discipline to stick to that decision despite intense pressure. Interest groups had high expectations because of the state's favorable revenue situation and were more aggressive than ever in promoting their causes.

Let me also take a moment to mention a couple of substantive bills that originated in the House Fiscal Council. One is HB 5021 related to civil commitment proceeding for sexually violent predators under the **Jimmy Ryce Act**. It was developed after the special meeting I mentioned in my last column that featured testimony from **Captain William Bowden** of the Department of Corrections. We feel that many of the problems at the DeSoto facility described by Captain Bowden were attributable to detainees who have yet to

complete formal commitment proceedings in the courts. They are in legal limbo with little incentive to participate in treatment or cooperate with other program requirements.

In response, I worked with **Rep. Jack Seiler** to develop the language that ultimately became HB 5021. It will limit delays in civil commitment cases under the Jimmy Ryce Act and hopefully break the current logjam. A portion of the increased funding provided to state attorneys and public defenders is

earmarked to expedite older cases.

HB 5017 is another bill that originated in the House Fiscal Council related to corrections. The bill in its final form was limited to a couple of minor, technical adjustments that did not generate a lot of interest. In its original form, however, it was considerably more controversial because it eliminated the Parole Commission. This provision was ultimately dropped during final budget negotiations between the House and Senate.

Several other bills passed the Legislature that would be of interest to PBA members such as the stun gun regulations. They are too numerous to mention individually here. Please visit the House web site at <http://www.myfloridahouse.gov/> and click on "2006 Legislative Session End of Session Report" for a complete list of all bills that passed the Legislature.

One disappointment I will note is the ultimate outcome of this year's version of the Anti-Murder Act. The PBA supported this bill, and I sponsored it in the House. While it passed the House, it was never brought up for a vote in the Senate.

As I wrap up my career in the Legislature, I will take with me many fond memories of a truly incredible experience. It is an honor to be chosen by your peers to represent them in the Legislature and a pleasure to work on their behalf. Most gratifying is the opportunity to work with ordinary, concerned citizens from all walks of life. They work tirelessly to improve our state through active participation in the democratic process. Many of them are among your membership and I have truly enjoyed our time together.

Thank you for allowing me to address you through the *Roll Call*. Thank you for your efforts to make Florida safe for me, my family, and my constituents. I will always hold you and the important work you do in the highest regard. 🇺🇸

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Representative Joe Negron addressing PBA at the June Board Meeting.



Representative Joe Negron with his second consecutive "PBA Legislator of the Year" award.