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John Rivera

A Message From Your President

This special election issue of *Roll Call* reflects the outcomes of PBA's political screenings from throughout the state. **Those endorsed candidates with August Primary opposition are listed in this edition; endorsed candidates for the November General Election will be shown in a regular edition of *Roll Call* coming out in October.** Please make sure that you, your family and friends do everything possible to get these candidates elected. Support them like your future depends on it... because these decision-makers will in fact determine your future.

More Sadness in the Law Enforcement Community

Yet another of our brave officers has fallen at the hands of yet another violent criminal who should not have been on the street at all. **Fort Myers Officer Andrew Widman** was gunned down by some scumbag who should have been behind bars already for previous crimes. Unbelievably, he should not have been in our country period. Our heart goes out to the Widman family as they deal with this senseless tragedy. It is quite apparent that Officer Widman was much loved and respected. He will be greatly missed by all of us.

In past columns, I have questioned how much community and governmental support our officers really have. For the Fort Myers community, I am here to tell you that the answer is overwhelming support! **Deputy Executive Director Matt Puckett, Dade County PBA Sergeant-At-Arms Luis de lo Santos** and I attended Officer Widman's funeral, and we were deeply touched by the emotional support given by the public, the law enforcement community, and political leaders. As we participated in the funeral procession, I was amazed and so proud at how people pulled off on the side of

the road, saluting, hands over the heart, and waving flags. Then there were the big flags that local businesses displayed. People were lined up everywhere to show their support and respect. The law enforcement community was just superb in the way they honored a fallen brother. And as for elected leaders, of whom there were many, I must single out **Lt. Governor Kottkamp, Attorney General Bill McCollum, Fort Myers Mayor Jim Humphrey, Senator Burt Saunders, and Representative Nick Thompson.** Representative Thompson, by the way, has already reached out to us about legislation which will ensure that this type of tragedy never occurs in Florida again (the cowardly piece of excrement who shot Officer Widman should not have been in this country for starters). And to **Gulf Coast PBA President Cecil Pendergrass**, you and your fellow members did a magnificent job. And to the rest of Florida, Fort Myers is a role model if you want to see how to treat a fallen officer and his family.*

Honoring Fallen Officers

As reported to you in the last *Roll Call*, Florida PBA is well on the way to showing more deserved honor to our fallen officers. I am pleased to report that our full-sized bronze statue, "Officer Down," has received an official go ahead by the Division of Management Services. Our appreciation goes to **Governor Crist** and his staff for smoothing the way for this approval. The statue will be unveiled during the next legislative session.

In the meantime, stay safe and fight the good fight! 🇺🇸

**See related article below printed in the Charlotte Sun Newspaper from a Fort Myers resident, Robert R. McMillan. The article was written prior to Officer Widman's death.*

Police officers are in the line of fire

Reprinted Courtesy of Robert R. McMillan



From Iraq and Afghanistan to the streets of our country, lives are taken by evil people. Let me explain what I mean.

John Nally, a former police officer, showed me a PBA magazine with a tragic story about a murdered officer, Eddie Byrne. The article brought back memories.

Some 20 years ago, I will never forget being on the stage of Christ the King Church in Queens, N.Y., with then-Vice President George H.W. Bush. It was the 1988 presidential election, and I was running for the U.S. Senate in a very uphill race against Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan.

During the rally, New York City police officers came together to support Bush for the presidency. Behind us on the stage was a sign with a big red heart and the words "New York Police — Bush." Clearly, the heart was an expression of support for the Bush candidacy. I was proud to stand on the stage next to Vice President Bush.

Then, an event took place that still tugs at my heart. Matt Byrne, a retired police lieutenant, stepped forward and presented Bush with badge "Number 14072." It was the badge of his son, Eddie, who had been ruthlessly murdered while on duty protecting an informant. The "hit" on Eddie Byrne was ordered from prison by the cocaine mob.

From that point on, President Bush either kept the badge in his White House desk or carried it with him when he was on a mission to stop ruthless gun violence. The ceremony, on the stage at the October 1988,

brought tears to the eyes of many in the audience and on the stage. Matt Byrne, during his presentation to Bush, said to keep the badge as a "reminder of all the brave police officers who put their lives on the line for us every single day." How true that statement remains through history and today.

Think about the analogy between combat soldiers and police officers out on the streets.

First of all, police officers often are put into situations where timing is everything. Whether it is chasing a suspect, entering a dark alley, pulling over a speeding vehicle, or even being involved in a shoot-out, danger does lurk at every turn.

Police officers have a great deal of training, and they have to be careful not to overreact. But how would you like to be in one of these situations and have to be the first to fire? Yes, mistakes are made, but I would hate to be in the shoes of an officer trying to make the decision about pulling the trigger. A dark alley is not the best place to make that decision, but it often has to be done.

Then, when a mistake is made, who takes the blame? It is often a rush to judgment by the media in deciding against the police officer, without ever having been in the officer's shoes. And today, too often, there are people out there who have no regard for the community nor worries about following the law. These are the types our police officers have to deal with every day.

Again, I will never forget that October date in 1988. I hope this piece helps you reflect on the important and difficult role our law enforcement officers have to play in today's environment.