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This Russian guy loses his pet parrot. He looks everywhere, all around the neighborhood, in the park, everywhere. He can't find the parrot. Finally he goes around to the KGB office and tells the desk officer his problem.

The officer's a little puzzled. "Look, bud, I'm sorry you lost your bird, but this is the KGB. We don't handle missing animal reports."

"Oh, I know that," says the guy. "I just wanted you to know, if you find my parrot—I don't know where he could have picked up all his political ideas."

News from Around the State **Organizational Update**

The Haves and The Have Nots

Is there a light at the end of the tunnel? I think if you look hard enough you can almost see a glimmer. The reality of our current economic situation is that even the economists can't agree on when we'll actually hit bottom. What was supposed to be the upswing in late 2009 has been pushed back until at least 2011. Only time will tell if that holds true. All of that is in the future, but what about today? I bargain a number of contracts around the state. Most cities and counties are rolling their current budgets back to 2006 levels. Depending upon the size of the governmental entity, that equates to anywhere from hundreds of thousands to hundreds of millions of dollars in roll backs to get to those 2006 levels. Not a pretty picture is it? With that said, let me get to the reason I titled this article "The Haves and the Have Nots."

As I mentioned before, I bargain a number of contracts around the state, and some employers are in better financial shape than others. So, as you can imagine, negotiations can be contentious with some employers and pretty laid back with others. Some employers want to lay off officers and reduce benefits to balance their budgets. Others are increasing pay and benefits to attract the best and brightest to their cities and counties. Most employers fall somewhere in between these extremes.

The officers and deputies involved in these negotiations are the "Haves." They have the benefit of collective bargaining! They have the right to bargain the impact of any change in the conditions of employment prior to the employer implementing the change. They have a place at the table with the ability to modify, amend, alter, or even stop the proposed change the employer wants to implement. Like the employer during negotiations they have the right to propose new language or amend existing language to meet the wants and needs of their members. Bottom line, the "Haves" are an empowered share holder in the employer's decision making process as it relates to wages and conditions of employment. You don't always win or get what you want, but you do get a place at the table. Priceless!

To illustrate the "Have Nots," I will use a city police department and a sheriff's office. First, the city in a knee jerk reaction to the impact of Amendment 1 began to unilaterally roll back benefits that employee's had enjoyed for years. An example of the benefits lost included the loss of the general employee's pension fund (police were included, separate from their Chapter 185 retirement) where the city had put an amount equal to 12% of an employee's base wages into the fund every year. The employees now have a new 401 A plan (through the National City Managers Association, who would have thought it!) with a 6% contribution. It's not just the 6% that was lost. The biggest loss is that the employees went from a pension where the city was responsible to keep the

plan solvent to one where each employee is responsible for their own plan. Pretty sweet deal for the city, cut your cost in half and do away with your liability for your employee's pension. Other losses include no pay raises and eliminating clothing allowances, etc. You get the idea, with the stroke of a pen and no requirement to negotiate, it's all gone. The most telling part of this is that one employee group has the right to collective bargaining (firefighters) and the city is currently negotiating with them over the city's proposed changes. The police officers have a pending election for the right to collective bargaining.

The Sheriff receives a memo from the Board of County Commissioners to all constitutional officers asking "roll your current budget request back another 10%." To accomplish this the Sheriff decides to do a number of cost saving moves. The pay raise you were promised is gone with the understanding that we might have to take back last year's raise as well. You get to keep your take home cars with just a few changes such as paying \$200 per month or \$2,400 a year for the privilege and if you use it for off duty work you have to put your own gas in it! Of course you can imagine

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how many calls we got asking about getting collective bargaining. The deputies are currently voting on whether they want the right to collective bargaining. An interesting note to this is that the Sheriff gave the promised pay raises and refunded the money collected for take home cars just prior to the mailing of the ballots for the collective bargaining election.

In a letter to all deputies, the Sheriff says that he has always been able to do good things for his employees and will continue to do so in the future, that they (the Sheriff and deputies) didn't need outsiders meddling in their affairs. Interesting reading, let's define outsiders. An outsider is someone like myself or **Hal Johnson** (PBA General Counsel) acting as chief negotiator and deputies who work for the Sheriff. Outsiders? I think not!

In closing, I think that this has to be the second or third article I've written along these lines in the past year. But every time I sit down to write my article, I try to make it relative to what is currently happening in the police labor movement, the most important issue facing law enforcement today has to be the economy. Just like all law enforcement, training and proper equipment will get you through almost every tactical situation. Collective bargaining rights and a proven representative will give you the tools you need to protect your conditions of employment in today's economy. Your collective bargaining agreement and your Florida PBA membership card...don't leave home without them.

Please take a look at the photographs at right taken by our staff reps and others in recent months. ●



Florida PBA Staff Rep Steve Mears. Iraq last year. This year when the St. Mark's River (Tallahassee area) flooded, PBA's Citizen-Soldier Mears continued his service.