

A Message From Your **Executive Director**



David Murrett

Eighteen Years of Fighting for Fairness Pays Off

On May 20, **Ernie George** was elected Chairman of the Criminal Justice Standards and Training Commission (CJSTC). CJSTC, for the uninitiated, is the 19 member commission which sets up the training for all law enforcement and correctional officers, decides if you get certified (meaning, you can work as an officer), and decides whether or not to take away your certification (meaning, you can't work as an officer).

It is an extraordinary honor and triumph for Ernie, Florida PBA, and working stiffs throughout the law enforcement and corrections community.

My, my, how times have changed. Not so long ago, representatives of rank and file officers had to sit in the back of the bus—no, they weren't even allowed on the bus. Officers coming before the Commission were routinely decertified and humiliated in the process—even on the most trivial of charges. The Commission of old had the attitude: "Let's hang the guilty bastard, then give him a fair trial." Thankfully, due to the many years of persistent legislative lobbying by PBA (led by Ernie and **John Rivera**), two most sympathetic governors (**Bush** and **Crist**), and a new cadre of progressive, fair-minded sheriffs (e.g. **Sheriff Bradshaw**), chiefs (e.g. **Chief Romine**), and other administrators (who sit on the Commission as well), the "hang 'em high," kangaroo court mentality has now been replaced with a Commission that treats rank and file officers with respect and fairness. This change didn't just fall out of the sky or materialize overnight.

Allow me to digress and give a blow by blow account of how this remarkable change came into being. I was there with Ernie from beginning to end, so I have had a unique, inside view of how all of this happened.

Around 1990 when Ernie was President of Palm Beach County PBA, and I served as Florida PBA's Chief Lobbyist, I noticed Ernie start grumbling about how unfair CJSTC had been to some of his members, summarily running them off when they shouldn't have been. One day at the Capitol in 1992, the grumbling got even more pronounced, and he gathered me up to go with him to meet and discuss the problem with then **Senator Robert Wexler** (later Congressman and Florida PBA Honorary Member for many good reasons, including this story). Senator Wexler was Chairman of the Senate Criminal Justice Committee. We met with Senator Wexler and his staff director, and Ernie laid it all out about the unfairness of CJSTC and that a good start would be to pass legislation which required rank and file officers to sit on the Commission, with the belief that rank and file officers would be more sympathetic and understanding. Wexler listened intently and then told the staff director: "Do what these guys want." And "do" he did. We worked hard with Senator Wexler, and out of that came legislation requiring that at least one law enforcement officer and one correctional officer serving on the Commission must be of the rank of sergeant or below. That was the beginning of many changes through the years.

Next year, Ernie noticed that these positions were not being filled by "sergeant or below" officers and that the old crowd was being allowed to fill out their terms, which was FDLE's misguided interpretation of the law. Back to the drawing board and more legislation. Legislation passed booting off the interlopers, mandating that the Governor comply with the law mandating "sergeant and below" representation. As an added bonus, the legislation also required an additional two rank and file officers be put on the Commission.

In 1994, when **Jeb Bush** ran for Governor and narrowly lost, Ernie made a project of educating Jeb about the need to reform membership of the CJSTC. When Governor Bush won election in 1998 (again with PBA's backing), Ernie continued that education with Governor Bush. In all

the meetings where we met with the Governor, and there were many, it seemed like the topic of CJSTC came up just about every time. We found a sympathetic and most helpful ear. By then, Ernie had become President of Florida PBA and was honored by the Governor by being appointed as one of the commissioners with the rank of sergeant or below. Unfortunately, his appointment was not well received by the other 18 commissioners, and when he spoke up in support of deserving officers appearing before the commission, the votes were mostly 18-1 against the officer—with Ernie being on the short end of that stick. It got so hostile that he told John Rivera (now President of both Dade and Florida PBA's) and **Dick Brickman** (Senior Vice President of Florida PBA) that they would have to attend the meetings with him and give him moral support while he was taking his beatings on behalf of the officers. They did so. (John is now an appointed commissioner, and Dick still attends all the meetings.)

Next, Ernie, John and Dick noticed that accused officers would often not have their cases resolved for two or three years—which meant that many officers could not work and support their families while the respective case went dragging on. Back to the drawing board and more legislation. We got legislation passed which mandated that all investigations by the Commission had to be resolved within 180 days after receiving the complaint.

Next, Ernie and his two compadres decided that more rank and file officers should be on the Commission. Back to the drawing board and more legislation. Another rank and file law enforcement officer was added to the Commission. Then another rank and file officer was added in a subsequent legislative session. Then another rank and file officer was added shortly thereafter, bringing the total to four law enforcement and one correctional officer.

Next, the trio noticed that even though a total of five rank and file officers were to be on the Commission, most of those who finally got appointed seemed to be management wannabes and were hardly supportive of deserving officers coming before the Commission. It turned out that FDLE and other management types had great influence on which rank and file officers actually got on the Commission. Back to the drawing board and more legislation. We came up with the bright idea that a committee ought to be set up, so that a list of six names would be submitted by the committee, and the governor would have to select one from that list. While we were at it, we also added a provision adding yet another rank and file law enforcement officer to the Commission (which meant five law enforcement and one correctional officer of the sergeant or below rank). This was a most contentious piece of legislation. It passed and Governor Bush signed it into law—even though it cut into some of his powers as governor.

Today, PBA and FOP (PBA has four votes and FOP two) sit down and come up with a list jointly agreed upon. This has worked exceedingly well. Ernie George, John Rivera (President of both Dade and Florida PBA's), **Pat Hanrahan** (Broward County PBA President), **Mick McHale** (Southwest Florida PBA President), and **Nelson Cuba** (Jacksonville FOP President) all serve as commissioners appointed by Governors Bush and Crist. These appointees plus three other like-minded commissioners add to the clout for rank and file officers (one law enforcement, one correctional officer below the rank of sergeant, plus **Attorney General McCollum's** designee who is a former state FOP president). The end result? Ernie no longer has to endure being there by himself as in those early day 18-1 votes against deserving officers.

After nine years of being a commissioner and many more years of fighting the fight for justice, Ernie's time has finally come. Officers coming before the Commission now get a fair shake. Congratulations on your election, Ernie! ●



Ernie George

Congratulations, Ernie George, on your election as Chairman of the Criminal Justice, Standards and Training Commission!

“Many of life's failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up.”

~ Thomas Edison