



*Jeff
Kottkamp*

Editor's Note:
Lieutenant Governor Kottkamp's article was written in response to the Blackwater Bailout proposed by the Florida Legislature this past legislative session. See page 19 for details. This article was sent to editorial boards around the state.

Editor's Note: PBA has endorsed Jeff Kottkamp (R) for Attorney General.

Guest Article from Florida's **Lieutenant Governor**

Prison Debate Should Focus on Safety – Not Savings

State government in Florida, much like the citizens it serves, is facing yet another difficult budget year. The legislature is leaving no stone unturned as it tries to find ways to reduce government spending in order to balance the budget. In fact, over the last three years state spending has been reduced by over \$7 billion. Considering the budget cuts that have already been implemented the legislature does not have an easy task this year.

The budget debate has now turned to the costs of running our state prisons. The Senate recently approved an amendment to the budget to close three correctional facilities and transfer the inmates in those facilities to a privately operated institution. It is believed that using the private facility could save the state \$20 million in operating expenses. There is another \$100 million in estimated savings by eliminating 1,300 currently vacant prison jobs.

As with any budget savings proposal there is a debate about the actual savings, as well as the policy implications, of the proposed cuts. It appears that moving inmates to a private facility will result in the closing of three prisons which are currently in operation. This in turn will cause as many as 1,400 prison guards to lose their jobs thus adding to Florida's unemployment numbers. There is no doubt that there will be a social cost to closing state run prisons. Our unemployment numbers will go up, as will the demand for social services by the families of those that will lose their job. For that reason alone it is difficult, at best, to justify the closure of three state run prisons.

Equally troubling is the possible "trickle down" effect of this change which could lead to the closure of six state-run facilities and the relocation of 6,000 inmates. The Secretary of the Department of Corrections believes this may lead to the early release of as many as 2,500 prisoners.

Thus, beyond the debate about potential savings and potential social costs there is another important issue to consider—the safety of the citizens of Florida. Government's first and foremost responsibility is to ensure your safety. Consequently, the debate about prison closings cannot be about savings alone—the issue of citizen safety must be at the forefront of the discussion. The potential early release of 2,500 prisoners would certainly reduce the safety of our citizens. Such an outcome is not acceptable.

There is another reason to question this proposed change. When someone is convicted of a crime and sentenced to prison—it is a punishment being carried out on behalf of the citizens of Florida by state officials. It is society's way of saying "you broke the public compact and now you will be punished". There is something lost in the process when the responsibility for carrying out that punishment gets shifted from state officials to corporate employees. The whole process shifts from a focus on "crime and punishment" to a focus on "profits and loses"—that is wrong.

We must continue to look for ways to be good stewards of the taxpayers' money. However, the proposal to close state-run prisons focuses too much on possible savings and not enough on the safety of the citizens of Florida. ●



Alex Sink

As a statewide elected officer of the Florida Cabinet, Chief Financial Officer Alex Sink oversees the Department of Financial Services, a multi-division state agency responsible for management of state funds and unclaimed property, assisting consumers who request information and help related to financial services, and investigating financial fraud. CFO Sink also serves as the State Fire Marshal.

Editor's Note: PBA has endorsed Alex Sink (D) for Governor.

Guest Article from Florida's **Chief Financial Officer**

Key Legislative Initiatives will Better Protect Florida's Seniors, State Workers

Now that this year's legislative session has come and gone, I am pleased to report that two of my priority legislative initiatives have been signed into law by **Governor Crist**.

In early June, the Governor signed my Safeguard Our Seniors protections into law, which increases financial protections for Florida's seniors and puts the much-needed "alligator teeth" into the law to deter scammers. In the past few years, my office has heard from hundreds of seniors who have been victims of annuities fraud. Con artists lure them with a free lunch or other ploy to earn their trust, and then rob them of their life savings by selling inappropriate financial products that generate a hefty commission for the agent.

Now, safeguards including harsher penalties and better regulation will have a real impact in protecting our seniors, and I am especially grateful to **Senator Mike Bennett** and **Representative Maria Sachs** for standing with me on this legislation.

I am also pleased that the Governor signed into law State Board of Administration (SBA) reforms which I have long advocated; however, I am still concerned that stronger oversight is needed for the \$112 billion pension fund that our police officers, firefighters, teachers and other state employees depend on for their retirement.

Our state's pension fund is the fourth largest in the nation, and right now, it's managed by just three trustees – the Governor, Attorney General, and CFO – two lawyers and a businesswoman.

As the lone trustee with financial experience, I have been making the case for the past two years that the fund urgently requires more trained, qualified, professional oversight.

While the fund's financial situation is currently strong, we are just one crisis away from turning steady gains into an unfunded moneypit, which has happened in other states with poor oversight.

The fund's management has improved with many of the important recommendations that I laid out more than two years ago at the start of the 2008 Legislative Session, entitled "Ten Proposals to Strengthen Safeguards over Florida Investments." I worked to enact many of these reforms, including required Quarterly Board Meetings for current SBA trustees, which are now signed into law.

However, the reform that matters most is ensuring that the trustees have the know-how to make informed decisions on behalf of the millions of Floridians depending on the pension fund for their future.

I will continue my commitment to deter fraud and protect the hardworking public servants who dedicate their careers to helping Floridians. ●