



*Florida Police Benevolent Association, Inc.*



# CAPITOL REPORT

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*By Matt Puckett, Deputy Executive Director*  
LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY FOR THE WEEK ENDING FEBRUARY 15, 2008

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## **HOUSE MEMBERS GATHER TO DISCUSS FURTHER REDUCTIONS TO THE 2007-2008 STATE BUDGET**

Members of the House of Representatives spent a portion of this week in various committees receiving proposals to further reduce the state's budget for fiscal year 2007-2008. State revenues continue to trickle in at levels lower than had been previously projected when this budget was last reduced in October. As a result, every agency has been tasked to once again reduce their operating costs an additional 4%. For those of you keeping score at home that will total an 8% reduction since May.

The demise of Florida's once blistering housing market, scaled back growth in our population and lower consumer spending have contributed to the continued sluggishness of our economy. Florida is leading the nation in the housing market downturn with two major cities (Miami and Tampa) occupying the top two spots respectively. State economic forecasters project a further erosion of revenues throughout the remainder of this fiscal year and into the next as the housing market proceeds to flatten across the state.

Public safety, always a chief concern during poor economic periods, figures to be shielded from wholesale changes, but the loss of funding for many important prevention projects should be expected. Also, we anticipate funding related to vacancies, overtime, and equipment to receive more than a cursory look with cuts possible as the Legislature struggles meet its constitutional requirement to balance the budget.

The actual reductions to the budget will not take place until the start of the 2008 Legislative Session. Legislators will set aside time during the first and possibly the second week of session to slash spending. We will keep you posted.

## **NOT ALL OF THE NEWS IS BAD**

Despite all the doom and gloom in Tallahassee, the national economic news does seem to favor the predictions by Florida's economic forecasters that we may start to see rebound, or at least hit bottom after we are well into the next fiscal year. In fact, **Federal Reserve Board Chairman Ben Bernanke** provided testimony to the Senate Banking Committee on Thursday in Washington, D.C claiming he forecasts the national economy may regain speed by year's end. Please see article on next page.

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The New York Times

February 14, 2008

## Fed Chief Sees Economic Rebound Later in Year

By [EDMUND L. ANDREWS](#)

WASHINGTON — [Ben S. Bernanke](#), the chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, said on Thursday that his “baseline” forecast is for the economy to experience “sluggish” growth for the next several months but to regain some speed later in the year.

But the Fed chairman carefully left himself room to lower interest rates yet again, saying that “many downside risks to growth remain” and promising that the central bank “will be carefully evaluating incoming information on the economic outlook and will act in a timely manner as needed to support growth.”

Mr. Bernanke acknowledged that a wide variety of economic indicators had declined in recent months, though he once again avoided making any predictions about the likelihood of a recession. On Wall Street, most economic forecasters now estimate that the chances of a recession are at least 50-50, and a growing number of analysts contend that an economic contraction has already begun.

The Federal Reserve has already reduced its benchmark overnight federal funds rate four times since last September, and it slashed the short-term rate twice in the span of eight days in January. As a result, the federal funds rate has plunged to 3 percent from 5.25 percent.

The Fed’s rate cuts have led to a more modest decline in mortgage rates for borrowers with good credit, but they have done little to stop the meltdown in credit markets that stemmed from soaring defaults over subprime mortgages. Those troubles have since spread to a broad risk-aversion by lenders toward all but the most plain-vanilla mortgages and toward many forms of business borrowing.

“The outlook for the economy has worsened in recent months, and the downside risks to growth have increased,” Mr. Bernanke said, according to the written text of testimony presented on Thursday to the Senate Banking Committee. Mr. Bernanke noted that banks have been forced to book huge losses from mortgages on their balance sheets, reducing their ability to extend new credit, and that they had become “protective of their liquidity” and “less willing to provide funding to other market participants.”

The Fed chairman said that the job market has worsened, noting that payroll employment dropped 17,000 jobs in January, according to the Labor Department. That was down from an average increase of 95,000 jobs per month in the final three months of 2007. Unemployment, though still comparatively low at 4.9 percent, has edged up from 4.7 percent several months ago. Housing prices have declined and show no signs of having hit bottom, and the stock markets have fallen sharply from their highs late last year.

Mr. Bernanke cautioned that inflation has been pushed up, in part because of steep increases in the prices of oil and food, and that the dollar has weakened against most major currencies. The Fed’s favorite measure of inflation, which excludes the volatile prices for food and energy, climbed 2.1 percent in 2007 — slightly faster than the Fed’s unofficial comfort zone for inflation.

Mr. Bernanke did not signal that the Fed might tighten monetary policy out of fears about inflation, but he sounded less than confident that consumers and business can continue to expect low inflation. Saying that the Fed would be “closely monitoring” price trends, he cautiously said that inflation expectations “appear to have remained reasonably well-anchored.”

## Sunset Committee Holds Workshop on Florida Highway Patrol

The Legislature has a new committee designed to periodically examine all the various state agencies on a rotating basis. The **Legislative Sunset Committee's** chief mission is to look to streamline state government by eliminating duplicative services performed by multiple agencies, consolidate certain similar functions, or eliminate an agency altogether.



Florida PBA Deputy Executive Director Matt Puckett testifies before the Legislative Sunset Review Committee on Monday.

On Monday, the Committee held a workshop to review the function of Florida Highway Patrol within the Department of Highway Safety & Motor Vehicles. **The Office of Program Policy Analysis & Government Accountability (OPPAGA)**, the Legislature's research office, has already reviewed four potential options specific to the functions of FHP: Option 1 is transferring the FHP to another State Agency like FDLE or DOT; Option 2 is continuing the FHP as a Stand-Alone Agency; Option 3 would be to abolish the FHP; Option 4 is to continue the FHP and limit its functions exclusively to state highways. Additionally, the Committee is looking at an option (not yet reviewed by OPPAGA) that could create a Department of Public Safety, which would consolidate all the various state law enforcement agencies under one roof with a commission, or a board of directors in charge of its functions.

The Florida PBA testified before the Committee that in our view no wholesale changes should be made, or even considered, until the Legislature addresses the pay disparities Troopers, and quite frankly all officers, face with the state. Our position is that the biggest obstacle to the mission of the Patrol is recruiting and retaining qualified Troopers, so until pay compression is addressed... all other efforts to realign the Patrol within or outside of the Department will fall short. While under further Committee questioning, **Department of Highway Safety & Motor Vehicles Executive Director Electra Bustle** did a superb job of illustrating the overlapping relationship the Patrol has with other agencies within the Department. She also fully supported our position that the Patrol's most pressing concern is the pay compression issue. Committee members, **Representatives Kevin Ambler and Sandy Adams**, were both keenly aware of the pay struggles Troopers face and offered their support in fixing the problem.

The Committee will meet throughout the interim weeks (one left by the way) and during the Legislative Session to fully debate the options on the table, or perhaps come forward with some different ideas. The Florida PBA lobbying team will continue to address the subject with the Committee at each of its scheduled meetings.

## PBA LEGISLATIVE AGENDA FOR 2008

- Equitable pay increases for state correctional, correctional probation, and law enforcement officers represented by Florida PBA, including but not limited to, pay compression and retention issues.
- Legislation extending the period of DROP participation for Law Enforcement, Correctional and Correctional Probation Officers, at the rank of Captain and below, an additional 36 months (**Representative Julio Robaina HB 501 and Senator Carey Baker – SB 706**)
- Legislation including Institutional Security Specialist to the definition of Certified Correctional Officer. (**Representative Pat Patterson – HB 427 and Senator Ted Deutch – SB 924**)
- Legislation allowing for purchase of Special Risk credit for certain academy time. (**Representative Anitere Flores – HB 379 and Senator Mike Fasano – SB 106**)
- Legislation changing the Special Risk upgraded credit from two percent to three percent. (**Representative Ed Hooper – HB 397 and Senator Dave Aronberg - TBA**)
- Support for the Officer Malcolm Thompson Act. (**Representative Frank Attkisson – HB 57 and Senator Steve Oelrich – SB 1024**)
- Support for legislation to place security cameras in certain late night business parking lots (**Representative Ari Porth HB 325/HB 327 and Senator TBA**)
- Support for legislation to add fleeing/eluding a law enforcement officer to list categories for felony murder (**Representative Will Snyder – HB 321 and Senator Paula Dockery - SB 1064**)

With reference to other legislation, the Board of Directors gives authorization to the Director of Legislative Services to support legislation favorable to the membership or oppose legislation harmful to the membership.

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### Photo Highlights



Commissioner of Agriculture and former law enforcement officer Charles Bronson (right) meets with (moving from left to right) SLEO Chapter President Matt Tyre, SLEO Secretary Michael Douglas, SLEO Vice President Chris Kirkland and SLEO Communications Director Christina Hunt.



Attorney General Bill McCollum meets with President Matt Tyre and Vice President Chris Kirkland of the SLEO Chapter.



FDLE Special Agents Chapter holds a board meeting in Tallahassee before heading to the Capitol for committee meetings.



SLEO Chapter members meet with members from Chief Financial Officer Alex Sink's office to discuss legislative priorities.