



Florida Police Benevolent Association, Inc.
CAPITOL REPORT

For the Two Weeks Ending March 26, 2010



Matt Puckett
*Deputy Executive
Director*

Bad Legislation as Far as the Eye Can See

“Just because you’re paranoid doesn’t mean they aren’t after you” Kurt Cobain.

Where to begin? Over the last two weeks, we have seen more than our share of bad legislation targeting you and your family. I like lists, so here’s one which lays out all the pending issues that can have a negative impact on you:



- 1) Three Retirement Bills that target both the municipal and state pensions (HB 1319, HB 1543, and SB 1902). After the phone and email blitz last Wednesday, HB 1319 and HB 1543 were withdrawn from further consideration. SB 1902 was postponed until a later date so it is still lingering out there. *More information on page 7.*
- 2) House of Representatives passed a budget conforming bill (HB 5701) that will eliminate the Retiree Health Insurance Subsidy for all retirees by December 31, 2010. The Florida PBA publicly opposed the bill, but it passed on a party line vote (11-6) with all Democrats voting against the bill. *See vote history on pages 5 and 6.*
- 3) Senate Budget Chairman JD Alexander filed SB 2022 which will require every single *active* member of the Florida Retirement System to Contribute a *quarter percentage point* into their retirement account. This requirement applies to all active members, DROP participants, and members participating in the FRS investment plan. *See next page for the vote history.*
- 4) House Budget will enact a 3% across the board salary reduction for all state employees. This issue is unique because it pushes the decision to the department and agency levels for the first time instead leaving the

reductions to the Legislature. In the past, the Legislature would simply include proviso language that either cut, or increased salaries. Now under this plan a department or agency could implement the reduction by cutting salaries, positions, or furloughs. Of course any reduction is subject to the collective bargaining process.


- 5) The Senate Ways and Means Committee approved an amendment to close down three facilities and transfer the inmates to the privately operated Blackwater River Correctional Institution in Santa Rosa County. The amendment would also privatize 1,350 additional beds at existing Department of Corrections Institutions. *See two articles about this sneaky deal on pages 13 through 17.*

Vote History for SB 2022

Here is the list of Senators voting on *SB 2022* – requiring every active FRS employee to contribute 0.25% towards his or her retirement account. The bill has been removed from all committees of reference and is on the March 31, 2010 Special Order Calendar in the Senate.

	Name	VOTE	Email	Phone
	Alexander, JD (Chair)	YES	alexander.jd.web@flsenate.gov	(850) 487-5044
	Deutch, Ted (Vice Chair)	NO	deutch.ted.web@flsenate.gov	(850) 487-5091
	Altman, Thad	YES	altman.thad.web@flsenate.gov	(850) 487-5053
	Baker, Carey	YES	baker.carey.web@flsenate.gov	(850) 487-5014
	Bennett, Michael 'Mike'	YES	bennett.mike.web@flsenate.gov	(850) 487-5078

	Crist, Victor	YES	crist.victor.web@flsenate.gov	(850) 487-5068
	Diaz de la Portilla, Alex	YES	portilla.alex.web@flsenate.gov	(850) 487-5109
	Fasano, Mike	YES	fasano.mike.web@flsenate.gov	(850) 487-5062
	Gaetz, Don	YES	gaetz.don.web@flsenate.gov	(850) 487-5009
	Garcia, Rudy	YES	garcia.rudy.web@flsenate.gov	(850) 487-5106
	Gelber, Dan	NO	gelber.dan.web@flsenate.gov	(850) 487-5121
	Haridopolos, Mike	YES	haridopolos.mike.web@flsenate.gov	(850) 487-5056
	Hill, Anthony C. 'Tony'	NO	hill.tony.web@flsenate.gov	(850) 487-5024
	Justice, Charlie	NO	justice.charlie.web@flsenate.gov	(850) 487-5075
	Lawson Jr., Alfred 'Al'	NO	lawson.alfred.web@flsenate.gov	(850) 487-5004


	Lynn, Evelyn J.	NO	lynn.evelyn.web@flsenate.gov	(850) 487-5033
	Negron, Joe	YES	negron.joe.web@flsenate.gov	(850) 487-5088
	Peaden, Jr., Durell	YES	peaden.durell.web@flsenate.gov	(850) 487-5000
	Rich, Nan	NO	rich.nan.web@flsenate.gov	(850) 487-5103
	Siplin, Gary	YES	siplin.gary.web@flsenate.gov	(850) 487-5190
	Sobel, Eleanor	NO	sobel.eleanor.web@flsenate.gov	(850) 487-5097
	Thrasher, John	YES	thrasher.john.web@flsenate.gov	(850) 487-5030
	Villalobos, J. Alex	YES	villalobos.alex.web@flsenate.gov	(850) 487-5130
	Wilson, Frederica S.	NO	wilson.frederica.web@flsenate.gov	(850) 487-5116
	Wise, Stephen R.	YES	wise.stephen.web@flsenate.gov	(850) 487-5027

Vote History for HB 5701

Here is the list of Representatives voting on *HB 5701* – eliminating the Health Insurance Subsidy for all FRS *employees and retirees* effective December 31, 2010. The bill has been removed from all committees of reference and is on the March 31, 2010 Special Order Calendar in the House.

	Name	VOTE	Email	Phone
	Rivera, David (Chair)	YES	david.rivera@myfloridahouse.gov	(850) 488-7897
	Reagan, Ron (Vice Chair)	YES	ron.reagan@myfloridahouse.gov	(850) 921-7747
	Saunders, Ron (Minority Ranking Member)	NO	ron.saunders@myfloridahouse.gov	(850) 488-9965 !
	Adams, Sandra	YES	sandy.adams@myfloridahouse.gov	(850) 488-0468
	Bogdanoff, Ellyn	YES	ellyn.bogdanoff@myfloridahouse.gov	(850) 488-0635
	Brisé, Ronald	NO	ronald.brise@myfloridahouse.gov	(850) 488-4233
	Chestnut, Charles	NO	charles.chestnut@myfloridahouse.gov	(850) 488-5794

	<u>Flores, Anitere</u>	YES	anitere.flores@myfloridahouse.gov	(850) 488-2831
	<u>Galvano, Bill</u>	YES	bill.galvano@myfloridahouse.gov	(850) 488-4086
	<u>Gibbons, Joe</u>	NO	joe.gibbons@myfloridahouse.gov	(850) 488-0145
	<u>Glorioso, Rich</u>	YES	rich.glorioso@myfloridahouse.gov	(850) 488-0807
	<u>Grimsley, Denise</u>	YES	denise.grimsley@myfloridahouse.gov	(850) 488-3457
	<u>Hays, Alan</u>	YES	alan.hays@myfloridahouse.gov	(850) 488-0348
	<u>Poppell, L. Ralph</u>	YES	ralph.poppell@myfloridahouse.gov	(850) 488-3006
	<u>Proctor, Bill</u>	YES	bill.proctor@myfloridahouse.gov	(850) 488-2977
	<u>Skidmore, Kelly</u>	NO	kelly.skidmore@myfloridahouse.gov	(850) 488-1302
	<u>Thompson (G), Geraldine</u>	NO	geraldine.thompson@myfloridahouse.gov	(850) 488-0760

	Weatherford, Will W.	YES	will.weatherford@myfloridahouse.gov	(850) 488-5744
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PBA Fighting to Protect You

Every single member of the PBA deserves a tremendous pat on the back and a pay raise and increase to their retirement contribution rate. You all did a superb job with our call to action on PBA D-Day. The email servers and phone lines were completely shutdown. Great job!

I wish I could say it was over, but there is still so much more to do. Here's another list (I told you I like lists):

- 1) The three pension bills (HB 1319, HB 1543, and SB 1902) are 2/3 of the way dead, but SB 1902 still has some life. This bill, as currently proposed, will reduce your retirement calculation down to only base salary. That applies to everyone in both municipal and state pension plans. It will not retroactively take away previously earned calculations, but from July 1, 2010 forward, it will only allow base salary to be included in your average final compensation. It also allows cities to close Defined Benefit Plans in favor of Defined Contribution Plans. The cities would be able to require increased employee contributions without increasing the benefits and plan participants would no longer be able to hold a majority of the seats on the pension board of trustees. We need to stop it in the Community Affairs Committee (Senator Bennett is the bill sponsor and also the Community Affairs Committee Chairman).
- 2) SB 2022 is still very much alive. It will receive a Senate Floor vote this week. Barring a change of heart, it will probably pass on a close vote along party lines. That's an educated guess based on the committee vote from last week. After that, it will become part of the package heading towards the conferencing process between the House and Senate. If we have a chance to truly stop it, conference is the place.
- 3) The salary reduction is in the same boat as the SB 2022. It will go to conferencing and that's our best chance to kill it.
- 4) Health Insurance Subsidy (HB 5701) is also in this above referenced boat and conference is our best shot to stop it.

- 5) **Blackwater River Correctional Institution amendment is one that we have a chance to stop on the floor of the Senate. We believe, had the vote on the amendment gone to a roll call vote instead of a voice vote, the amendment would have died in committee. No matter what happens, we will force the Legislature to take a roll call vote on this issue. Senator Al Lawson is filing an amendment to strip this language out of the budget.**

That's where we stand as of today. Nothing is safe until April 30th, the end of session, so let's keep the pressure on the Legislature. We are working on amendments to address each of these issues, or we are working to outright kill the legislation. Please stay informed as all of this moves forward.

PBA in the News

March 23, 2010 by Miami Herald

Death watch on for pensions bills that thwart powerful police and fire lobbies

This is the week we start the death watch for high profile, controversial and even good government bills that are running out of time. Top on our list today is a series of bills aimed at reining in the lucrative pension benefits of many police, fire and special risk employees. The bills, proposed by Rep. **Juan Zapata**, R-Miami, Rep. **Tom Grady**, R-Naples and Sen. **Mike Bennett**, R-Bradenton, also revise the retirement plans for future state and local government employees.

Bennett's bill is the only one to get a hearing but it was also watered down and amended when it came up today before the Senate Community Affairs Committee, which he chairs. Then, as dozens of firefighters and police sat in the crowded meeting room, it was postponed – some speculating that it's because he didn't have the votes.

Over in the House, Grady's bill, which he had planned to amend to match Bennett's amendment, didn't get included on the list of bills scheduled to be on the agenda before Rep. **Rob Schenck's** Governmental Affairs Policy Committee when it meets Wednesday and Thursday.

Bennett would require that future hires be given retirement plans that give benefits equal to the base salary for the last five years of employment but no longer include what they've earned in overtime, unused leave and other additions governments have agreed to add in the last several years. New hires would also be offered only defined contribution plans, not defined benefit plans, and cities and counties would have to report annually their pension fund

liabilities and contributions.

Bennett was blunt about the turmoil these measures are facing.

"Anybody who wants to run for reelection never wants to go against the firefighters or the PBA," he said. "Sometimes things that are politically correct are certainly not politically popular. But if you go back home if they get a pension plan that will fund them for the rest of their lives after only 30 years and at age 45. I think they would say no. Does their pension plan cover all their overtime? They would say no."

But, he admits, that while the rich benefits offered to many special risk employees are not popular, neither is thwarting them. "I'm hoping someday to run for Congress and it's not going to be popular for me. But would they rather do that or bankrupt the cities and the state? We have to bring it more in line with what the private sector pays."

David Murrell of the Police Benevolent Association confirms this assessment.

"We're keeping a list of who's naughty and nice," he said of the session. "I call it my Santa Claus list."

Meanwhile, Bennett said his bill will be back before the committee next week and he hopes his fellow legislators see things his way: "While it's not popular, it's something we have to do."

While pension reform is hurting, effort to fund the pension plan are still alive. On Tuesday, the Houses' full budget committee approved raising state employer's share of the retirement plan \$294 million and the county share \$166 million to bridge the gap. They are also asking for another actuarial study for the fiscal year July 1, 2009 to July 1 2010, to determine if there is any remaining budget gap.

Posted by Mary Ellen Klas at 06:06:04 PM on March 23, 2010

OrlandoSentinel.com

Lawmakers: Slash pensions for police, teachers, firefighters Unions irate as Legislature searches for ways to cut costs

By Denise-Marie Balona, Orlando Sentinel

8:53 PM EST, March 23, 2010

Two bills aimed at slashing pensions for Florida's teachers, police and other public employees, as well as requiring some of them to work several years longer before retiring, are being considered by state lawmakers.

Both bills, which have come under heavy fire this week by outraged union leaders, seek to cut retirement pay for hundreds of thousands by requiring that only fixed, monthly salaries be used to determine benefits. Unions argue that would be a tremendous loss for many employees and want lawmakers to find other ways to help fill a \$3 billion hole in the state budget.

If the legislation gains favor, teachers no longer could cash in their accrued sick days to bump up their pensions, as they have done for years.

Emergency workers no longer would be able to add in their overtime or extra money earned for completing certain training programs. Firefighters alone would lose an average of 30 percent to 40 percent of their pension payout, according to Florida Professional Firefighters Inc.

One bill calls for a complete revamping of the way retirement benefits are calculated. Groups of employees would be affected differently, but many would lose money and have to work three to five years longer before retiring.

For example, teachers and many other school-district employees would have their pensions based not on an average of their highest five years' salaries but on an average of their entire history of salaries.

School employees also would be limited on how much of their base pay could be used to figure pension pay.

The drastic changes outlined in House Bill 1319 and Senate Bill 1902, many of which would take effect July 1, are designed to save the state money and help cities reduce their retirement-plan costs.

Employees, many of whom haven't had raises in recent years, are livid over what they say could easily amount to a loss of tens of thousands of dollars apiece. They're also peeved that the legislation was introduced only a few weeks ago and already is moving through committees.

Bob Saunders, vice president of the Central Florida branch of Florida Professional Firefighters Inc., said police and firefighters statewide are "really hurting" over these plans.

"We don't mind doing a little adjustment locally — we have given up a pay raise here and a benefit there," Saunders said. "But these [bills] are completely out of line. They're taking our pension and gutting it."

Supporters of the bills, however, argue that the state must make cuts to balance its budget for the coming fiscal year and help cities stave off financial disaster. State officials haven't yet generated estimates for their savings, however.

The Florida League of Cities backs both bills because they shave retirement costs. Senate Bill 1902 also offers more retirement-plan options to municipalities that are strapped for money. For example, cities would be able to adopt a less expensive plan similar to a 401(k) in place of fixed pensions.

Right now, some cities pay almost as much money for pensions for police and firefighters as they do salaries, said Kraig Conn, legislative counsel for the Florida League of Cities.

"There are cities [where pensions] are 60, 70 and 80 percent of payroll," he said, adding that part of the reason for the high pensions is that supplemental income such as overtime is included in retirement calculations.

"When you get close to retiring, what typically happens is a lot of employees won't take leave, and then overtime and cashing in [paid leave] all gets factored in," Conn said. "It's been very problematic."

The League of Cities has been working with state Sen. Mike Bennett to fine tune Senate Bill 1902.

Bennett, a Republican from Bradenton, sponsored that bill and is chairman of the Senate's community affairs committee, which was scheduled to discuss the measure Tuesday but postponed a vote because of a lack of time.

Conn said House Bill 1319, sponsored by state Rep. Tom Grady, R-Naples, may be amended so that it more closely resembles Bennett's legislation. Right now, Grady's bill calls for more drastic and widespread cuts than Bennett's bill.

B. Grassel, the president of Lake County's teachers union, called House Bill 1319 "the most destructive bill filed in Florida in many years." She sent e-mails to teachers late last week urging them to circulate petitions and contact lawmakers.

Until recently, teachers had focused their ire on two other bills — one that would establish a merit pay system by eliminating teacher tenure and tying their pay to student test scores, and another that would allow schools to back off limits on class sizes.

Educators are already petrified about layoffs and cuts next school year. Teacher salaries have been practically frozen for two years.

Fort Lauderdale teacher Valerie Vitale fears she'll never be able to afford to retire if the pension bills pass.

"These changes, coupled with rises in taxes and insurance in the state of Florida, will ensure that I work 'til I die!," Vitale wrote on a new Facebook page created to garner opposition to the two bills.

The page was used this week to elicit help with a massive telephone and e-mail campaign slated for today.

Tom Batchelor, a fire-services employee for 20-plus years, wants more. He's calling for a revolt.

"I think a revolution is in order and our brothers in blue HAVE GUNS so we're all set! I am so sick of this crap," he said.

Mike Scudiero, a spokesman for the Coastal Florida Police Benevolent Association in Daytona Beach, called the legislation "asinine" because it forces police officers who usually retire after 20 to 25 years in a high-stress, physically demanding job to work 30 years before they can leave.

"It's dangerous," he said, adding that older officers would have a tougher time running after burglars and fighting. "For people who already have a shorter life span, that's crazy."

Saunders, of the firefighters group, said public employees plan to meet today to discuss lobbying strategies.

"We're hoping to kill it at the committee level — that's the strategy right now," he said.

Denise-Marie Balona can be reached at dbalona@orlandosentinel.com or 352-742-5928 or 386-228-5008.

Senate budget committee approves pension bill

By Bill Cotterell
Florida Capital Bureau

Public employees would start making a small contribution to the Florida Retirement System next year, under a bill approved Thursday by the Senate budget committee.

The vote came over strong objection by employee representatives.

The employee contribution would be one-fourth of 1 percent of gross earnings — about \$75 a year for a worker making \$30,000 — but Senate Ways and Means Chairman JD Alexander said the state can't continue an entirely employer-paid pension plan. He said very few states don't require employees to chip in something to the pension pot, with contributions ranging from 2.5 to 10 percent.

"I wish there were some other way, I truly do," said Alexander, R-Lake Wales. "I take absolutely no pleasure in this. I have a great respect and admiration for our public employees, particularly those in public safety who stand to protect us."

Lobbyists from the Florida Police Benevolent Association, Professional Firefighters of Florida, Florida Education Association and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees united in opposition to the bill (SB 2022).

Apart from pensions, the powerful budget chairman has repeatedly said this year that he wants to make all state employees pay for health insurance. About 27,000 Selected Exempt, Senior Management, legislative and other employees now have employer-paid insurance.

There are also some pending budget proposals for pay cuts in the budget, which will likely require layoffs in the fiscal year starting July 1. Separate House and Senate work on the budget will be completed in the next few weeks.

"We really don't think a quarter-percent from employees is going to help the Florida Retirement System; it's got a lot more problems than that," said Don Teems, a lobbyist for the PBA. "But I do think it's the camel's nose under the tent. I do believe that you'll come back year after year after year and impose increases on the employees. I think that's the intent.

Alexander estimated the employee 0.25 percent would add up to about \$41 million initially, if implemented Jan. 1 for half of the fiscal year, and \$83 million over a full year. The \$400 million-plus funding gap he cited is borne largely by city, county and special districts that make up about 80 percent of the FRS membership, but state government, universities and community colleges bear about half.

The budget committee voted 14-8 for the pension contribution. Only one Republican, retired educator Evelyn Lynn of Ormond Beach, voted against Alexander's bill.

Senate Minority Leader Al Lawson, who has represented Tallahassee for 28 years in the House and Senate, said the money may be small but that this is the wrong time to tap employee paychecks.

"We're going on five years without a pay raise for state employees," said Lawson. "This amounts to a reduction in pay for their families."

Senate budget chief privatization push would shut down three state prisons, axe at least 639 guards

by Dara Kam | March 25th, 2010

Senate budget chief J.D. Alexander just got a reluctant Senate Ways and Means Committee to sign off on his prison privatization plan that would shut down three prisons and put more than 600 prison guards out of work.

Alexander's late-filed budget amendment, offered during the committee meeting this afternoon, drew protests from the PBA and some committee members, including Criminal and Civil Justice Appropriations Committee Chairman Victor Crist.

Alexander's plan is to open the new Blackwater prison in the Panhandle, a 1,350-bed facility the state paid more than \$160 million to build but is not yet operating. Boca Raton-based private corrections company Geo Group would run the prison, Alexander said, saving the state about \$20 million a year and doing away with 639 prison guard jobs. The state corrections department would be ordered to shut down two prisons to fill the 2,200-bed facility, saving the state about \$24 million a year, according to Alexander's amendment.

Alexander's proposal would also privatize another existing prison, although there was no mention of that during debate on his amendment this afternoon. That would save another \$14 million.

Senate Criminal and Civil Justice Appropriations Chairman Victor Crist opted not to open the Blackwater prison this year because the inmate population has not grown as much as expected and its decline means the extra beds are not now needed.

It is unclear whether the Department of Management Services has already signed off on a contract with Geo to run the prison.

“We’re closing a facility because they gambled on how many inmates would be here next year and the year after. This is a bail-out for the private prison industry,” Florida President Jim Baiardi told Atwater’s committee.

Alexander said he ran the amendment so the Senate Criminal and Civil Justice Appropriations Committee wouldn’t have to deal with angering the PBA, a powerful union.

“It was difficult for the committee to deal with it so I chose to deal with it myself. I have a very hard time not spending money on schools or hospitals or childrens care when we have a real likelihood to show significant savings by opening up this new facility,” Alexander, R-Lake Wales, said.

“I’ve been a PBA guy from the get-go,” Alexander said. But the new prison would make the system more efficient and save money.

The amendment passed although Crist, R-Tampa, voted against it.

“I believe my budget is sound and already provides for Blackwater,” Crist, R-Tampa, said.

Prison plan assailed as 'sneaky,' misleading

By [DARA KAM](#)

Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

Updated: 10:13 p.m. Saturday, March 27, 2010

Posted: 6:30 p.m. Saturday, March 27, 2010

After repeatedly emphasizing his commitment to "open and transparent" government during a committee meeting Thursday evening, Senate budget chief J.D. Alexander attached a last-minute prison-privatization amendment to the state's spending bill without any warning to anyone it would affect, including the Department of Corrections.

Alexander's proposal to open a privately run prison near the Blackwater River in the Panhandle would shutter at least two state-run prisons and put 639 prison guards out of work, the Lakeland Republican told the committee.

His plan also would privatize an unidentified existing 1,350-bed prison, bringing the number of guards who would get pink slips up to 1,400, according to the amendment.

Alexander says that shutting down prisons to fill a 2,224-bed facility to be run by Boca Raton-based Geo Group would save the state about \$20 million a year.

And it would put into use the state-of-the-art, energy-efficient Blackwater prison the state paid Geo \$110 million to build near Milton in a deal slipped into the 2008 budget by state Rep. Ray Sansom before he became House speaker. Sansom later stepped down from that position in disgrace.

But corrections officials object to the plan and say Alexander overestimates the state's potential savings by going private.

Geo is now negotiating with the Department of Management Services to run Blackwater, but with a major hitch: The state doesn't have enough inmates to fill it without closing other prisons.

That's because the state overestimated how many inmates would be incarcerated and the prison population is declining despite historically high unemployment.

Alexander based his estimate on a \$65-a-day rate for inmates in state-run prisons and \$41 a day that Geo says it can charge for Blackwater, a savings of \$24 a day for each of the 2,224 inmates who would be housed at the facility.

But corrections officials say the savings would be about \$9 million — less than half Alexander's \$20 million estimate — because their average daily rate is \$52 while the private prison's costs would depend on what kind of inmates were locked up at Blackwater.

"We don't believe this is the right way to open Blackwater," said DOC spokeswoman Gretl Plessinger.

Blackwater was originally supposed to house mentally ill and seriously sick inmates who cost more to care for, but documents show that the state is now negotiating with Geo to care for inmates who are the cheapest and easiest to supervise.

"As discussed earlier today, we wanted to provide you with a revised pricing for the Blackwater Facility if it were to house 2,224 M-1/M-2/S-1 inmates," an unidentified Geo official wrote on March 19 to Michael Weber, chief of private prison monitoring at the Department of Management Services.

M-1, M-2 and S-1 inmates are relatively healthy and have no mental health issues.

The \$41-a-day price goes up to \$45 if the 2,224-bed facility does not run at full capacity, according to the e-mail.

But DMS spokeswoman Linda McDonald declined to say who would run Blackwater because negotiations aren't finished.

And she would not say what type of inmates would be housed there.

"That is not a decision that DMS makes. Ultimately it could be the legislature, but DOC is certainly involved, too," McDonald said.

Plessinger said it is unlikely that all the inmates from one prison could be transferred to Blackwater because most prisons have a mix of classes of prisoners. She also said corrections officials have no idea which prisons will be shut down.

Deal 'sneaky,' some say

Alexander's late-filed amendment is the latest twist in a deal worked out in secrecy for at least two years since Sansom set it into motion.

Sansom resigned his speakership in 2009 after being indicted on charges including grand theft related to a deal he tucked into the 2008 budget. He is facing trial on charges of steering tax money to build a jet hangar for developer Jay Odom, who donated nearly \$1 million to Sansom and the state Republican Party, at a Panhandle college that hired him the day he became speaker.

In the same budget, the Santa Rosa County Republican also slipped in a \$110 million appropriation to build a private prison in his home county.

Alexander's privatization plan was never discussed during the Senate Criminal and Civil Justice Appropriations Committee meetings where prison spending is usually decided.

The committee chairman, Victor Crist, voted against the amendment Thursday. He said the potential savings by privatizing the prisons could not only put people out of work but also devastate the rural communities in which the prisons are based.

"They generally are the primary if not the only employer there. If you shut it down, you could be shutting down a town. All of a sudden, everyone there could be out of work," said Crist, R-Tampa. "How do they sell their homes? How do they relocate even if they got a job with a private prison 300 miles away?"

And, Crist said, the laid-off prison guards — whose annual salaries average between \$30,000 and \$35,000 — could wind up costing the state more if they sign up for state services for the unemployed.

"Sometimes a dollar saved upfront could cost you two dollars behind," he said.

Alexander said he introduced the amendment because Crist refused to do so and as Senate budget chairman he wants to save money on prisons to help close a \$3.2 billion spending gap.

"Many states have reduced their incarceration costs by using privatization," said Alexander, R-Lake Wales.

He estimated Florida could save up to \$700 million a year by privatizing each of its 62 prisons.

But Police Benevolent Association President Jim Baiardi said Alexander kept his plan quiet to avoid public debate on the controversial issue.

"It's been sneaky. Very sneaky. It's almost like it's been done in the dead of the night. So much for open government," Baiardi said, calling it a giveaway for Geo.

"I don't understand how they can say that," Alexander said. "The reality is we've got a brand-new prison that the state directed and used taxpayers' monies to build. I think putting that prison online, saving the money, saving the maintenance costs, is something that only makes good financial sense for the people of Florida."