



Florida Police Benevolent Association, Inc.
CAPITOL REPORT

For the Week Ending April 1, 2010



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*Deputy Executive
Director*

Florida PBA fights the “Blackwater Bailout”

Let's go ahead and place this latest prison privatization legislation into the category of “What in world were they thinking?” I'll spoil the whole story now by saying that at least the Senate Leadership realized what a disaster this thing was before it was too late, but that realization should have been obvious from the start.

Here is the cliff notes version:

In 2008, the Legislature agreed to some budget language by *Representative Ray Sansom*, who was the House Budget Chief at the time, to build a private prison in Santa Rosa County. PBA fought it on the floor with an amendment by *Representative Curtis Richardson* and during budget conference, but it remained in the budget... not our proudest moment. However, we warned everyone who would listen that this deal was sneaky and that it reeked of backroom politics.

Flash forward to last week when the Senate Ways and Means Committee approved a *last minute amendment* to the appropriations bill that closed at least 3 public prisons, eliminated 640 Correctional Officer jobs, and privatized 1,350 public prison beds. And the Senate was doing all of this just to save one little private prison known as Blackwater River Correctional Institution.

Now we have an instant scandal.

Basically, the Blackwater prison was in the final stages of coming on line and it did not have any inmates. No inmates for a private prison means no cash and no cash means plummeting market value... you follow my meaning I'm sure. So what to do, what to do? The Senate, I assume, decided it had to help. Yet a funny thing happened on the road to bailout Blackwater.

First, the Ways and Means Committee that approved the amendment was heavily divided on the voice vote. So the amendment came out of there sideways, but intact.

Next, the media sensed a scandal and set out to uncover the *Who, What, Where, and Why*.

The Florida PBA, led by *State Correctional Officers Chapter President Jim Baiardi* along with a few of our allies, took to the halls and streets. Correctional Officers began flooding the Senate's phone lines with calls to stop the bailout. Our friend *Senator Al Lawson* filed an amendment to remove the language from budget and the PBA lobbyists began the process of securing enough votes to pass the amendment.

The pressure mounted from all over Florida too.

- There were articles and editorials about it in every major and a number of local newspapers.
- Major political figures like *Lieutenant Governor Jeff Kottkamp*, *Senator Paula Dockery*, and *Representative Marti Coley* released editorials opposing the deal and privatization of public safety.
- *Department of Corrections Secretary Walt McNeil* took a strong public stand against it.
- Residents from the town of Sneads, which is home to Appalachian Correctional Institution, held a protest against it.

This is grassroots at its finest.

So finally, on the floor of the Senate a series of compromise amendments were filed to save the public prisons and the all of the officers. The amendments passed, but, unfortunately, the Blackwater prison will still come on line and remain a private facility. For the moment everything on the public side that was in jeopardy is now safe. Let's remember that this deal was struck by Senator Lawson and the Senate Leadership so we still have to work hard during the budget conference to make sure the House Leadership holds tight with this deal, or perhaps even improves it for the public side (it's possible).

A big Thank You to everyone who helped out on this effort. There were so many people it would be impossible to mention everyone. It is very nice know that our citizens care a great deal for the Correctional Officers of this state.

Senate OKs Florida Retirement System contributions

By Bill Cotterell
DEMOCRAT capital Bureau

Government employees would begin paying into the Florida Retirement System, under a bill approved Wednesday by the Florida Senate.

The bill (SB 2022) by Sen. JD Alexander, R-Lake Wales, would require employees to pay one-quarter of 1 percent of their salaries into the FRS. Alexander said the pension plan has been entirely employer-paid since 1974 for most employees.

"The worst thing we can do to state employees, who haven't had a pay raise in five years, is to tell them we're giving them a salary reduction," said Sen. Al Lawson, D-Tallahassee.

But Alexander said that the state, county, city and regional agencies that make up the FRS can't afford to pay the full cost any more. He said Florida is one of only six states that don't require employee pension contributions.

"Certainly, this is something that none of us likes to do," said Alexander.

Alexander said the contribution rate under his bill would amount to \$75 a year for an employee earning \$30,000.

Alexander emphasized that the bill would not affect any other pension provisions. Legislation has been filed that would raise retirement ages, lower the annual accrual rates, end the state subsidy of retiree health insurance and change rules for the Deferred Retirement Option Plan.

Most of those bills are not moving, as the session passed its halfway point Wednesday.

Lawson tried to delete the pension contribution from the bill, but the Senate voted 23-14 against his amendment. It then sent the package to the House in a 26-7 vote.

PBA will continue to fight this legislation during the conference committee. At this moment the Florida House does not agree to this contribution plan.

PBA Readies for the Final Stretch

April 30th is the final day of this year's Legislative Session. Our goal for that day is to be able to declare nothing negative happened to anyone in the Law Enforcement, Correctional, and Correctional Probation Officer communities. We have been fighting hard up to this point, but this last month is going to be extremely difficult. Last week's Capitol Report had a list of issues that we were concerned about so let's recap with a new, smaller list (I like lists):

- 1) SB 2022 which will require every single *active* member of the Florida Retirement System to Contribute a *quarter percentage point* into their retirement account.
- 2) HB 5701 eliminating the Retiree Health Insurance Subsidy for all retirees by December 31, 2010.
- 3) House Budget will enact a 3% across the board salary reduction for all state employees. Under this plan a department or agency could implement the reduction by cutting salaries, positions, or furloughs.
- 4) SB 1902 (State and Municipal Retirement Reform Bill) may come back up in the Senate Community Affairs Community.

All of you have done so much to help us fight back this year. Together we have made it clear that the PBA is still very much a force to be reckoned with in the Legislature. Let's keep up the pressure. And as always... Stay safe.