



From Washington D. C.

Legislative News for PBA

Housing Foreclosure Crisis/Mortgage Fraud Affecting Economy Nationwide

*Bill Nelson
U.S. Senator*

I am proud to represent Floridians in the U.S. Senate, where one of my goals is to make sure our state receives its fair share of federal funds. These funds give our cities and communities the tools necessary to improve the quality of life for all Floridians. And as law enforcement now plays a greater role in the fight against terror, I understand the importance of making sure you receive adequate federal resources.

U.S. Senator Bill Nelson is a member of the Senate's Intelligence, Armed Services, Commerce, Budget and Finance committees.

As Florida's senior senator, I have been working in Washington to address the current economic downturn. The housing foreclosure crisis is a major factor contributing to the economic situation in Florida. Unfortunately, Florida has one of the highest foreclosure rates in the nation, and the situation has not yet begun to improve. In fact, it's getting worse. Between March and April 2009, there were more than 342,000 new foreclosures.

The foreclosure crisis has also spawned a fraud crisis. At every point along the continuum of home financing, there are those who have chosen to exploit the situation by committing fraud. In 2008, for example, the U.S. Treasury Department's Financial Crimes Enforcement Network received more than 68,000 suspicious activity reports from financial institutions. In addition, the Mortgage Asset Research Institute and the FBI report that there is some element of fraud in 70 to 80 percent of foreclosures.

Ultimately, it is law abiding homeowners who pay a price for the fraud that is proliferating in the housing market. That's why a definitive and coordinated law enforcement response is required to address the problem. During the previous Congress, and again this year, I introduced legislation in the Senate to support the establishment of a Nationwide Mortgage Fraud Task Force.

A version of my bill recently became law as part of the housing bill that just passed the Congress. That legislation recognizes that the FBI, which has established a mortgage fraud unit, cannot make a significant dent in the problem by acting alone. With levels of mortgage fraud reaching historic levels, a coordinated federal, state and local law enforcement response is required. The legislation expresses

the sense of the Congress that the Attorney General should determine whether to establish a Nationwide Mortgage Fraud Task Force and if he determines that one is necessary, such a task force should:

- initiate federal investigations and coordinate state and local investigations;
- provide training to state and local agencies;
- collect and disseminate mortgage fraud data;
- establish regional branches in the 10 states with the highest concentration of mortgage fraud;
- create a database of mortgage industry license suspensions and revocations; and
- establish a toll-free hotline to report potential cases of mortgage fraud.

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As the Major Cities Chiefs Association recently wrote in a letter supporting this proposal, a Nationwide Mortgage Fraud Task Force "made up of Federal, State and local law enforcement, taps the experience and the expertise required to focus counter-fraud efforts in areas with high instances of mortgage fraud."

Moreover, a nationwide task force will build on initiatives already taking place within the Department of

Justice. The Department's Bureau of Justice Assistance, for example, already has made funding available to support the work of state and local mortgage fraud task forces. At the local level, the Miami-Dade Police Department's Mortgage Fraud Task Force already has vetted more than 2,000 complaints, made 125 arrests, and presently has more than 500 active cases.

It's now my hope that the Justice Department soon will announce that it is creating an effective structure to deal with mortgage fraud. Florida's housing crisis demands nothing less. ■



Florida PBA Is Proud To Be The Sole Law Enforcement Sponsor Of The 2009 Florida Police & Fire Games

By Al Shopp, Florida PBA's Director of Business and Services

It's that time of the year again, when law enforcement officers and firefighters from around the state gather in South Florida to compete in the 25th Anniversary of the 2009 Florida Police and Fire Games. Once again, the Florida PBA is proud to announce its sponsorship of the 2009 Games. The PBA continues its long time support of the games due to its commitment to the men and women who walk the toughest beat in the state.

Like the PBA, the Police and Fire Games promote the competitive fire within us, and makes us the true champions we are. Win or lose, we bond with our fellow officers and take home a sense of pride that just can't be explained. In an attempt to capture the gold, approximately 5,000 competitors representing over 200 different agencies will be competing in 45+ olympic-style sporting events in the Treasure Coast starting June 21-27.

For more information or to register for the games, go to: www.lawgames.org/florida_games.htm

A complimentary copy of this *Roll Call* will be provided to all attending the 2009 Police and Fire Games.

The Florida PBA wishes all participants great success as they compete in their chosen event. Go for the gold! ■

