



Fraternal Order of Police **FLORIDA STATE LODGE**



Message from the Florida State Lodge President James Preston

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Disturbing increase in attacks on police officers on the streets and now in Tallahassee!

Cops are slaughtered everyday in our culture in the name of entertainment in our movies, television and video games. Kids and young adults playing video games see police officers as targets to kill in order to earn points in the virtual world of games that desensitize them from the real world of responsibility. Law enforcement officers are expendable in daily episodes of the many TV shows our kids grew up with. Is it any wonder that the disrespect carries over into real life? Our law enforcement officers are real men and women doing an extraordinarily difficult, challenging and stressful job. They have families. They are professional and well trained to deal with the challenges they must face each shift. Yet, they are dying and being injured at an unacceptable and alarming rate that is heartbreaking. No other civilian profession has had to build a National Memorial Monument to honor over 19,000 officers who have died in the line of duty. A monument that will never be completed as each day another name, another life tragically ended must be etched into the cold granite wall to remind us of the sacrifice and sorrow another family faces. Our members strap on a gun and wear a vest as they start their shift. They leave behind a family who worry each day if their loved one will return home. Cops face dangers that frighten ordinary people and many times hear "I wouldn't want your job". The officers choose this "unwanted and thankless" job because they wake up each day of their lives wanting to make a difference in their community.

When economic times were good and the unemployment was low, new people entering the work force choose safe well paying jobs while police officers protected the community relying on the promise of a future pension for their service. Now the economy has taken a temporary turn and we have become the target of politicians who want to balance their budget and non-stop spending on our already over burdened backs. We face layoffs and furloughs, reduced pay and now our pensions are attacked by part-time state employees who travel to Tallahassee for a few weeks a year to legislate and then return to their jobs back home as lawyers and dentists. They forget that we took low salaries, and limited benefits and risked our lives to protect the community and our reward is increasing violence against us as the politicians are breeding distrust between law enforcement officers and citizens by giving erroneous numbers to the public about what we receive, and not telling them all the facts, or as Paul Harvey would say "The Rest Of The Story". They forget that private citizens that do not have pensions will get full Social Security Benefits, while public sector employees will have theirs cut by 2/3's because they have a pension due to Social Security rules of the Government Pension Offset (GPO) and Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP).

Our Florida officers are attacked and injured on the streets every day and some will lose their lives protecting our communities. They do not deserve to be attacked by uncaring politicians who are trying to cover up their excessive spending sprees on the back of these cops. Our modest pensions have been legislated and earned over the years. The benefits fought for are not a windfall but a modest way to provide for our future in retirement, for the physical and emotional stress the rigors of this job brings. On average according to FRS, cops live in retirement 9.3 years.

State law enforcement officers have not seen a pay raise in 5 years and now are being asked to take a pay cut by way of contributions to the pension fund. Many municipal police officers on separate pension plans are and have been contributing for years. Tampa Police officers are now paying 14.5 percent towards their pensions this year. Yet we are at impasse in negotiations in Jacksonville and Miami over pension issues as these cities look to balance budgets.

Pensions are nothing new to public service. They have long been used to induce men and women to serve their nation, state and community dating back to before the Revolutionary War. Our career military personnel justly earn a modest pension for the sacrifice they are willing to make in service of our country today.

Governor Rick Scott in a TV commercial he published while on the campaign trail pledged he would not cut law enforcement pensions. "Absolutely not", said candidate Scott, when asked if he planned to cut police pensions. Follow this link to hear Governor Scott in his own words. (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PudKNxTKzrc>). Now, it is time for him to live up to his own pledge and not reduce pension benefits that have been paid for in blood and sweat by the men and women in law enforcement.

Politicians rally around uniformed police officers for quick campaign photo-ops with one hand on our shoulder, a wide smile and promise to support law enforcement while the other hand reaches for our endorsements, support and campaign funds. No politician will tell you they don't support law enforcement while they are seeking your vote. Public safety is always a "top priority" in their campaign rhetoric. Well, we are demanding you live up to your promises. Pensions were a promise made that must be kept. Changing a system that is not broken to fix a temporary problem is not the answer. It is obvious that there is more at stake than just our pensions. Politicians want to get their hands on the retiree's money and raiding the retiree trust fund could easily plug the holes in the state budget. The legislators and taxpayers need to remember that this money that they are eyeing is not theirs, but the retirees. It was part of their salary set aside to pay out pensions for those who are successful in reaching retirement age. That is why they pay taxes on it when they withdraw or receive it.

Here are just a few of the many voices of law enforcement officers today:

I am in my 18th year and I have been on my labor committee for 12 years and my PAC since 1999, so I am very active. We contribute 9.5% and are currently receiving 185 monies. I am very nervous because you know how important these things are. I haven't contacted anyone at this point because we are in the middle of trying to get our local council people elected in

March, but after reading about the DROP and being so close I had to reach out to someone.
Robert Marek

Upon reviewing the plan Governor Scott has proposed, the first thing that stood out was that we would be pay 5% into the plan and getting less benefits. Where is that 5% percent going? Sen. Jeremy Ring was quoted in the Sun Sentinel on 02-02-11 "With projected revenue shortfall of \$3.62 billion or more, the Legislature will have to take on the costly pension plan when it convenes this spring and require employees to pay something toward their retirement" Does that mean that the State of Florida is going to TAX us 5% to cover the shortfalls in the budget.

The Governor likes to repeat that "We must bring Florida in line with the private sector and nearly every other state in the country by requiring government workers to contribute towards their own retirement" The problem with that logic is that most private sector jobs don't require you to strap on a bullet proof vest and a gun belt to go to work. They are not asked to risk their lives to defend people who they do not know. They are not asked to go into a house and arrest an armed felon. They are not asked to do CPR on a dying child while family member look on. They are not asked to work under cover to infiltrate a drug gang. They are not asked during hurricanes to leave their families behind to protect the public. They do not go to work everyday and pray that they come home to their children and don't make a mistake that will cost another officer his life. I love my job as a Police Officer and would not trade it for any other job, I have to live up to a standard of conduct and I think the state should live up to theirs. "A promise is a promise a contract is a contract".

Governor Scott some jobs can not be done by the private sector and you should not even attempt to compare our pensions to theirs.

Police Officers, Fire Fighters and Teachers are the bedrock of our society if you keep chipping away at the bedrock, sooner or later the building falls. **George Wooley**

Mr. Costello,

I recently received a copy of proposed House Bill #303, sponsored by you. I was a little disturbed by the fact that your proposed bill essentially obliterates first responder pensions, and takes away the central part of collective bargaining; But I was most disturbed that while attending the service for two murdered Officers I could not get your proposed bill out of my mind. You see I found myself looking at the 4 children of these Officers and was left with the empty feeling that if not for their pensions these children would have nothing. To make matters worse while driving to the service we were notified that two St. Petersburg Officers were murdered leaving behind more children.

I know it is difficult for a dentist such as yourself to understand how heart wrenching this is but just imagine every day before you leave for your office, your spouse checking to see if you are wearing your vest, and for your family to say good bye not knowing if you will come home. I know you represent Volusia County, but the brave men and women there are no different. In fact there have been 17 Officers killed in the line of duty in Volusia County and its municipalities.

Although my job mandates that I be political, I choose not to. I will tell you that I am extremely disappointed that a law maker such as yourself would go to such extremes instead of making minor adjustments to a well funded system. You see my chosen profession, unlike yours does not allow me to pick my clients therefore you can sleep soundly at night knowing that a Police Officer, who you apparently look down on will put his/her life on the line for yours.

Jack Lokeinsky

TALLAHASSEE -- Gov. Rick Scott Tuesday proposed to require public employees contribute 5 percent to their pension plans, require all new hires go into a defined-contribution plan rather than traditional [pensions](#), reduce the accrual rate for all participants and eliminate future cost-of-living adjustments on benefits.

The new Republican governor said his ideas would save the state \$2.8 billion over two years. He'd outlined his intention to change the state's massive public [pension](#) program in his campaign for election and in his first weeks in office.

The Florida Retirement System has more than 650,000 participants -- among them state workers and law-enforcement officers, teachers and county [employees](#) -- and more than 300,000 retirees. Those public workers now get free pensions.

"Government workers, like private sector employees, deserve the opportunity to save for the future, but taxpayers shouldn't be asked to foot that bill alone," Scott said in a release.

Scott's plan, which must be approved by the Legislature, would:

- * Require 5-percent [salary](#) contributions by all FRS participants
- * Reduce the annual service credit -- the percentage of average salary earned each year on the job -- to 1.6 for all employees, except for 2 percent for high-risk police officers, firefighters and prison guards.
- * Eliminate cost-of-living adjustments for benefits earned after July 1. Current retirees are unaffected. The current COLA is 3 percent.
- * Close the Deferred [Retirement](#) Option Program to new participants as of July 1

Officials with the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees say the plan is a disaster.

"While ([employee](#)) contribution is one thing, we don't want the Legislature to do anything catastrophic like close the plan to new hires," said Doug Martin, communications director for AFSCME in Florida.

"Closing the pension plan would create the problems that they seek to avoid."

If new hires are required to participate in a 401(k)-style plan, the number of participants paying into the defined-benefit plan will continue to dwindle as they retire -- simultaneously increasing the beneficiaries drawing pensions. That will require, Martin said, ever-increasing payments from government to prop up obligations.

"This isn't us saying this, it's the math," Martin said.

He said big changes to the \$129 billion Florida Retirement System will ruin it for the sake of immediate budget problems.

"These issues and these changes are not about flaws in the Florida Retirement System," Martin said. "This is about balancing the budget on the backs of public employees and retirees."

Scott said it's about fairness.

"We must bring Florida in line with the private sector and nearly every other state in the country by requiring government workers to contribute towards their own retirement," Scott said in a statement.

He's scheduled to unveil his full budget proposal Monday.

"We will stand together against those, who would attack us on the streets and the politicians who would take pensions and benefits from our families."



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