

PBA In The News (Excerpts)

St. Petersburg Times

Florida's Best Newspaper

Union carries weight

January 13, 2007

The Florida Police Benevolent Association is a potent force in statewide politics. The PBA's more than 32,000 members include prison correctional officers, local police and probation officers, and as of last July, state troopers.

A politician who gets on the wrong side of the PBA learns quickly that there's very little about this group's politics that could be called benevolent.

The union spends a bundle of money to help get its candidates elected—more than \$1.3 million in the last cycle alone.

Union members put up signs for candidates, walk precincts and donate money. The PBA's endorsement is a seal of approval that a candidate is pro-law enforcement.

Less visible, but no less important, is the PBA's behind-the-scenes support for its favored candidates.

Case in point: Right before last September's primary election, Charlie Crist's campaign found out that his opponent, Tom Gallagher, would march in the Labor Day parade in the quaint little town of Keystone Heights, north of Gainesville.

The parade's organizer just happened to be a PBA member, and the union backed Crist for governor. The PBA was not about to be upstaged.

Next thing you knew, Crist was standing in a Jeep Wrangler, waving to parade watchers and tossing Frisbees to kids—Frisbees embossed with the PBA logo.



HERALDTODAY.COM

Police Chief named head of juvenile justice agency

January 5, 2007

TALLAHASSEE—Tallahassee Police Chief Walt McNeil was named Thursday by Gov. Charlie Crist to lead the state Department of Juvenile Justice, an agency that's been under fire over the death of a teen following a confrontation with guards at a sheriff's boot camp.

The Republican governor announced McNeil will take over from Anthony Schembri, who had headed the agency since 2004.

McNeil is a Democrat, the second to be tapped by Crist to head a state agency. New Department of Children & Families Secretary Bob Butterworth is also a Democrat.

When asked whether there was any significance to that, Crist said it was news to him. "I didn't ask," Crist said. "It really didn't matter. He's a Floridian."

"Excellent, excellent, excellent," was the reaction of Sen. Tony Hill, D-Jacksonville, the chairman of the Legislative Black Caucus, which has been a vocal critic of the agency.

Hill said McNeil, who is black, will have credibility and that the pick showed Crist has sensitivity to the black community's concerns about the agency, which Hill said deals with a disproportionately large number of black children.

But Hill said ultimately McNeil's qualifications in law enforcement and abilities as a leader make him a good choice.

"I have nothing but the utmost respect for his leadership," Hill said.

McNeil, 51, rose through the ranks after beginning as a Tallahassee police officer in 1979. He has also served as vice president of the International Association of Police Chiefs.

He has had a great relationship with his officers and did an excellent job as chief, said Matt Puckett, the deputy executive director of the Florida Police Benevolent Association. "It's a fantastic appointment. He's more than qualified," Puckett said.

St. Petersburg Times

Florida's Best Newspaper

Florida's top campaign donors

CONNIE HUMBURG and JONI JAMES © November 3, 2006

John Walton died last year, crashing his experimental aircraft near his home in Montana. But that hasn't kept him from being one of the major political donors in Florida's elections this year.

The estate of Walton, one of the heirs of Wal-Mart founder Sam Walton, has funneled more than \$2-million this year into a group that favors private school vouchers and that is playing a role in 15 Florida legislative races, including two hard-fought campaigns for state Senate seats in the Tampa Bay area.

The largesse of Walton's estate ranks near the top of 14 entities that have contributed at least \$1-million over the past two years in local and state elections, mostly in anticipation of Tuesday's election, according to a St. Petersburg Times analysis of state campaign finance reports through Oct. 21.

The Times' analysis provides a window into the bankrolling of candidates and issues this election cycle. It also offers an early guide to the issues that likely will be raised in Tallahassee over the next two years, even if candidates aren't talking about them now.

Consider, for example, the Florida Police Benevolent Association, a 34,000-member union and political behemoth that has reported more than \$2-million in political activity this election cycle, from heavy backing of Republican gubernatorial nominee Charlie Crist to paying a role in local sheriff's races.

The exact totals for professional groups like unions are difficult to compute because they collect money and transfer it to affiliated groups, so the same dollars can be counted more than once.

But there's no doubt the police association is a major player in Tallahassee and local sheriff's races. At a time when Florida's overall crime rate is dropping, politicians aren't talking about police pension benefits or whether to add private prisons to the state's prison system. But the police association will talk to them once they're in office.

"The Lord helps those who help themselves," David Murrell, executive director of the Florida police association, said this week about his group's political contributions. "We've tried to make things happen instead of sitting back."

The Daytona Beach
News-Journal
news-journalonline.com

Union, MADD blast Tanner for dropping DUI case

November 17, 2006

PALM COAST—Law enforcement union officials are calling for a probe of State Attorney John Tanner after he failed to prosecute a Flagler Beach woman accused in April of drunken driving.

Jim Spearing, a political consultant for the Coastal Florida Police Benevolent Association, said Thursday his group is "outraged" that Tanner dropped an "extreme" DUI case against Patricia R. Hall because Nathaniel Juratovac, a Flagler Beach police officer, was involved.

Juratovac is the officer who twice arrested Tanner's daughter, Lisa, in 2005, leading to her being strapped into a restraint chair at the jail and a battle between John Tanner and the union.

Spearing—joined by Don Murray, executive director of Florida Mothers Against Drunk Driving, Juratovac and other union officials outside Tanner's Daytona Beach office—said John Tanner's dismissal of the case "put a very dangerous person back out on the road."

Murray said Tanner's decision was "poor judgment at the very least."

"This is an obvious case that requires prosecution," he said.

The Top Ten Ways Chiefs Should Not Start The Memo:

1. Are you a jelly belly?
2. Attention, nincompoops!
3. What's up, dudes?
4. You're all worthless and weak. That being said...
5. Four score and seven years ago...
6. After much consideration, I've decided to institute a six-day schedule.
7. Will whoever took my stapler please return it ASAP?
8. Dear Underlings...
9. Please report to ops for the Segway detail lottery.
10. Has anyone seen my keys?



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