



*Matt Puckett*

*From Your Deputy*

# Executive Director

## The "Four P's" — People, Pay, Pensions and Policy

**L**ike any good candidate for public office knows... when spreading your message you need a simplistic platform that covers the issues important to your constituents. The Florida PBA is no different. We have to consistently spread the word about our association's core concentrations. Our message can range in complexity, but it boils down to four categories—People, Pay, Pensions, and Policy—the "Four P's."

**People** – Any agency's chief responsibility is to have enough people in the positions designated to protect the public. Let's not forget that these positions are the essential reason for the agency's existence. Therefore, we can not allow an agency to operate at dangerously low staffing levels. It not only threatens the public's safety, but it threatens our officers performing the work.

**Pay** – Anyway you slice it... this is the issue at the forefront of every negotiation. Yes, some officers in Florida are paid well, but the vast majority of our officers are not receiving the compensation they deserve for the service they provide. Even the well paid officers need to regularly negotiate for increases to their pay and benefits (such as healthcare coverage), or the market will quickly turn them upside down.

**Pensions** – I've read that many outside of law enforcement and corrections view your pension plans as a

Cadillac while other public employees are rolling in a Pinto. The question here is, "Do you deserve a guaranteed pension at the end of your career?" Ask the mother, who had her child returned to her safely because you, if she thinks you deserve it. Ask a child, who never had contact with the pervert you apprehended, if he wants you to have it. Ask the father, who greeted his daughter at home safely on prom night, because you prevented a drunk driver from crashing into her, if he has heartburn over your pension. Without question, the public believes you deserve it; because they want to reward you for the hard work, stress, and sacrifice you expended protecting them throughout your career. Our mission is to protect your pensions from those few who forget how you go about earning it. (See Ron DeLord's article on page 13.)

**Policy** – This is the catch all for everything from privatization to tattoos. Policies can create a fair environment or can paralyze you with indecision. Remember policies are the reason for internal affairs. We strive for policies that level the playing field and we will continue to be the loudest advocates for fair polices.

In my opinion, if we focus our efforts on these four areas, we will continue to provide our membership with the best service in Florida. ●

## State's Financial Outlook Bleak

**T**he state's financial forecasts continue to look grim. Now we are up to a \$1.5 billion shortfall and it appears that may not be the bottom. The prime reason for the downturn points to plummeting home sales as the housing market cools off.

This slump is being experienced nationwide. Florida, of course, enjoyed huge revenue surpluses during the recent housing boom, but that has quickly vanished as we recede back to normal revenue levels. Now we will feel a large pinch.

The obvious concern for the Governor and Legislature is where to reduce spending.

Unfortunately, the cuts could be in every major area of the budget by at least 4% while revenue estimators predict the state may have to trim up to 8% of its total budget to maintain balance.

So if you were hoping for encouraging economic news, I'm sorry to disappoint you. (See articles below and on the next page.) ●

## Future also grim as lawmakers begin budget cutting process

Article published Aug 27, 2007 • BY BILL KACZOR • ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

Economists warned lawmakers the state's financial outlook will remain grim for the next three years as legislative committees Monday began working on budget cuts to offset a \$1.1 billion shortfall in tax revenues for the current fiscal year.

Florida's economy is expected to improve but the resulting income growth will be insufficient to match projected spending increases in education, health care and other areas, according to the latest projections by the Revenue Estimating Conference.

Without budget cuts or new taxes—an unlikely option for the Republican-controlled Legislature—the shortfall would increase to \$2.5 billion in the next fiscal year, which begins July 1, 2008, drop to \$846 million the following year and increase to \$1 billion the third year.

Amy Baker, coordinator of the Legislature's Office of Economic and Demographic Research, presented the three-year forecast to the Legislative Budget Commission. The panel will take a vote on adopting the projections next month, said its chairman, Rep. Ray Sansom, R-Destin.

"What they seem to be is the same old-same old," said Sen. Gwen Margolis, D-Miami Beach. "It's either boom or bust."

The revenue shortfalls—including \$380 million in the last budget year—have been blamed on a depressed housing market. Florida's real estate market historically has gone in cycles. Home prices climbed sharply for three or four years but began dropping in mid-2006.

Legislative budget committees began meeting later Monday as a prelude to a special session set to begin Sept. 18 to modify the \$71 billion budget lawmakers passed in May for the 2007-08 fiscal year.

The Senate is looking at cutting 4 percent across-the-board from each budget segment such as educa-

tion, transportation and law enforcement while the House plans to make more targeted cuts.

"We feel like that targeted cuts are more reasonable and more effective," said Sansom, who chairs the House Budget and Policy Council.

Senate Fiscal Policy Committee Chairwoman Lisa Carlton, R-Sarasota, said she expects her chamber also to make targeted cuts but only within each budget segment including the two largest spending areas: education and health-social services.

"To hold one area harmless like education would mean you would have to make an extra \$415 million worth of cuts in the other area," Carlton said.

The estimate of future shortfalls does not include the effect of a proposed state constitutional amendment designed to cut property taxes if legislative leaders live up to a promise to offset resulting losses to local school districts with state dollars.

An earlier version was estimated to cut \$1.6 billion a year in school taxes, Baker said. She said the effect of the final measure should be less than that but would add to the shortfall. No formal estimate has yet been made.

Representatives of the state's school boards and superintendents urged the Senate Prekindergarten-12th Grade Education Appropriations Committee to give them more flexibility at the local level to make spending decisions including where budgets should be cut.

They also recommended cutting or delaying a new \$147.5 million merit pay program for teachers and the annual \$157 million recognition program that provides cash prizes to high-performing schools as determined by their scores on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test, or FCAT.

The State Board of Education, though, has urged that no cuts be made in the merit pay program, which gives teachers bonuses based on the FCAT or other tests and principals' evaluations. The board contends the bonuses serve as an incentive for teachers to improve their performance.

Teachers have resisted merit pay. They argue test scores don't necessarily indicate a teacher's ability, that it undermines teamwork and any extra dollars should go into across-the-board salary increases.

State health officials told the Senate Health and Human Services Appropriations Committee that services will suffer from budget cuts.

Agency for Health Care Secretary Andrew Agwunobi said he has looked at cutting administrative costs first but that accounts for less than 2 percent of his budget.

As a result, the agency is proposing service cuts including a reduction in the Medically Needy program. It covers seriously ill people who make too much money to qualify for Medicaid but cannot afford to pay for health care. Cutting it for all but pregnant women and children could save \$175 million.

The agency also is proposing a 4 percent cut in Medicaid rates paid to hospitals, nursing homes, health maintenance organizations and pharmacies.

Health care cuts are troubling because the state loses federal matching money in many cases and the costs often are just shifted elsewhere, officials said. Hospitals still care for the needy but pass their costs to local taxpayers or raise rates for paying patients.

---Associated Press Writer David Royse contributed to this report.

**[EDITOR'S NOTE: The start of the Special Session scheduled for September 18th has been temporarily postponed.]**