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Deputies protest proposed labor law change

By [Carl Orth](#) | The Suncoast News

Unionized Pasco deputies are rallying members to protest proposed collective bargaining legislation some deride as the "Union Busting Act of 2010."

Fraternal Order of Police Lodge 29 and state FOP representatives say a crucial committee vote on Senate Bill 610 is coming Tuesday.

The FOP is sending sample protest letters to its members, encouraging them to send a flood of messages to the offices of state senators who will be voting on the legislation.

James W. Preston, president of the FOP Florida State Lodge, said the legislation "appears to be a political move to circumvent current Florida State Statute and avoid following the mandates of PERC." PERC is the acronym for the Florida Public Employees Relations Commission, which mediates public sector labor-management disputes.

State Sen. Mike Fasano, R-New Port Richey, wrote the bill, titled "Collective Bargaining for Certain Public Employees," as a means of resolving any impasse in negotiations. The proposal would apply to Florida's elected county constitutional officers, the sheriff, tax collector, property appraiser, supervisor of elections and clerk of the circuit court.

The changes, if approved, would categorize those agencies as the "legislative body" in dealing with their respective employees.

Fasano is a bit surprised at the FOP opposition.

"Why the FOP is opposing the bill I don't know," Fasano said. Another law enforcement union, the Police Benevolent Association, is neutral on the proposal, he noted.

"I believe a constitutional officer - tax collector, property appraiser, supervisor of elections, sheriff, all elected by the taxpayers - should decide how to spend the taxpayers' money," Fasano added.

Sheriff Bob White supports Fasano's bill and its companion, House Bill 417, because it would uphold the "Florida constitutional principle that the sheriff, elected by the people, has exclusive jurisdiction over the terms and conditions of deputies employment," according to a statement released Thursday by Doug Tobin, Sheriff's Office public information officer.

"It will never be acceptable to Sheriff White to turn over the health and well-being of his deputies and their families to any legislative body," Tobin said in the statement.

"Nobody will fight harder for their deputies than their elected sheriff," White is quoted as saying in the statement.

The Senate and House bills have the full support of the Florida Sheriff's Association and the Florida Association of Counties, White noted. The Pasco County Commission backs him on this issue,

according to the sheriff.

Fasano believes Senate Bill 610 would "place the responsibility on our constitutional officers to deal with their employees fairly," rather than "allowing the county commission to be the superseding voice" in conflicts.

FOP's Preston insists the Senate bill is "very unfriendly bill to all deputy sheriffs in the state of Florida. SB610 creates a new and unnecessary level of government."

The current system allows PERC mediator orders to be appealed to the state's District Court of Appeals.