

Palm Bay City Council Address: September 16, 2010

In an uncertain world, one thing is for sure: When a Palm Bay citizen dials 911, a fire fighter will be there, within minutes. No matter what life throws at us; burning buildings, heart attacks, choking babies, car accidents, poisonings, hurricane flooding, even the Mother's Day fires. No matter how dangerous it gets, Palm Bay citizens know someone is there for them.

If you're trapped in a car surrounded by flood waters, our fire fighters will be there. If your child is drowning in a canal, our fire fighters will be there. If your spouse gets electrocuted in the home, our fire fighters will be there. And you can guarantee our fire fighters will get there, **first.**

Last week we looked back at the 9/11 tragedy. We understand the role firefighters play in keeping America safe, and we admire them. You may think we're putting firefighters on a pedestal, and I say yes — that's exactly where they deserve to be. Placed on a pedestal because they're heroes. When a building crumbles or burns, they go rushing in, not us.

When that station alarm sounds, firefighters look into the unknown and confront it, without flinching. And when you or I need a hero, Palm Bay Fire fighters save our lives. Twenty four hours a day. Seven days a week. No matter if their having a bad day. No matter if it's Christmas or their child's birthday, our fire stations are open. Fire fighters are here for us. They are devoted public servants. They protect us. Shouldn't we protect them back?

We must take care of the heroes who take care of us. We can't turn our backs on them. We can't ignore their families; husbands, wives and children, waiting for their loved ones to come home safely. As Americans, we must do what's right.

Fire fighters and their families have sacrificed a lot for us. After they've given us so much, I find it hard to take away what we've promised to give them. This, my friends, is why we must vote no on cutting pension compensation for Palm Bay's firefighters. Let's honor and thank our heroes by protecting them as they've protected us.

Tonight I urge my fellow city council members to vote no on cutting pensions. I ask them to join the citizens of Palm Bay in supporting firefighters, because their sacrifices keep our city going. Yes, budget cuts must be made, but we must NOT cut firefighters' pensions. We can't cut corners on public safety. It's too important. And we cannot go back on our commitment to our public defenders.

Today, they receive fair pension compensation. Should the new plan pass, fire fighters will receive 2 percent times their average final compensation, times the number of years of future service. In short, our firefighters will take about a 50 to 30 percent pension compensation cut.

Cutting pensions means something's got to give in a retired person's budget. A 50 to 30 percent cut is a big deal. It's a lot of money for a retired person to lose. And after a lifetime of dedicated service, don't fire fighters deserve to spend their retirement years in stability?

Take into consideration the unique occupational hazards fire fighters face. Because their work is so physically and mentally demanding, their careers tend to be shorter than those of other vocations. Firefighters put their health, safety and well-being into jeopardy, which affects their families. That's why a reduced quality of life due to a smaller pension is an extra worry fire fighters don't need.

According to (insert study name here), firefighters face health risks such as:

- A greater risk of death from heart attack, up to 100 times the normal rate. Heart attacks are the most frequent cause of on the job deaths for firefighters.
- They're in a higher risk group for hypertension, high cholesterol, certain malignant cancers and chronic muscular or skeletal complaints.
- They're more prone to testicular and prostate cancer, Hodgkin's Lymphoma and multiple melanomas — up to a 50 percent higher rate than the general public.
- Also, long-term operations expose firefighters to great amounts of stress, including:
 - Psychological stress
 - Sleep deprivation
 - Or exposure to toxic substances

Clearly, our firefighters have a lot on their plates. And if these examples aren't enough, consider the effect cut pensions will have on our community. We may lose some of our most experienced firefighters, who take with them their years of seniority, leadership and expertise.

Our firefighters face the ultimate pressure: They know that if they make a mistake, even once, someone could lose their life. Their strength does not fail us when we need them most. And now, it's our turn to not fail them. My fellow council persons, we must vote no on cutting Palm Bay firefighters' pensions.

Yes, we all know the city only has so much revenue. We know budget cuts have to come from somewhere. We need to make budget cuts? Great. Make 'em some where else. But leave Palm Bay's firefighters' pensions alone. In the long term, cutting out public safety is a cost Palm Bay can't afford.

So what do we need to do? Support the IAFF's pension proposal plan. It's a moderate and fair resolution. Both sides give a little ground to get back a workable plan. In it, all current employees will retain 100 percent of their current pension plan, and pension cuts will only apply to newly hired employees.

After a lifetime of service, let's give our firefighters the kind of retirement stability they've earned. After all they've given us, it's the least we can give back. We need to support the heroes who support Palm Bay. My fellow council persons, please join me in voting no on this proposal. Thank you.