

Developing a Battle Strategy to Save Your Retirement

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By CLEAT President, Todd Harrison

At the CLEAT E-Board meeting in Fort Worth this Summer, at the CLEAT Convention in Corpus Christi and at the retirement strategy meeting conducted by the National Association of Police Organizations (NAPO) in Orlando we have been in non-stop conversations about how to develop a battle plan to counter the evil political schemes to end decent law enforcement retirements.

Some folks have warned us that the retirement/pension battle is coming to Texas and I always ask where they've been? This year, in the 82nd Legislative Session, saw a full scale attack on your pensions that has been escalating with every session since 2001. We have been successful in killing all of the bad legislation and this session we had to fight in order to pass a piece of agreed-to legislation for the Austin Pension System.

Next there are voices who tell us there is no hope and that we just have to give up, accept and appease those who are the enemy in hopes that they will show mercy.

Then there are those who want us to hide behind and mingle in with the other pension systems and hope our enemies will forget we exist and somehow won't notice us.

In all of these meetings our goal has been to help arm law enforcement labor leaders with THE TRUTH and prepare our local unions and PAC's for war.

As this battle intensifies I'd like for us to remember that we are the only qualified organizations to continue to fight for police retirements. Others may want in the game, others may want our money and hard won political connections but we are the only standing army that is battle tested and ready to fight.

If you think about the whole of this war, you will likely panic. As a policeman I appreciate that our Public Affairs staff are breaking this battle down into components. On the street, I often encountered situations that required me to fall back on the things I knew, things I trusted. This battle is one of those times.

For example, our lobbyist points to using this time to gather information, raise money for CLEAT PAC and wait until after the candidate filing deadlines before meeting to endorse political candidates. As President I have developed a 5 point plan to help get us started.

1. I've directed our staff to organize and plan a coordinated campaign effort between all CLEAT Defined Benefit Local Associations as well as the Dallas Police Association and the Houston Police Officers Union. I asked for a meeting early next year to go over the list of viable candidates, those we might be able to support, as well as those we should be planning to oppose during the primary campaign season. This effort is already underway between CLEAT's Charley Wilkison and representatives of all the major law enforcement groups in the state.
2. CLEAT is developing a 'Police Retirement Truth Squad' to interface with CLEAT Public Affairs in a all-out rapid response effort when we see or hear our retirement plans misstated in the media. I'd like one person from each local that has a Defined Benefit system to be a part of this alternating committee.
3. I've come to agree that polling of public attitudes is an integral part of this war. My plan is to use various polling companies to keep us abreast of what Texans really believe and how they are coming to their conclusions. I want these scientific instruments to assist our members in communicating our positions with the public and I want our elected officials to be able to utilize this information as they prepare to make decisions. We will be able to use non-PAC dollars, regular union monies for these polls.
4. This war will be expensive. We need candidates and elected officials to hear from us during the coming months. Fundraising for CLEAT PAC should be increased a thousand fold. Our local members stand to lose their future income, retirees will lose big if retirement systems are completely collapsed and those individuals who do business with our pension funds need to know that the war is due, in part, by greedy financial managers attempting to get their hands on the money.
5. We need constant communication between all of our leaders so that our coordinated message remains intact and our local unions stay connected to our plan. Thinking along those lines I'm planning an organization wide conference call with our entire board of directors on the first Monday of every month until the legislative session is finished in 2013. I want to begin these conference calls next February and each local President and E-board member will be able to join the call and ask questions or report information from across the state.

Now, folks, no matter how good our intentions are they will not matter unless we execute our plan. And the first step of the journey begins now. The thousands of police families and the future of Texas law enforcement are depending on what we do next.

Let's build our local PACs, stay united in political endorsements and stay in constant communication with one another. Remember our motto: "strength, Justice and Unity"

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