

September 1, 2009

Letters to the editor

Public pensions are a growing burden

Re: "Public employee pensions are far from lavish," (My View, Aug. 25).

I have a different perspective from Raymond T. Edmondson because of the very real and growing burden that local governments face when it comes to funding public pension benefits.

Since 1999, because of state law, cities have spent more than \$284 million to pay for new police and fire pension benefits. In some instances these pensions have become 50 percent to 60 percent of a city's entire payroll. Because of state mandates, these benefits are now being paid only through local taxes.

A recent report showed that most of the top 100 highest paid salaried employees in a large Florida city were front-line fire-rescue personnel. The lowest total compensation on the list was more than \$200,000!

We owe a debt of gratitude to police officers and firefighters for their service; but their pension benefits are costing taxpayers billions. This passing of the buck from the state to local taxpayers negatively impacts our quality of life and will ultimately and irreversibly hurt local services — including fire and police.

In short, the economic impact of public pension spending mentioned in Edmondson's column is irrelevant, especially if the costs to cities to pay for these pensions become unsustainable and the quality of life in our communities is compromised.

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George LeMieux is a respectable choice

I am no Republican partisan. Two weeks ago, a local Democratic club recognized me for years of service. But some of the things being printed and said about George LeMieux's appointment to the U.S. Senate illustrate what is wrong with politics. They compel me to write.

What Florida needs most in the Senate is a capable, honorable, public-spirited person. Gov. Crist appointed one.

Unlike career politicians, LeMieux has succeeded in private business.

LeMieux was chief of his firm's litigation department before joining the attorney general. After LeMieux left government service, the firm chose him as chair.

LeMieux held high government posts. But he was also an active Broward County volunteer serving the Broward Goodwill, among others, well.

I had been working in Attorney General Bob Butterworth's office when LeMieux became deputy

attorney general for Crist. The anticipated bloodbath of Butterworth people did not occur. LeMeiux proved an effective, compassionate manager. He also proved an excellent lawyer. LeMeiux argued and won a case before the U.S. Supreme Court. As the governor's chief of staff, LeMeiux successfully managed the difficult year of transition. Both jobs also teach a lot about the legislative process.

Mailings and blogs charge LeMeiux leveraged his former positions into lucrative lobbying jobs. LeMeiux has not lobbied. You will find only one member of his firm registered to lobby, and he was lobbying before LeMeiux was a lawyer. LeMeiux is making his money the old-fashioned way — hard work.

LeMeiux knows the state and its issues through successful service in the private sector, in the Attorney General's Office, and as the governor's chief of staff. He is a good choice and will do a good job.

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Correction

Gadsden County Commissioner Doug Croley was misquoted in a news story in Sunday's *Democrat*. Asked by a citizen if he would support a "full-blown hospital" for the county, what Croley actually said was that the commission approved a rural emergency facility business model (which has no more than four observation beds) and added, "All that I can do now is to help Gadsden's Hospital Board and their attorney open such a rural emergency medical resource to benefit the citizens of Gadsden County."
