



First responders pay their fair share

Posted: 02/26/2011 4:00

Two Miami-Dade County detectives, Roger Castillo and Amanda Haworth, were gunned down in Miami Jan. 20 while serving a warrant. Their ultimate sacrifice is a painful reminder that first responders in greater Miami work dangerous jobs in a dangerous metropolitan area. Suddenly, the public is being encouraged to believe that first responders receive too many benefits, and that tax dollars alone support those benefits.

A recent report, "Tough Choices — Trouble Ahead," released by the LeRoy Collins Institute, frightens taxpayers into believing they are responsible for paying our healthcare benefits. That is not true. Local and municipal governments are not responsible for public-employee health insurance; they only provide the opportunity for retirees to purchase their own health insurance at the same premium as working employees. And we do contribute to both our pensions and our healthcare costs.

One solution outlined in the report to help local governments save money was to "Reduce the transferability of retirement benefits to spouses and dependents."

Really? Who would be willing to explain that to the families of Detectives Castillo and Haworth, just 41 and 46 years old respectively?

Public-employee benefits are not to blame for the economic mess, Wall Street is. Why are we so fixated on demonizing working-class Americans who unselfishly risk life and limb for benefits they not only contribute to, but have earned? I can only hope the deaths of these police officers will help Miami area residents see this report for what it is — political propaganda. We will never apologize for putting our lives on the line for public safety; neither will we apologize for the safety that our pensions and healthcare bring to our families. At the end of the day close your eyes, think of Detectives Castillo and Haworth and say thank you!

Raul Fernandez, captain and trustee, Miami Fire
and Pension Board