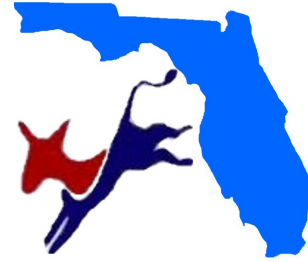


# News from the Okaloosa Democrats

## CharlieCare Becomes AshleyCare to Selected OCSO Retirees



On May 3rd NWFDN Online Editorial, "[Sheriff's Health Plan Hocus-Pocus](#)" noted that the post-employment health insurance benefit for selected retirees started under former Sheriff Charlie Morris. Not so fast; there's more to the story. It appears that Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office (OCSO) is the only agency in the State of Florida that offers **"free health care" coverage for selected retirees**. The Board of County Commissioners (BCC) knows about this possible discriminatory practice and approves the Sheriff's budget each year.

During the [BCC Special Budget Workshop on June 23, 2010](#), former Sheriff Edward Spooner with then-Chief Deputy Ashley present was challenged by the BCC on the health care coverage for selected OCSO retirees. Former Sheriff Spooner stated that health care plan would stop on October 1, 2010 and clarified his statement by saying, "[What I tell you is, it's good 'til November 8.](#)"

There were implied concerns during the workshop that the health care benefit for OCSO retirees was unfair to the employees and the county could not afford it.

Careful review of the [OCSO email response on April 27, 2011](#) to a public records request revealed that two retirees were placed in the shadowy health insurance plan under former Sheriff Spooner (President Obama's recent nominee for U.S. Marshal) on **June 24, 2010** and **September 30, 2010**. Former Sheriff Spooner added these individuals after he told the BCC on June 23, 2010 that the plan for OCSO retirees would be stopped on his watch. This unfair post-employment practice has become an integrity issue for the President's nominee and Sheriff Ashley.

[Note 14 relating to the Sheriff of the 2010 Comprehensive Annual Financial Report \(CAFR\)](#) depicted 21 retirees and beneficiary receiving the health care benefit before it was terminated by former Sheriff Spooner on October 1, 2010.

At the [BCC Meeting on May 3rd](#), a partner of O'Sullivan Creel L.L.P explained that the 21 people receiving the benefit were composed of 11 OCSO retirees and 2 children of a law enforcement officer killed in the line of duty received the benefit, which the Sheriff pays for. The remaining 9 people are retirees or beneficiaries paying the premium for the OCSO group health insurance.

The Chief Financial Officer (CFO) of the OCSO told the BCC that a thorough review of all OCSO retirees receiving the benefit was conducted and no discriminatory practice by the Sheriff existed. The CFO also indicated the policy was under review.

In other words, Sheriff Ashley is continuing to maintain the "free health care" plan. Perhaps the internal review did not give the Sheriff enough information to make a decision. Maybe the Sheriff will make a decision after the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act challenge clears the Supreme Court.

Why? The Sheriff really likes what the GOP calls ObamaCare. Sheriff, you are not alone. We like it too, but you have to give it to all OCSO retirees and meet the IRS requirement.

Neither the auditor or OCSO CFO was able to publicly answer whether the retirees receiving health insurance coverage paid by the Sheriff received a 1099-R to report the income, or state the IRS requirement to do so.

Without a documented written policy (criteria) and the non-disclosure of the names of OCSO retirees receiving the "free health care" coverage, the public is being asked to accept the verbal policy (at least 20 years of service at OCSO) while relevant questions are not being answered.

There's an old saying..."The details are in the numbers." So we say show the public the numbers and maybe the public can help you decide. Specifically, tell the public the:

- (1) Total number of OCSO retirees currently reported to a Florida Retirement System (FRS) as personnel in retired status?
- (2) Total number of retirees possess over 20 years of service and under 65 years old at OCSO when they retired?
- (3) Total number of OCSO retirees over 65 years old and reported to FRS as personnel in retired status?
- (4) Total number of OCSO retirees received or receiving the post-employment health insurance benefit paid by the Sheriff's office since it has started?
- (5) Has any former or past Sheriff or any former or past Sheriff's spouse received the post-employment health benefit paid by the Sheriff's office?

The questions above do not violate public access. No personal information is being requested. Regardless of party affiliation, all public officials must be held accountable and be transparent in disclosing how our taxed dollars are being spent.

F.S. 121.031(5) exempts the names of retirees receiving public funds leaves room for misuse or abuse and the public has no access for public oversight-- it's a very bad law. We suggest calling your State Representatives or State Senators and get this exemption repealed or amended to make public funds distributed to retirees transparent by name only.

The bottom line: If OCSO cannot afford to equitably give this post-employment health insurance benefit to all retirees then none of them should be given this perk--it's an **all or none** proposition.

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