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TAXPAYER ABUSE IN BONITA SPRINGS: FIRE UNION PUSHES 3 DAYS OFF FOR EVERY 1 DAY WORKED—TRIGGERING A $7.18 MILLION PAYROLL EXPLOSION & 19.5% PROPERTY TAX HIKE

While 85% of private-sector taxpayers have zero pension bonus, Bonita Springs property owners are forced to fund a 24/72 shift handout, a 1.85% insurance tax surcharge, and standalone pensions 52.5% richer than County EMS.

AT-A-GLANCE: THE COST TO BONITA SPRINGS TAXPAYERS

- **The Schedule Handout:** Moving from a 24/48 shift (1 day on, 2 days off) to a 24/72 shift (1 day on, 3 days off)—meaning firefighters work roughly 7.5 days per month.
- **The Hiring Bloat:** Forces the district to hire 34 new personnel (32 firefighters and 2 Battalion Chiefs) just to cover the extra days off.
- **The Direct Tax Hit:** Adds $7.18 Million in recurring annual payroll and benefits—forcing a +19.5% net property tax increase on Bonita Springs homeowners and businesses.
- **The Operational Reality:** Fewer than 0.25% of district emergency calls are actual structural fires in a community built largely of modern concrete construction.

I. The 24/72 Shift Scheme: Why One Extra Day Off Costs $7.18 Million

Covering a fire station 24 hours a day, 7 days a week under a standard '1 day on, 2 days off' schedule requires three rotating shifts (A, B, and C). Moving to a '1 day on, 3 days off' schedule (24/72) requires adding an entire fourth shift line (D-Shift)—automatically inflating operational staffing requirements by roughly 33% without adding a single new fire station or rescue truck.

Union-Backed Agenda: Fire Commissioner candidate/elect Larry Kosilla has championed this union-backed shift expansion. Enacting it forces Bonita Springs taxpayers to fund 34 brand-new full-time positions—32 firefighters and 2 Battalion Chiefs—at an annual recurring cost of $7.18 Million. That permanent payroll explosion translates directly into a +19.5% net property tax increase on local families and businesses, even though fewer than a quarter of one percent of local callouts involve actual structural fires.

Benchmark Metric	Current 24/48 Schedule (3 Shifts)	Proposed 24/72 Schedule (4 Shifts)
Work / Off-Duty Ratio	1 Day Worked / 2 Days Off	1 Day Worked / 3 Days Off
Average Shifts Worked / Month	~10 Shifts (20 Days Off)	~7.5 Shifts (22.5 Days Off)
New Personnel Required	Baseline Current Roster	+34 New Hires (32 FF + 2 Battalion Chiefs)
Annual Taxpayer Cost Impact	**Current Operating Baseline**	**+$7.18 Million / Year (+19.5% Tax Hike)**

II. Standalone Pension Abuses & Artificial Final-Year Salary Spiking

- **52.5% Richer Than County EMS & State Firefighters:** Under the Florida Retirement System (FRS) Special Risk class, Lee County EMS paramedics and State of Florida firefighters receive a 3.0% annual benefit multiplier and a 4.0% DROP interest rate. Bonita Springs' standalone plan forces property taxpayers to guarantee a 3.58% multiplier for senior staff and a fixed 6.5% annual DROP interest return—handing out nearly $19,000 a year in extra interest bonuses on a single $750,000 DROP balance.
- **Artificial Leave-Bank Spiking (Prohibited Under FRS):** Working roughly 7 to 10 shifts a month allows personnel to accumulate massive banks of unused sick, vacation, and holiday time. While FRS strictly caps how much unused leave can be included in a member's final average compensation, Bonita Springs' standalone rules allow retirees to dump banked days straight into their final year's salary—artificially spiking their lifetime pension calculation right at the finish line.
- **Zero Employee Skin in the Game:** Over 85% of private-sector workers do not receive a defined-benefit pension bonus at all. Yet Bonita Springs taxpayers pay hundreds of thousands of dollars annually for private pension board attorneys, private actuaries (Foster & Foster), and money managers charging 40–60 basis points (compared to just 7 basis points at the Florida State Board of Administration) without requiring firefighters to contribute the standard 3% employee salary contribution.

III. Double Taxation: The Mandatory 1.85% Property Insurance Tax Surcharge

In addition to rising ad valorem property tax bills, local homeowners and commercial business owners are hit with a mandatory 1.85% state excise tax (authorized under Florida Statutes Chapter 175) tacked directly onto their property insurance policies. Across Lee County's independent fire districts, this hidden surcharge extracts over $12.5 Million every year from property policyholders—channeling more than $5.7 Million annually above statutory baselines straight into supplemental firefighter 'Share Account' bonus payouts.

IV. The Solution: Taxpayer Action Plan

1. Reject the 24/72 Shift Expansion: Demand that the Bonita Springs Fire Commission block any move from 2 days off to 3 days off that forces the hiring of 34 new staff or triggers a +19.5% property tax increase.

2. Consolidate Lee County's 17 Independent Fire Districts: Merge the 17 separate fire kingdoms into ONE unified countywide fire district under Lee County Government—saving taxpayers up to $23 Million in operating costs and $16 Million in pension administration overhead every year.

3. Enforce FRS Parity & 3% Employee Contributions: Require standalone pension participants to contribute at least 3% of their salaries toward their own retirement, ban final-year leave spiking, and align benefit multipliers with Lee County EMS paramedics.

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