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## **Penelas addresses critics over police tactics at FTAA talks**

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CORAL SPRINGS, Fla. - Democratic Senate hopeful Alex Penelas faced questions Thursday about police tactics during last November's Free Trade Area of the Americas talks, with one union retiree complaining that demonstrators were "treated like dogs."

Penelas and his rivals for the party's nomination to the U.S. Senate addressed several hundred retired members of a health care workers union, offering their views on issues such as the protection of Social Security and the right to form unions.

But the mundane forum took a turn when Murray Gilman, a retired pharmacist from Delray Beach, told the Miami-Dade County mayor about his experience at the protests - "I get down there and see people being treated like dogs" - and recalled that one colleague was "arrested and handcuffed."

"That's your police. Where were you when this happened? Why did you let this happen to us?" Gilman said as retired members of the Service Employees International Union cheered.

Penelas said he would take full responsibility for any wrongdoing by the county's police department, but said "the Miami-Dade Police Department was not the lead agency in this meeting of the FTAA. It was the city of Miami police. It's two different jurisdictions. It's two different police....," Penelas said, interrupted by jeers from some retirees.

The mayor said he has worked closely with labor leaders and no complaints have been filed against the county's police department for its role during the FTAA protests.

"I run a community of 2 1/2 million people, one of the most complex and difficult communities anywhere in America. I am not one that shies or runs away from responsibility," Penelas said.

Nancy Astrachan, a Delray Beach retiree, complained about police in "full riot gear," describing a protest scene where helicopters buzzed overhead and elderly union members had trouble returning to their buses.

Penelas said officers were dressed in riot gear because intelligence "suggested that there was a group of 500 to 700 anarchists who had made very specific threats against the welfare and safety of" protesters.

Police arrested 146 people during FTAA demonstrations, including up to 28 felony arrests. Organized labor, a group heavily courted by Democratic candidates, has criticized the police conduct.

Ryan Hampton, a spokesman for U.S. Rep. Peter Deutch, one of Penelas' rivals in the Senate primary, said the mayor was shifting blame.

"Mayor Penelas still owes an explanation to the AFL-CIO and the working men and women of Florida of what really happened during the FTAA protest and whether he authorized an excessive police presence during the protest," Hampton said.

But Danae Jones, a Penelas campaign spokeswoman, said the mayor has explained the different police jurisdictions and the lack of complaints against the county.

"The mayor has been among the union's strongest supporters, and not just in a position to vote yes and no but to actually step into the line of fire on behalf of working people on more than one occasion," Jones said.

Penelas unveiled his plan to reduce the cost of prescription drugs earlier in the day, and vowed not to accept financial contributions from the manufacturers of prescription drugs, their executives or their political action committees.

During the forum, both Penelas and former state Education Commissioner Betty Castor criticized Gov. Jeb Bush's decision to sign a bill eliminating the waiting list for KidCare, the popular state-subsidized health insurance program.

Castor, who worked to help establish the health care program in the late 1980s, said the reforms would hurt children because of changes to the future eligibility requirements.

"I can guarantee you that one of the consequences will be that a lot of kids do not get coverage ... and that is unfair," Castor said.

Deutch, who addressed the retirees by phone, outlined his work helping elderly residents of nursing homes as a law student and vowed to protect entitlement programs.

"I will do everything possible to prevent the condemnation of Social Security. Period," Deutch said.