

# *Paying for Bad Cops*

*Radley Balko* | February 9, 2011

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Walter Olson points to a case in Colorado, where a police officer kned a handcuffed woman in the face, breaking her eye socket. He also didn't bother to report her injuries. The Aurora police chief sensibly fired the officer, and the city paid the victim an \$85,000 settlement. But then . . .

That was not good enough for the civil service panel considering the officer's firing, which said excessive force had not been proved to its satisfaction. It did find that the officer had violated a number of department policies — he should have reported the woman's injuries, for example — but said termination was too severe a penalty; instead, it said, he should be docked 160 hours of pay and made to undergo training. The docking of pay seems to be of a somewhat notional variety, however, given that the commission ordered him awarded back pay for the salary he would have earned had he not been dismissed in June 2010 (the underlying incident took place in February 2009).

As Olson points out, the citizens of Aurora get screwed in a number of ways, here. They have to pay for the settlement. They pay for the city's case against the cop, and they pay for the cop's defense. And now, they get to pay the cop's back pay. And what do they get for all of that? They get to know that there's a cop now back on the force who is capable of kneeing a handcuffed woman in the face, fracturing her orbital bone, and not paying the blood coming out of her head enough mind to bother reporting her injuries.

On a similar note, a police pension board in Chicago has voted to uphold the \$3,000/month pension of disgraced Sgt. Jon Burge. Burge oversaw a team of cops who for more than a decade routinely tortured murder suspects during questioning. Several of the people Burge and his men tortured into false confessions were sentenced to death, then exonerated years later. Because Chicago public officials and U.S. attorneys never bothered to investigate the torture

allegations when they happened, the statute of limitations expired before Burge and his men could be charged. Instead, Burge was convicted on perjury charges for lying in a federal lawsuit brought by his victims. The citizens of Chicago paid for the defense of Burge and his men in that case, and [will also pay out a \\$16.5 million settlement](#) to as many as 500,000 victims.

And now, unless Attorney General Lisa Madigan wins a court challenge, they'll also be paying for Burge's pension.

Finally, a reader [sends this story](#) from Elkhart, Indiana, where two police officers face termination, one for forging a check in his ex-wife's name, and the other for coercing a woman into sex while on duty. Even though they may be terminated, both officers may also still be eligible for a disability pension, "because they believe they suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder."

It's unfortunate when the "sacrifice of public service" is borne by the people allegedly being served.