

TOWN MAYOR ANNOUNCES 10 POLICE OFFICER LAYOFFS IN TIT-FOR-TAT MANEUVER



Following an arbitration award in favor of Police Benevolent Association, Old Bridge (New Jersey) Mayor Owen Henry announced layoffs of ten veteran police officers to 'balance the budget.' In his balancing act, the mayor brought the police force of the town down to a meager 81 officers. Concerned citizens and police personnel said it was almost crazy to try to man and protect city perimeters with only 75% of the force minimum required for a town of the size. FBI guidelines say that a town the size of Old Bridge should have at least 114 police officers. In a town hall meeting, Mayor Owen Henry said, "I want you to know I take no joy in what I had to do ... This has nothing to do with saving. This has to do with money we don't have right now." However, the mayor did not look or act sad in any manner. The mayor's decision was a direct response to an arbitration award in favor of police officials which granted members of the force a 7.5 percent increase in salaries from 2010 to 2013. The administration claimed that the arbitration award added a further weight of \$900,000 to an existent shortfall of \$5.4 million in the municipal budget. Residents and police officials criticized the mayor's move pointing out that if the township could not afford to pay the arbitration award, then the mayor could have appealed the decision, but instead of any appeal he chose to layoff veteran police officials putting the safety of the township at stake. Patrick Colligan, a vice president of the New Jersey State PBA and 20-year police officer told the media concerning the mayor's actions: "That's called terrorism, that's not called negotiations." The president of the New Jersey Fraternal Order of Police, Ed Brannigan, said "This move by the mayor is nothing more than union-busting ... when you lay off cops, people die." However, the mayor maintained that "The layoffs would have occurred whether I appealed the decision or not ... I've looked under every seat cushion, every stone ... we need to start making money now." The mayor told the media that the township had originally planned to lay off 13 officers, but surplus money would be used to keep the layoffs to the reduced number of ten officers only.

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