



Wall Township Policemen's Benevolent Association Local 234

P.O. Box 1332, Wall, New Jersey 07719

P R E S S R E L E A S E

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Wall Township, New Jersey
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Setting The Record Straight: PBA Corrects Misinformation Disseminated by Wall Twp Officials

This purpose of this press release is to correct misinformation regarding the purported financial crisis faced by the Township of Wall related to the Wall Township Policemen's Benevolent Association. Additionally, the PBA would like to address the "Construction Unit" recently discussed in the Coast Star by Mayor Newberry.

The Wall Township Policemen's Benevolent Association, Local 234, is the labor union that represents all police officers in Wall Township with the exception of the Chief of Police, David Morris.

In May of 2009, Township Administrator Joseph Verruni advised the Union that he was forecasting a financial crisis for the Township in 2010. The reasons given for the impending crisis were a decrease of both financial aid given to the Township by the State of New Jersey and a decrease in tax collection revenue.

Mr. Verruni and the Township Committee suggested "furloughing" employees as a solution. The suggested furloughs required employees to work sixteen less days and lose the associated pay with the lost time, thereby reducing the Town's payroll expense.

It is the intent of the Wall PBA to support and assist Wall Township in any crisis situation, however, the Union sought the assistance of an independent auditor to determine exactly what the Township's financial position was at the time. The PBA also sought to obtain a prudent and objective assessment of what the Town's projected financial position for 2010 would be.

The Wall PBA and the union representing the Communications Workers and Department of Public Works employees opted against furloughs until such time as a financial summary report could be obtained. The PBA retained the services of Raphael J. Caprio, Ph.D, a regionally renowned Rutgers University Professor specializing in Public Administration.

To perform the necessary analysis, Dr. Caprio depended upon financial information supplied by the Town. While the unions waited for the necessary documentation to be forwarded to Dr. Caprio, the Township administration in cooperation with the Town Committeemen began a campaign of pressuring the Unions to accept the proposed furlough program before an analysis could be conducted. The threat launched against the Unions called for extensive layoffs in the absence of union "cooperation."

Opinion offered to the Wall PBA included the sentiment that the Township was attempting to obtain concessions before a financial audit could be completed because the financial crisis being forecasted by the Township administration was disingenuous.

In September of 2009, the Communications workers and Department of Public Works Union succumbed to the pressure of threatened layoffs to avoid leaving their least senior coworkers jobless in difficult economic times. The Wall PBA held steadfast against furloughs until Dr. Caprio's report could be obtained, despite the continued threat to lay off nine police officers.

On November 10th, 2009, The PBA and Dr. Caprio met with township Administrator Verruni and Committeemen Newberry and Hoffman. The township estimated it would spend every available dollar within its holdings and still be short nearly \$1 million for 2010. Dr. Caprio's review of Township documents estimated the town would have nearly \$2 million more than the Township was forecasting.

One area of focus was "cancellations" or funds that are allocated in budgets but go unused. While the Township estimated almost no available cancellations at year's end, Dr. Caprio's estimate for cancellations was a modest \$271,458.00. In January of 2010, The Coast Star published that the township actually had \$819,500.00 in cancellations, a figure which illustrated the gross undervaluation of the Town's future in their own forecast.

At the November 10th meeting with the PBA, Township CFO Steve Mayer said that the tax collection rate was "low" and he feared the result would be an inability to pass a budget for 2010.

At the November 24th public committee meeting, Mayer reversed his position just prior to public release of the collection data and reported that the township had over a 98% tax collection rate.

Wall Township sought to take from the pockets of their employees the monetary equivalent of sixteen unpaid days without justification.

It is the PBA's position that Wall Township was not in a financial crisis, rather, they were forecasting a *future* crisis and demanding conciliatory payment up front from their employees in the form of furlough days. The PBA, as a result, takes great exception to the tactics employed by those who run Wall Township and calls into question the veracity of all financial statements made by the Town.

While it may be politically favorable to report to Town residents a financial savings, the fact is that the "savings" realized by the Town was extracted from employees who were misguided by baseless claims of impending financial catastrophe.

In spite of this, the Wall PBA offered an overtime concession valued at approximately \$250,000.00 for 2010. This offer would allow Wall Township to reallocate the entirety of the budget allotted to police department overtime. While the PBA knew that the Township was not in crisis, it felt that providing a financial cushion for 2010 would easily abate any unforeseen crisis that could arise. The offer was essentially a \$.25M free insurance policy for the Township of Wall. The offer was all but ignored.

In January of 2010, the Township announced a cessation to the furlough program, a program designed to counteract the ramifications of a future financial crisis which could not possibly have had an opportunity to begin to unfold. In its wake, the furlough program has left many employees of Wall Township questioning the ability of the Township administration and politicians to manage the Town's affairs with any semblance of competence.

The latest and most disturbing "cost savings" plan unveiled by Mayor Newberry is a program purported to save the Township of Wall hundreds of thousands of dollars, the creation of a "Construction Unit" within the Wall Township Police Department.



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In the February 11th, 2010, edition of the Coast Star, Mayor Newberry is quoted:

"Now, Mayor Newberry said, the PBA and the committee have come to an agreement to eliminate "construction overtime" in the police department.

Officers are often needed at construction sites where work is being done on roads. For instance, the mayor said, a roadwork project will soon begin on Sea Girt Avenue, and a police presence will be needed to ensure the safe flow of traffic.

Instead of paying officers overtime to work at construction sites, the officers will be stationed at the sites during their normal working hours, the mayor said. It will provide "significant savings" to the township, which the mayor estimated will be about \$300,000 based on past overtime payments."

While \$300,000.00 in savings sounds like a great idea, the truth is that not only will the Township of Wall not realize significant savings from the "Construction Unit," the creation of this unit has come at a very significant cost to the citizens of Wall.

The fact is that neither the Town nor the Committee have ever had any discussion with the PBA regarding construction overtime or the creation of such a unit. For Mayor Newberry to make such a statement shows a reckless disregard for the truth.

Historically, off-duty officers have always worked at construction or traffic control sites. The cost for officers has been paid for by the contractor or entity performing the work, not the Township of Wall. In fact, the Township of Wall bills contractors an additional hourly surcharge for off-duty officers which they refer to as an "administrative fee." As a result, the Township has always profited from officers working in an off-duty capacity.

In 2009 approximately \$270,000 was brought in from contractors; money that was not an expense to the town, but rather, revenue. For 2010, the Township wants to maximize the income potential of officers working for private contractors.

The plan to accomplish this goal is to assign officers to construction details while on duty. Instead of answering 9-1-1 calls and crimes in progress calls, officers will be assigned to construction details. The contractors will be billed and that money is 100% income, none goes to the officer since taxpayer dollars already paid the officer.

There has been much talk regarding the Highway 35 and Sea Girt Avenue construction job which is set to begin in the fall of 2010. This State funded construction project was dangled by the Township Committee in front of the PBA in November at the Township Committee Meeting. The possibility of making overtime for working the job, overtime funded by the State of New Jersey, not Wall Township, was offered as a means of offsetting the wages lost to furloughs.

Mayor Newberry, therefore, has supported the creation of a Construction Unit, after having no conversation with the Wall PBA, in hopes to offset the nonexistent payment of overtime to police officers working construction jobs.

"This will lower municipal bills because officers will only be paid their normal salary for working construction sites, instead of being paid overtime, as they were in the past."

- Mayor Newberry

Again, the Township of Wall has never paid for off-duty officer's overtime, the contractor or entity performing the work has. As a result, what Mayor Newberry has actually done is taken two officers off their normal duties and placed them into a "Construction Unit" with the intent to bill the contractor or entity the equivalent of the officer's salary.

What has really happened, then, is that Mayor Newberry has effectively reduced the already depleted staffing levels of the Wall Township Police Department by two officers.

And what position has been eliminated in the Police Department to create a full time on-duty traffic director? One of the positions now assigned to direct traffic in Mayor Newberry's "Construction Unit" was formerly the Wall Township High School Resource Officer.

To the Wall PBA, attempting to generate revenue from directing traffic at construction sites is uncomfortably similar to establishing quotas for writing tickets, especially at the cost of a police officer in the High School. It is our hope that the citizens of this Town will attend the next Committee Meeting armed with facts about how the elected Mayor of their town is seemingly running the ship of Wall aground.

Should any Wall resident desire to learn more *facts* about Mayor Newberry's cost savings initiatives, I would be happy to receive inquiries by email at president@wallpba.org

Heath Bono
President