

TO COSTA MESA POLICE PERSONNEL
FROM STEVE STAVELEY, INTERIM CHIEF OF POLICE
DATE: 6/20/11
SUBJECT: I am resigning as 1200 today and wish to say Goodbye

This path has been clear for me for some time now, and now that it is coming to fruition, I wanted to take this moment of your time to say goodbye. I also wanted to express to you how much I have appreciated your openness, honesty and your welcoming of me in my return to Costa Mesa. While it has been a brief stay, I have felt very much at home and have enjoyed my time greatly. I think it's a great community and my affection for the department and its people is boundless. I will miss you and the community.

There are basically two reasons that I leave right now. The first is the 5/8 the council wishes to impose and the second is the layoffs of officers. Just before leaving on a very short trip to the river on the 16th of June, I was informed that all professional employees would be moving to 5/8s. When I first got to Costa Mesa this time, and met with two councilpersons they told me that they wanted everyone on 5/8s (cops too by the way). I told them it was not their responsibility rather that scheduling should match customer need (a scientific method of deployment) and not serve some off the wall bias that they had. More importantly, scheduling is the responsibility of the department head not the council. For council persons to demand such changes is meddling. Later our CM told me that he was ordered to put everyone in the professional ranks (non-sworn) on 5/8s. I told him I would not support that and for me it was a line in the sand. We had a rather heated discussion on the subject and frankly – I was not very polite – which I do regret. If you let council people meddle in such small matters, is it long before they tell us who we can cite, or arrest, or require us to release or whose burg gets investigated – I think not. It is simply a step to corruption and I won't play in that arena. Never mind the lack of following the MOU or meeting and conferring on any such changes.

Here is the second reason and I wanted to be sure that you understood why I am resigning now right when I could well be of most value to you and the community. Here is why. It's very clear to me that there is no fiscal crisis in the City of Costa Mesa. The majority of the council has created budget gaps in order to affect or create the appearance of a fiscal crisis. They have pushed finance and the budget process around to get the kind of numbers that benefit their position. They have in essence lied as they create the appearance of crisis in order to appear as the white knight to a narrow band of political followers. They have done this, I believe, because they have a political need to layoff police officers. This is completely unethical and immoral behavior and I will have no part in it. If I stay,

and refuse to sign layoff and demotion notices (which I am fully prepared to do) then Tom Hatch will suffer yet more and be forced to fire me. If I resign prior, at least I save him some pain and he is a good guy, and not deserving of this situation. In fact, I think in the right circumstance (and this is not) he has the potential to be a great CM. In any case I will not help the council majority hurt you, undermine this department and halt the improvement of this community – I simply cannot do that – it would be wrong and frankly hurt my reputation as a professional. I do not expect at my age to have another chiefs job, but I do expect to continue to teach, mentor and be of value and so my reputation is important to me. Even more importantly I expect of myself to do the right thing – and this is the right thing and very painful for me personally. I wish I could stay and try to help you, but I cannot – so I bid you farewell.

When the majority of this council were busy playing in sand boxes in their mommies backyard, I was a policeman. I have been a policeman since 1967. I got my first police chiefs job in 1987, and have had 6 other chief's jobs since then as well as one CEO position in a private sector enterprise. I spent 14 years as an elected school board member, served on the Anaheim Parks and Recreation Commission and the Community Services Commission in the same city. I have been president of the Orange County Chiefs of Police and Sheriffs Association as well as the chair of the Communications Committee and in that role led the development of the largest multi owner, multi user, trunked 800 Mhz radio system ever built in the world – the system right here in Orange County. I have led organizations with 1 paid employee and lots of volunteers and I have been the CEO of an organization with 1,600 highly skilled and trained professionals.

It is safe to say that the council majority – does not know more about the subject of leadership, or leading police departments or serving as an elected than do I – and yet they do not listen, they do not understand and continue to blunder along in complete ignorance and incompetence.

Over the years, I have had city councils I thought were smart and thoughtful and ones who were less skilled. In every case, I know they were trying to do the right thing – I did not always agree, but clearly they were trying hard to improve the communities we all served. I have never, however, seen a council such as this one. They lack skill, training, education, knowledge, they fail to study (or at least learn). The majority either lies or are so lacking in the necessary skills that they actually believe the junk they say. They act as if they are owners of the business that is the municipal government of the City of Costa Mesa, but they are not, they are merely trustees of these public assets both human and physical and they fail in that role completely. They are in my opinion incompetent, unskilled and unethical.

One of the interesting elements of this whole thing is I happen to agree that we need a two tier retirement system. Two tier because the courts will never allow the current system to be taken from current vested employees. I must have said before some 1,500 to 2,000 police officers in the past 10 years – all of them leaders and managers that 3% at 50 was a great boon to me personally but the worst thing we have done to policing. Why, because it drives people out of service before their replacements are ready. It causes the same mistakes to be made, organizational generation after organizational generation. Now it also happens that it is too expensive. The legislators and council persons who approved of those changes in retirement were wrong it turns out – the worst recession in the modern age has demonstrated that the 3% at 50 did cost more money, but only after more than 10 years of no increased costs. Retirement systems are an investment in the human infrastructure that makes a city a great place to live or not – nothing more, nothing less. If the investment needs to be changed, the decision makers should have the courage to change it and not continue to play some political game. Of course that would require they sit down with the employee associations and they seem not to want to do that. Another shortcoming or lack of understanding of the systems they are working within.

On that exact point (sitting down with the associations) I have been in “combat” with union leaders off and on for years – we just have different functions in our society and organization. But I never bash the folks representing the interests in the pay and benefits of our employees – and before they were association members they were our employees. Unions exist for a reason – because management abused the worker in the early 1900s and will again in many organizations without a defense system – the unions. But here is the point – anyone in a leadership role who bashes unions / associations and can’t find a way to do what they need to do and get the support of the folks you work with is either a weak leader or lacks courage and a willingness to engage and defend their decisions. Either case such persons should not be in a leadership position. Don’t blame a bird because it chirps and fly’s and don’t blame a union because it represents the needs of the employees. If you give those unions more authority over management rights, and let them engage in anything beyond pay and benefits then that is the hallmark of leadership failure. If your arguments are so weak that you cannot achieve success in that engagement then the shame is yours not the unions. That is the case here in Costa Mesa in my view and the council is covering itself with lots of shame.

I say that they (council majority) are destroying this police department with their incompetence and that means only one thing. The community building efforts that this department has invested in for many years will stop and the community will begin to deteriorate. No community can stand still and no community can grow and build

itself without suitable police services. The cause of justice cannot flourish without those same services and this council has and continues to undermine this agency ability to do its job and for political and in some cases personal reasons – biases and even personal and individual animosity. As I have noted above, they attempt to meddle in routine department affairs for personal benefit and frankly several of them are rude and ill-mannered and frequently boorish.

So I leave you, and I hope you understand. If you need me, you know how I can be reached. I will think good thoughts for you all, and willingly serve as reference should individually you find the need for such. I would be pleased if I could be of assistance as a mentor should you desire same.

I will say that in the end, this period of turmoil will subside and be replaced with opportunity. If there is not too much damage the department and community can, with time, effort and energy, survive and grow its services again. I caution that each of you should keep your eyes open. The council majority plays fast and loose with the law and ethics and I am certain as individuals they will step over the line and it won't be long before the DA or more likely the AGs office comes knocking on the door. When that happens I know for a fact that you will handle yourselves professionally, as you always do. While such circumstance will be hard to take, there is a positive side it - will prevent Costa Mesa from following straight to Bellwhich is exactly where it is currently headed.

I have left Capt. Gogerty in charge of the department – he and Commander Ford are working well together and it should be seamless until the new chief comes on board.

Steve Staveley
Interim Chief of Police
Costa Mesa