

Port Authority cops: Staff cuts leave sites, like **GWB**, unguarded at times

BY TOM DAVIS — Friday, April 30th, 2010 'North Jersey.Com'

Port Authority's police say they are understaffed, forcing them to leave critical infrastructure — such as the George Washington Bridge — unguarded at times.

The agency has cut about 100 officers over the past year and shifted its money and attention toward rebuilding the World Trade Center site, the Police Benevolent Association told the Port Authority during its Thursday meeting. Agency officials say the number was 140, but was made up of administrative workers, not officers.

The union, which is embroiled in a contract dispute with the Port Authority, said officers are often busy dealing with a heavy volume of traffic and arrests near the crossings.

"This leaves the bridge with no patrol coverage a good majority of time," Mike DeFilippis, second vice president of the Port Authority PBA.

Union members appeared at the agency's meeting because "we're looking for more police. We're looking for better patrol. We're looking for better equipment," said Paul Nunziato, president of the Port Authority PBA.

"The Port Authority is a prime terrorist target and we need to take it seriously," Nunziato said.

The Port Authority declined to address the union's specific complaints, saying the PBA is looking for a new labor contract since its 7-year agreement expired in January.

“The Port Authority is totally committed to the safety of all of our customers in this region,” said Chris Ward, executive director of the Port Authority “We have spent almost \$4 billion in security for all our facilities.”

Nunziato said he did not appear at the meeting because of the contract dispute. The problem, he said, is the 1,700-member police force is 30 percent understaffed and the Port Authority would rather pay overtime than benefits. The Port Authority, however, says that the 1,700-member force is "the highest number of officers ever."

“If I was here about my contract I wouldn’t be opening my mouth,” he said. “It’s about public safety and my officers’ safety.”

DeFilippis claimed that fewer officers patrol the George Washington Bridge now than they did prior to the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center

“Just one DWI arrest can tie up two patrol officers for numerous hours,” he said.

