

Atlantic City Mayor Lorenzo Langford responds to Governor Chris Christie's recent criticism

By LYNDA COHEN, Staff Writer | Posted: Friday, October 19, 2012 12:20 am

Labeled a failure by the governor, Atlantic City Mayor Lorenzo Langford has hit back in a scathing two-page letter that pointed to increased violence throughout the state.

During an Oct. 9 speech in Jersey City, the governor said Langford “has failed, and he’s impossible to work with in any kind of significant way.”

“I will not cower or simply roll with the punches,” Langford replied in a letter faxed Thursday to the Governor’s Office.

The governor talked about Atlantic City’s problems after the city reached 15 homicides for the year last month. In his response, Langford said if he is to be judged by that number, then Christie should be held accountable for the number of homicides in the state.

“For the record, New Jersey is now home to ‘the most violent city in America,’” Langford writes of Camden. “This was not always the case. In fact, prior to you becoming governor, we never had this distinction.”

The mayor goes on to say that the plague of violence and murder on urban cities can be traced to the manufacture and distribution of handguns.

“As governor, you have failed miserably to abate this problem,” the mayor writes.

In his comments to reporters earlier this month, Christie said he has “grave concerns about the leadership in that city, and I’ve made that very clear over and over again.”

But Langford questioned the governor’s leadership, and claimed that Christie’s “bait and switch policies” that shifted the budget burden to the municipalities are responsible for laying off more police officers in the state than at any other time.

Christie spokesman Michael Drewniak had just a nine-word reply to the mayor’s letter: “Mayor Langford’s record in Atlantic City speaks for itself.”

The public bickering does not advance the state and city’s joint goal of success in Atlantic City, political experts agree.

“It’s in their interest to work together,” said Daniel Douglas, director of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Richard Stockton College. “Neither of them is going any place in the next year.”

He said there are times when, after a public display like this, someone comes in and is able to sit the two sides down and find some common ground.

“They sit in a room, they have one more fight, but then may find solutions,” Douglas said.

Democratic state Sen. Jim Whelan — a former mayor who still lives in the city's Chelsea Heights section — said this type of battle is not uncommon.

“Unfortunately, this is what is done all too frequently in politics these days,” Whelan said. “We saw it the other night with President Barack Obama and Gov. Mitt Romney. My wife turned to me and said, ‘It looks like the Jerry Springer show.’ I don’t know that it advances anything.”

He said he hoped the Casino Reinvestment Development Authority, which oversees the city's Tourism District, would be the place that would bring things along.

“That’s a state authority that now has a seat there,” he said. “The’s the intersection where, hopefully, we’ll see things get done.”

In his letter, Langford takes issue with Christie’s “assertion that I am impossible to work with,” pointing to areas where he has brought sides together.

He pointed to the Atlantic City Strategic Planning Committee, which he said was the first joining of all the city’s “stakeholders” — a word often used in talking of the partnership between the city, state and other entities.

The two men have rarely been seen in the same place since the idea of the state coming into the city was first announced by the governor July 21, 2010.

At that time, Langford said, “What I heard was a theme of collaboration, participation and cooperation.”

By that October, Langford said: “Conceptually, I don’t have a problem with it. But the devil’s in the details,” he said.

Soon, Langford was expressing frustration at being left “out of the loop” as plans for the Tourism District moved along. Christie downplayed the problem, saying Langford had known him for nine years.

“He has always known me to be somebody who is a person of my word,” Christie said in January 2011. “And I have told him that this is going to be a partnership.”

That February, Langford compared the district’s proposed boundaries to apartheid. Christie said it was “playing to the lowest common denominator.”

On April 19, 2011, Langford was the sole vote against the district’s creation.

Last year, when asked about the noticeable absence of Langford during a press conference at the then-under construction Revel, Christie joked that his charm and personality would win the mayor over.

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