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Morristown union feels 'betrayed' by mayor Local is angry over immigration efforts

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A union that supported Morristown Mayor Donald Cresitello's 2005 campaign has now turned against him, condemning his effort to deputize local police as federal immigration officers.

"We feel betrayed," said Kevin Brown, chairman of Local 32BJ of the Service Employees International Union. "There's a tremendous feeling of fear right now in Morristown, and even some exodus. ... It's just a feeling that the community doesn't welcome immigrants, period, either undocumented or naturalized immigrants."

Cresitello has asked the federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency to deputize up to 10 officers. If the town is accepted into the federal program, the officers could file federal charges and order suspects to appear in immigration court, possibly leading to deportation.

The effort has sparked intense debate, both in the town and outside its borders. Supporters call it a long-awaited fix to the town's problems with overcrowded houses and crime, while critics charge it would lead to discrimination against all immigrants and make illegal immigrants afraid to report crimes.

Local 32BJ, whose membership includes some 350 Morristown residents, endorsed Cresitello because he said he would support immigrant families, Brown said.

Between 10 and 20 union volunteers -- including Hispanic immigrants -- helped with voter turnout for Cresitello on three Saturdays and on Election Day, and the union's political action committee contributed \$500 to his campaign, Brown said.

Last year's effort to crack down on day laborers congregating on street corners, and the recent attempt to deputize officers, have made members "angry, extremely angry," Brown said.

Cresitello fired back, saying he was surprised to learn of the union's opposition.

"I'm sure they don't support criminal activity," he said. "When I met with them I assumed that as an organization they would only want people that would be eligible to be legally employed members of the union. If I knew they would support illegal immigration, I don't think I would have accepted their help."

Local 32BJ represents about 7,500 workers statewide, primarily office cleaners, as well as some residential cleaners and other property workers, according to the union. Many of its members are immigrants, but the union does not keep track of whether they are in the country legally, Brown said.

The union faxed a letter to the mayor on March 29, asking him to reconsider the application, but the mayor has not responded, Brown said.

Cresitello said he has not received the letter.

If Morristown is accepted into the ICE program, its police would be among the first municipal officers

nationwide to be deputized. The only agencies now taking part are two state police forces and eight correctional systems. One town -- Herndon, Va. -- and three more county jail systems have been approved, but have yet to implement the program, according to ICE.

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