

# Lonegan says Corzine is out to smear him

## Governor, attorney general's offices dismiss critic's claims

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Former Bogota Mayor Steve Lonegan says he is the target of an investigation by the Attorney General's Office, part of what he called a broader effort by the Corzine administration to discredit him.

In a State House news conference Friday morning, Lonegan's defense attorney, Miles Feinstein of Clifton, described the actions against Lonegan as a "political witch hunt." The comments came six days after Lonegan was arrested outside a Corzine town hall meeting on the governor's toll-hike plan.

"I'm not afraid of Jon Corzine or the Attorney General's Office," Lonegan said. "I challenge them to come out of the shadows."

Both the Attorney General's Office and the governor's office dismissed the notion that they would go after Lonegan, a conservative Republican and outspoken Corzine critic, because of his political views.

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# Lonegan

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David Wald, a spokesman for the state Attorney General's Office, would neither confirm nor deny that an investigation exists, but he rejected the idea that the office would allow political motives to play a part in its work.

"Attorney General [Anne] Milgram has made clear repeatedly that politics plays absolutely no role in her office, and it's something she does not tolerate," he said.

Bogota Democratic Councilwoman Tara Sharp, who was on the council last year when news of the probe first broke, said it was "ridiculous" for Lonegan to claim that he is the subject of a Corzine administration conspiracy. New Democratic Mayor Patrick McHale said Lonegan was simply seeking attention.

"He just wants to get his name out there," McHale said.

But Lonegan said he wanted to go public because he believed both the probe and his arrest were politically motivated. Corzine and his aides have repeatedly denied that they played any role in the arrest, which took place while he protested outside the meeting in Cape May County.

In November, The Record reported that the Attorney General's Office had subpoenaed reams of records from Bogota's public works department. The request was for virtually all employment documents since Sept. 1, including payroll, schedule, overtime, attendance and work records.

At the time, borough officials, including Lonegan, pled ignorance regarding the purpose of the subpoena, which did not mention Lonegan by name. Lonegan said Friday that the Attorney General's Office has not contacted him di-

rectly. But he claimed that investigators had asked at least half a dozen people a broad range of questions that made it clear he was the subject of an investigation. He and Feinstein would not mention any names to avoid getting anyone into trouble for speaking with Lonegan.

Lonegan, who completed his third and final four-year term as mayor this month, and Feinstein also said they were aware of at least two other subpoenas. Borough Attorney Joseph Monaghan would not comment on the number of subpoenas but said he was unaware of any new developments since the fall.

Jim Gardner, a spokesman for the governor's office, reiterated that the governor's staff was not involved in Lonegan's arrest and that Corzine welcomes public debate. He referred questions about the alleged investigation to Milgram's office.

Lonegan is calling for an independent investigation to determine who called for the probe.

"We conducted our own investigation," Feinstein said. "Our investigation shows there is no basis for a grand jury investigation or attorney general investigation. We are demanding to know why is this happening."

Lonegan said people had told him that investigators had shown up at their doorsteps and interrogated them for hours about Lonegan, warning them not to tell him about the interviews.

"They were driving by [my] house the first week of November," Lonegan said. "They went to people to talk specifically about me. ... They were all over the map, all over the place. It was a broad net investigation to either scare the hell out of me or find out whether they could find anything."

He said one person was asked whether he had illegally removed



CHRIS PEDOTA/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Former Bogota Mayor Steve Lonegan, left, with his lawyer, Miles Feinstein of Clifton.

an oil tank from one of his two Bogota houses, despite the fact that the house is heated with gas.

Public Works Superintendent Donald Viviani is on leave with an illness. Foreman Joe Niosi, who is handling Viviani's duties, would not comment on the probe.

On Wednesday, officials from Middle Township publicly apologized to Lonegan and another activist who was arrested with him, and said they would seek to have the charges rescinded. On Thursday, the state police announced an internal review of the circumstances surrounding the arrest.

Lonegan said he wasn't sure if he would attend the governor's next town hall meeting on the financial plan, set for Monday at a school in Voorhees, because of a scheduling conflict. He has been at the previous four events.

The governor's office sent a letter Friday to the Voorhees schools superintendent noting that recent "questions" about security procedures have come up. The letter reminded the district that local police and officials are responsible for accommodating protesters and leafleting and that the governor's office "is not involved in those arrangements."

Staff Writer John Reitmeyer contributed to this report.