

# City firefighters join in Trenton protest

By Chris Sykes  
Staff Writer

Orange firefighters were among many from throughout New Jersey who converged on Trenton last week during a rally in support of public employee unions.

“Over 50 percent of our department went down there last week. Only about 10 of our guys didn’t go because they were on duty and had to work,” said Firefighter Elvin Padilla, president of FMBA Local 10. “We went down there because we’ve been getting a lot of abuse from a lot of people, but we’re at a point where we can no longer stand by and watch the politicians, particularly Governor Christopher Christie, engage in rhetoric and activities to try and break the unions.”

Padilla said Local 10 members made sure they went to Trenton for the March 3 protest because “enough is enough.”

“Three states, New Jersey, Wisconsin and Ohio, seem to have something in common where you have these Republican leaders who

are out to bust the public employee unions,” said Padilla.

“I think this is the start of more protests because this is something that has been in the making for a long time.”

Curtis Mayor, an Irvington firefighter, said he understands the “bottom line” at all times is financial, especially in the midst of a “very slow” economic recovery. But Mayor said he believed reducing services and employment was not the way to go.

“You don’t reform something to make it worse,” said Mayor. “You don’t improve something for one person by making it bad for someone else.”

Padilla added he believed last week’s rally was about assigning the blame for the nation’s fiscal crises. Padilla said he thought the blame should be with the bankers and “rich people” and their political supporters, not public employees or their unions.

“If everyone was doing bad, then I could classify it as a bad time for America in gener-

al. But the reality is there are a lot of people doing really well during this recession and this recovery,” said Padilla. “I truly believe this is about the Obama re-election. I hope that people wake up and realize that they are being bamboozled before it is too late.”

Dee Brown, another Orange firefighter, said the budget and contract processes of the last few years in the city have been eye-openers for him.

“The problem is that people and especially politicians forget that public employees are taxpayers, too. Public employees are homeowners, too. We don’t get special privileges just because we’re public employees.

We are not exempt from all the things and expenses that everybody else goes through,” said Brown. “So when we have cutbacks, the real question is who are you really hurting?”

Brown said firefighters have made previous concessions to city officials during his 10 years with the department. He said the concessions have included a work furlough of 10 days.