



Mayor Targets 90-Year-Old Veteran For Feeding Homeless Without Government Aid

First, Arnold Abbott faced the German Nazis. Now, he's facing a small-town mayor backed by U.S. police who don't want private citizens feeding the homeless.

By [Nicole Russell](#)
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As if it weren't sacrificial enough to have served our country in World War II, 90 year-old Arnold Abbott, or Chef Arnold, as he's called, and his organization Love Thy Neighbor have been feeding the homeless near Fort Lauderdale, Florida for more than 20 years. [Even getting arrested](#) didn't stop him from dishing hot food to the hungry.

Wait, what?

That's right. Two weeks ago, the mayor of Fort Lauderdale, the obviously intelligent and hospitable Jack Seiler, had Abbott arrested for violating a new ordinance that made feeding homeless people in parks illegal. He [told](#) the local news channel, "Mr. Abbott has decided that he doesn't think these individuals should have to have any interaction with government, that they should be fed in the parks. We disagree." I know, you wish he were your town's mayor. (Try to refrain from being jealous.)

The story has continued to [escalate](#). Just last week Abbot was cited a second time for—guess what?—continuing to feed homeless folks right where they are, in the city's parks.

Mayor Moderates His Tone, Not His Demands

Visualize this scene and try to remember it's not from a dystopic film starring Viggo Mortenson. The *Sun-Sentinel* reported last week: "A squad of about 10 uniformed police stood by as Capt. John Labandera, at first speaking over a battery-powered megaphone, asked Abbott to 'cease and desist' from serving meals to about 75 homeless people who had to maneuver through a throng of reporters and television cameras to get plates of tilapia, spaghetti and meatballs, tofu and fruit salad."

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Because obviously telling a man who faced German Nazis in the 1940s that he's breaking the law because he's dishing up fruit to homeless people warrants the use of police on horseback and

a megaphone. It's perfectly fine if that entire sentence seems completely illogical, because it doesn't make sense to me either. Abbott will apparently be mailed a summons to appear in court on the charge, which carries a maximum penalty of 60 days in jail and a \$500 fine. He was also fined when he was arrested two weeks ago.

Maybe all that Vitamin D in Florida is getting to Seiler's head and he's not thinking straight?

Already Seiler is subtly changing his tune, thanks to media reports portraying him as a cold-hearted weirdo who thinks the government should do stuff for people instead of charities. Now Seiler says the city isn't trying to halt Abbott's program—which, again, has been feeding the homeless for more than 20 years—he just wants them to have the right permits and move indoors, for safety reasons. Seiler commented last week, “There is an absolute right to feed a hungry person [...] at any one of 100 locations in the city.”

Despite changing his tune—no doubt due to aides who are a teeny bit too late in their public relations rescue efforts—a few people have Seiler figured out. Some local groups have rushed to defend Abbott, staging protests in front of Seiler's home. Sabrina Diz leads one such group, Homeless Voice. Last Wednesday they chanted as they walked by his house, “Hey Jack, what do you say? How many homeless did you starve today?”

What Seiler was trying to say two weeks ago is that charity can't save people; only the government can. Yet as Diz's ditty aptly points out, the government doesn't always do things well, nor does it always have the best of intentions.

Despite Huge Welfare Outlays, the Homeless Abound

According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, over [600,000 Americans are](#) without a bed to sleep in or a kitchen to eat dinner in on any given night, and nearly 58,000 of those are veterans. While that number isn't huge (and yes, it should be decreasing) by contrast welfare spending is the single [largest](#) item in the federal budget and, in the five years leading up to 2013, U.S. taxpayers [spent](#) \$3.7 trillion on welfare.

Federal funding for welfare has increased 41 percent since President Obama took office, yet 46 million Americans still live in poverty.

As Thomas Sowell said in a 2012 column: “All of us should be on guard against beliefs that flatter ourselves. At the very least, we should check such beliefs against facts. Yet the notion that people who prefer economic decisions to be made by individuals in the market are not as compassionate as people who prefer those decisions to be made collectively by politicians is seldom even thought of as a belief that should be checked against facts.”

Remember FEMA's [response](#) to hurricanes Katrina and Sandy? Private aid was in both places faster than you could say Federal Emergency Mana—well you get the picture. In a [policy piece](#) for the Cato Institute, Michael Tanner found that federal funding for welfare has increased 41 percent since President Obama took office, yet 46 million Americans still live in poverty. Tanner

lamented, “The poverty rate is perilously close to where we began more than 40 years ago.” Obviously handing out stuff—regardless of location—doesn’t work in the long-term.

Seiler is offering—no, demanding—on a smaller scale what this country has been doing poorly for decades: Forcing people to take what they do not need for a price they cannot afford. But, you say, these people need food! And they’re homeless! Yes, but Abbott is giving people something he can afford to give, in a location ideal for those who need it, using the most effective means available.

Despite our tragically destructive yet relatively new welfare programs, the idea is ancient. Roman satirist Juvenal said, “Already long ago, from when we sold our vote to no man, the People have abdicated our duties; for the People who once upon a time handed out military command, high civil office, legions — everything, now restrains itself and anxiously hopes for just two things: bread and circuses.”

Just because it happened in Rome in 140 B.C. doesn’t mean it should happen in Fort Lauderdale, Florida in 2014.