

San Francisco Chronicle

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA'S LARGEST NEWSPAPER

Dellums Speaks Out On Crime and Security at Town Hall Meeting

October 14, 2007

Susan Sward, Chronicle Staff Writer

OAKLAND, CA -- Mayor Ron Dellums, addressing a North Oakland town hall meeting Saturday, said that while he supports hiring more police, people have to face the stark fact that crime is deeply rooted in social problems.

Speaking to an audience at the Peralta Elementary School in a largely affluent neighborhood of tree-lined streets and many single-family homes, Dellums said that he backs adding enough officers so the 730-member Oakland Police Department will reach the 803-officer goal set by a voter-approved measure in 2004.

People should be able to live every day "with a sense of security and peacefulness," said the mayor, who heard from several speakers who urged putting more police on the streets. "If we are going to survive, that's not a struggle we can lose."

But Dellums - clearly comfortable with what he was conveying and speaking without any notes - was very blunt about his belief that placing more officers on the street is in no way a total solution to the problems besetting Oakland and most of the other big cities of America.

His comments occur when North Oakland has seen an increase in several categories of crime: Eleven people have been killed in the area since the start of the year - four more than at this time last year.

The area also has had a 2 percent increase in burglaries, a 9 percent increase in residential robberies, a 1 percent rise in commercial robberies and a 62 percent rise in carjackings, while auto burglaries have fallen by 26 percent and auto thefts are down by 12 percent, said Paul Rose, Dellums' spokesman.

After Dellums heard speakers talk of murders and other crimes that have occurred, he told the audience of more than 200: "I am serious about crime and violence, and I'm so serious that I'm saying let's don't play games with each other, folks.

"When crime and violence were constrained to the barrios and the ghettos and the 'hoods, people didn't pay any attention." But he said when crime became a citywide problem, "we're all concerned about it."

"This is not just a question about police," the 71-year-old mayor said. "We have to do the best we can, and I'm absolutely and unequivocally committed to do that.

But at the same time, I have lived long enough to know we have closed our eyes to the injustices and inequities, and now we are reaping the wild winds of that disregard for a whole range of people."

He recalled that he was chair of a commission that looked "at the plight of young men of color in this country ... who we are grinding up like glass." To deal with crime, he said, those people have to be given jobs, training, better education and opportunities.

Not everyone liked what they heard at the town hall meeting hosted by City Councilwoman Jane Brunner. After Dellums called on Oakland to become a model city, retired businessman Charles Pine, who lives in the Allendale neighborhood, told Dellums that Oakland was a model - of vehicle thefts, muggings, open drug dealing and other crimes.

Pine called for a police force of 1,100 that he said would match the strength of other big city forces and help give neighborhoods the peace that they deserve.

Dellums responded that if people want a police force of 1,100, "let's have a conversation about that, and if they decide they want it, let's go there and assess" what that would mean to the city budget and taxes.

When Dellums talked about increasing the department to the 803-member level - set by the 2004 ballot measure that

generates \$20 million a year through 2015 for police recruiting and violence prevention programs - he mentioned

several possible approaches. One was bonuses for recruits, and another was a community college course for would-be recruits.

But he said the city faces real hurdles: Last year 119 recruits graduated from the academy, but 60 officers retired, 40 more transferred to other agencies and 10 were terminated for cause. "So we have nine new police officers," he said.

Dellums' views on crime were part of a wide-ranging, 45-minute speech in which he spelled out his vision for the city. He said he wants a citywide zoning plan, high density concentrated in the downtown area, and a mixed-used development of the former Oakland Army base that would produce a minimum of 10,000 jobs.

He said he wanted to work with the city, the school district, the county and philanthropic groups over the next five years to make Oakland perhaps the first city in the country to provide health care services for every middle school and high school student in the city.

Dellums said he also plans to ask the city council for money for outreach workers to work with young people and "hopefully mitigate hostility and violence before it begins." He noted that every year 3,000 people are released from prison to the streets of Oakland, and it is not enough to give them \$200 as they exit the prison gate.

On another front, he said he will be announcing receipt of between \$350,000

and \$500,000 in seed money from the San Francisco Foundation and the East Bay Foundation to identify public-private partnerships that would tackle the city's problems. He added that the advisory committee overseeing this effort will be headed by his wife, Cynthia.

Concluding his speech, Dellums said that when he returned to Oakland from Congress, he was "prepared to fail

trying to do something big rather than be successful tinkering on the margins. ... We cannot afford not to address these issues."

Chronicle staff writer Christopher Heredia contributed to this report. E-mail Susan Sward at ssward@sfchronicle.com.

© 2007 Hearst Communications Inc.