

Frank Talk About Crime Is Overdue

Monday, January 30, 2006

Jersey Journal Editorial

Jersey City Councilman Steve Fulop's call for the head of Police Chief Robert Troy has certainly set off an emotional firestorm in the city.

Residents say they have had enough of the rapes, shooting and murders in the city. They say they live in fear in some neighborhoods and blame drug dealers and youth gangs. These people support Fulop's effort to center on crime as one of the top issues in the city.

Backers of Troy, including many of the politicians who put him in office and officers in the city, call him a professional lawman and say he is doing the best he can. They charge Fulop with grandstanding.

Whatever the motivations, Fulop has created a citywide debate that is long overdue. The administration of Jeremiah Healy came to power with a "get tough on crime" platform. Healy touts his many police hirings while explaining that the Police Department is still very undermanned.

What many residents want to know is where are these police officers. It is obvious that the days of the nightstick-swinging officer "walking" the beat in neighborhoods and knowing everyone by their first names are long gone. Yet, residents still long for a return to the "visible" officer.

Today, police travel in two-man patrol cars. The frustration comes from the belief that the police are a reaction rather than a prevention force.

Residents also are wary of an administration that has promoted a great number of officers. It leads to the question of how many supervisors there are for an "X" number of police officers. Each administration seems to give a variety of answers to that question.

No one ever questions the bravery and dedication of police. Most only want police superiors to make the best use of the manpower available.

There is crime in the streets. This city had 39 murders last year - 21 by gunfire. Remember, every shot fired is a potential fatality. Even the lesser quality-of-life crimes seem to be getting out of hand. We look to our elected leaders and police as the last line of defense against chaos, perceived or not.

Now is not the time for officials to circle the wagons. It is time for them to show us that law enforcement is working. It is a time to listen to concerns of residents. Attending evening sessions with neighborhood groups for question and answer sessions is an ongoing effort, but there has to be a way to reach more residents with information about how they can protect themselves. If need be, it is time to hold people accountable.

Police and residents should not be adversaries. They should be partners in trying to make the city a safer place to live.