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## Dellums' Worn-out Politics Are Killing Oakland

By Charles Pine

Less than eight months ago a series of armed takeover robberies of restaurants and their customers shook Oakland. The police department got on the case and caught Lance Landquist, age 19, of Oakland, then Mandi Coleman, also 19 and also an Oakland thug, and finally a 15-year-old Oakland thug.

The police force, however, lacks the resources to show a small element of punks that they do not own the streets. Today, another wave of restaurant takeover robberies threatens the daily life of residents and businesses.

If I may recall a comment back in December during the first wave, as reported by the San Francisco Chronicle:

Charles Pine, a member of Oakland Residents for Peaceful Neighborhoods, said the rash of robberies underscores a dangerous degree of understaffing in the Oakland Police Department.

He noted that Oakland has approximately 18 officers per 10,000 residents, compared with roughly twice that number shown by 2004 U.S. Department of Justice data for several other cities, including Atlanta, Boston, Cleveland and St. Louis. San Francisco had 29 per 10,000 residents, according to the data.

"Oakland has half a Police Department," Pine said. "This case, which caused a serious threat to the viability of all Asian restaurants, illustrates the price that Oakland residents and merchants pay for this understaffing of the Police Department." (*S. F. Chronicle*, Dec. 29, 2007)

## Three Mistaken Claims

This time around mayor Dellums had three points to offer the community.

1. Dellums protested that Oakland is not a "crime capital." He insisted the label was "hogwash."

I checked for recent news reports of restaurant takeover robberies across the United States. The only city that popped up is Oakland. Oakland has two and a half times the violent crime of Los Angeles. (*Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 11, 2007) Beneath the headline incidents, neighborhoods are plagued with burglaries, vehicle smash-ins, aggressive drug selling to children, sideshows and boom cars. Let's face it, thugs operate with relative impunity in Oakland.

2. Dellums blamed the current economic downturn and poverty in general. "When you think about the desperation and the daring of these types of kinds of crimes, it speaks to the broader issue of where we are in terms of this economy. When people become this desperate, they take desperate acts and then you realize that times are really troubled," stated Dellums. "We have to do everything we can to get to the root causes of crime and violence." (KCBS, Aug. 7, 2008)

Yes, street thugs mostly emerge from poor neighborhoods. The important point, however, concerns the converse: very few poor people resort to sticking a rifle or gun in the face of innocent people. Very few people smash their way into someone else's home. The thugs are a small element of society, but in Oakland, they have control of the streets.

Why? Because the police force is half what it needs to be.

Why? Because City Hall tolerates and even encourages the thug culture of disrespect. The mayor invited gutter rappers to his inaugural. City councilmembers cooed approval while a runaway agency, Youth UpRising, pimped out its youth clientele to gutter rapper videos that celebrate sideshows. Just a week ago, a city manager allowed a gutter rapper to piggyback on National Night Out, pairing up with him to promote his new "thizzin" CD.

It is hypocritical for Dellums to talk about poverty as the root cause of crime. Economic decline and inequality are indeed basic national problems. (Incidentally, Oakland's poverty rate is similar to other major cities, not especially larger.) The security of the solid working middle has deteriorated for decades – the very decades when Dellums

was in Congress and managed to do next to nothing about it, not even help establish a political current separate from the band-aid liberalism of the Democratic Party. And so, while Oakland falls apart, Dellums spent much of this past winter and spring on the campaign trail for Hillary Clinton, trotted out as her senior advisor on urban policy!

3. Finally, Dellums offered his solution. "We are looking at the development of our police, whether or not we engage these business corridors by bringing on private security, or whether we bring in voluntary organizations like the Guardian Angels." (KCBS, Aug. 7, 2008)

No doubt, the police department will divert precious resources away from other work and grapple with this second wave of restaurant takeovers. Then we can wait for the third wave. As for the Guardian Angels, Dellums is behind events. Fed-up residents of the Grand Lake district called them in more than a year ago.

"Bringing on private security" in business corridors means that merchants are told to collect an extra levy on themselves and hire security firms. They are no replacement for an adequately staffed police force.

Similarly, Dellums pushed a Son of Measure Y tax proposal onto the November ballot. It makes the same worthless promise of a few more officers that Measure Y offered four years ago, only this time the tax would be three times larger, \$275 a year per homeowner. It takes arrogance to ask for more money just after we have all had a recent peek at the City Hall's waste and high living. We saw the scandal around fired city administrator Deborah Edgerly, a grand jury report on credit card abuse by city managers, and a KTVU report detailing the ostentatious expenses and slack work ethic of the mayor himself.

## **Dellums Is Finished. The Real Issue Is How to Save Oakland**

Ron Dellums is finished as mayor of Oakland. He has lost the respect of nearly every resident who is aware of city affairs. After a year and a half of the Dellums tenure, virtually no knowledgeable participant in Oakland civic life admires the mayor.

Dellums' staff are rushing around trying to patch together a second try at a real budget, hoping a three-month visit by former city manager Robert Bobb and the temporary return of a previous budget director will save the day.

Dellums has been implicated in vote-rigging to impose an increase in the Landscape and Lighting Assessment (LLAD). Phoning Elihu Harris, the mayor asked the Peralta College district for its votes to help pass the increase with a promise that the City would not even try to collect the LLAD assessment from Peralta.

## **Unite On a Few Basics to Save Our City**

I do *not* support a recall drive against Dellums. We need time before the next mayor is chosen to unite Oakland around two points:

- We must put peaceful neighborhoods first. Oakland does not have the relative safety of an average American city, and the only solution is an adequate police force of at least 1,100 officers.

Subsidies and deregulation for economic development are not the answer. Developers must curb themselves. Oakland is close to becoming a failed city, and if that happens, rewarding projects will dry up.

On the other side, we must recognize that a city government's handouts to social program operators cannot address the "root causes" of crime. If you can organize a movement against a national kleptocracy, great. But don't pretend that feel-good, homeowner-financed grants to private programs make a significant dent in Oakland's social problems.

- We must agree to change City Hall from a dysfunctional, corrupt wastrel into an efficient producer of basic services, public safety first and foremost. The real job of the next mayor is to overhaul city government to this end. It doesn't take a celebrity; it doesn't take an insider politician; and it doesn't take a slash-and-burn business executive.

A successful mayor will set the goal, persist with it, get a city administrator and a police chief who are with the program and do their jobs, and accept help from dedicated ordinary folks within government and among residents. All it takes is 16 hours a day listening, studying, telling it like it is, asking and demanding.

When enough civic activists and local magnates unite on these points, then we will be ready to replace a man who has let down 400,000 residents.

– Aug. 10, 2008