Lynne Abraham's Plan for Criminal Justice and Public Safety

Introduction

Crime prevention and public safety are issues that do not operate in a vacuum. Safe neighborhoods are tied to good schools, good jobs and strong city services. A city with 400,000 citizens in poverty, including 130,000 children, with a dysfunctional public school system and an uncertain future in job creation, suffers from challenges that would test law enforcement in the best of circumstances. As a general matter, police/community relations need a serious rebalancing, which is informed by reports and studies of police practices all over the nation and in Philadelphia. Lynne's plan addresses many of the factors that drive the discussion and offers measures that can work to improve public safety.

Lynne is the only candidate to bring to the table a career in criminal justice and law enforcement.

Lynne served fifteen years as trial judge in Municipal Court and in the Court of Common Pleas and 25 years as assistant district attorney and as Philadelphia's longest serving District Attorney. She worked effectively in trying cases, presiding at jury trials and, as DA, leading an office of 600 employees that handled 75,000 cases a year. As DA she fought to protect victims of crime, especially those least able to protect themselves.

Lynne established the office's innovative Family Violence and Sexual Assault Unit, and went to Harrisburg to lead the way to amend the Pennsylvania constitution to prevent abused children from having to testify in the same courtroom as their abusers. She led the City's first investigation into child abuse in the clergy, notwithstanding threats from powerful party politicians and others who wanted her to turn a blind eye. Lynne has always put our kids first.

Lynne investigated police officers guilty of criminal conduct, while working effectively with the majority of courageous police men and women and community leaders at crime scenes, on drug vigils and, sadly, at funerals. Lynne was present and is known in every neighborhood in the City. She is uncorrupted and incorruptible.

Crime Prevention

As Lynne has said before, people are not safe unless they feel safe. In too many neighborhoods, people fear for their lives and property, in their homes and on their streets. Many feel they would like to support their police officers, but are afraid to do so. To be seen as even reporting a crime may mark someone as a "snitch," and cause them to become ostracized and targeted for retribution by violent offenders.

As with schools, jobs and taxes, there are no easy answers. Crime seeks out those in despair. In a city with a poor public school system, few jobs for the many who want them, and a thriving unlawful drug industry, many of our young people are drawn to criminal conduct. Meanwhile, young men, especially African-Americans and Latinos -- have been unfairly targeted -- and on a large scale -- by an ill-conceived "stop and frisk" program that never should have been launched. This further corrodes the relationship between law enforcement officers and the communities they serve.

But there are things we can do better and new ideas that may help. As Mayor, Lynne will work with communities, the School Superintendent, the Police Department, the District Attorney's Office and other public agencies to promote safe and secure neighborhoods. Lynne is an effective, proven leader in law enforcement.

Recruitment and training are keys to building an effective and diverse Police Department. Commissioner Ramsey has recently stated that he is not satisfied with the results of efforts so far to bring more racial and cultural diversity to the Philadelphia Police Department: discouraging, but hardly unexpected. Policing is one of the most difficult and dangerous jobs one can sign up for and the frustrations and challenges are daunting even to the most dedicated officer. Moreover, the 21st Century police officer needs to grasp fully the changes in the approaches to urban policing and be prepared for the challenges of meeting the evolving standards expected of law enforcement officers.

How we screen and select officer-candidates, who we ultimately hire, and how the Police Academy trains our newest officers, are keys to success in deploying well-trained, community-oriented, police officers. A thorough review of the Police Academy curriculum is in order. It is not enough to implement the findings and recommendations in the two major reports recently issued on community policing.

One of the ways to improve outcomes is to do a complete revision of Recruiting Methods, and Practices, and Training Protocols. We should incorporate the latest technologies to assist in the instructional regime and adopt best practices from other successful programs. Rigorous training and emphasis on crime prevention, integrity, professionalism, community relations and crime-fighting methods must be central themes.

No crime reduction initiative can be successful without community support and buy-in. Early intervention stops crime. We must strengthen the bond, and rebuild trust, between our Police Department and the community it serves. Officers cannot succeed by "going it alone" or engaging in an "us vs. them" mentality. Public safety and crime prevention must be a collaborative venture. Each group -- police and the community -- must support and respect the other. Officers must be considered part of the community. Frequent face-to-face, non-judgmental contacts between police and citizens help re-build trust and foster a more cooperative relationship. Deployment of police on bicycles has gone a long way to improve face-to-face contacts in certain communities. Lynne acknowledges that breaking barriers between police takes patience, care, changes in culture on both sides, and a great deal of effort. But as Mayor, she will do her very best to make that happen. That effort will repay itself many times over.

Recidivism is a major recurring problem that must be addressed. Lynne will prioritize helping ex-offenders trying to find employment. We can institute new methodologies for job training in our prisons, so that returning inmates can get a fair shake at finding employment and straightening out their lives. Revolving-door justice is largely a product of lack of education, job training and employment opportunities. A good start would be on-line television college and vocational courses, which can be offered at little cost. We need to support re-entry into society with a basic skill-set that makes sense.

Lynne's Seven Point Program for Criminal Justice and Public Safety:

Improve our Schools

Unpleasant fact: Our schools are failing.

Clearly, education is a key factor in keeping our kids on the path to being happy, productive citizens, contributing positively to their communities. Lynne supports Superintendent William Hite's plan, Action Plan 3.0, to restructure the public schools. His plan will break down the unwieldy bureaucracy and fairly and equitably seek to "lift the achievement of every student, wherever they live and whatever their background." Significantly, the Superintendent's plan will create an Opportunity Network for at-risk students, including those who have been in the criminal justice system, and a Turnaround Network, for the ten to fifteen percent which are the low-performing schools. These two networks will serve those children most likely to fall into anti-social or criminal behavior.

Lynne's Plan for Improving Our Schools treats the larger issues in more detail, but there are specifics the Mayor can lean in to that are worth mentioning here. Lynne will direct the Department of Human Services to increase the number of caseworkers -- from ten to forty -- to reduce absenteeism, especially in the early grades. We have not paid enough attention to the importance of intervention in the early grades, when it counts. Absenteeism can soon spin out of control and little can be done in the later grades. Also, kids get bored when they have nothing constructive to do. As Mayor, Lynne will work with Parks and Recreation to increase afterschool activities and expand the use of School District playing fields and school yards. Finally, Lynne will expand programs where the Police Department and School District collaborate to put into place progressive, child-oriented adult supervision, so that kids and young adults in the system get consistent messages of good behavior.

Police/Community Relations - Deadly Force

Unpleasant fact: poor police/community relations are a barrier to crime prevention.

Effective law enforcement depends on basic trust in the neighborhoods. Crudely put: is the cop "friend" or "foe"? The use of deadly force by police officers has captured all of our attention in incidents throughout the nation. It is a real problem. While Police Department leadership in Philadelphia is first-rate and diversity among the officers is better than in many cities, we are not immune.

Accordingly, Lynne supports the immediate implementation of the recommendations set forth in two recently published reports: "Collaborative Reform Initiative: An Assessment of Deadly Force in the Philadelphia Police Department," (supported by the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services of the United States Department of Justice) and the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing. The reports state the problems well and offer comprehensive approaches to addressing the problems. Essentially, the Department of Justice Report recommends regular and consistent training for use-of-deadly-force, revisions to the use-of-deadly-force models, revisions to Directive 10 to clarify use-of-deadly-force decision-making, better and more transparent deadly-force investigations, a stronger use-of-deadly-force review process and institutionalized learning processes and practices relating to these incidents. Mayor Nutter recently appointed a police/community oversight board, a good idea.

Lynne has stated her support for body cameras and dash cameras (as well as enhanced pole camera systems where we need more "eyes on the street") to assure a visual record of confrontations between citizens and the police. Lynne believes that in many circumstances firearms should be the very last resort, and that officers should be trained in the use of pepper spray and taser guns. Policemen should be given special training in the protocols of conduct in police/community relations and the proper role of police in crime prevention and reduction.

But community relations also depend on the little things that occur in the daily interactions between cops and citizens. We can avoid unnecessary friction by being smarter in how we regulate essentially non-criminal behavior. The recent City Council ordinance decriminalizing possession of small amounts of marijuana for personal use was a step in the right direction, but directing policemen to write up citations for possession makes little sense. To begin with, cops have better things to do, like fighting crime. Also, the effect of Council's ordinance is disproportionate. Affluent adults and young adults would have little trouble paying a \$25 fine, but for people in the more disadvantaged neighborhoods, twenty-five dollars may mean a lot. Most important, directing cops to confront an adult smoker and write up a citation for what is essentially a trivial offense creates unnecessary friction between the police force and the community.

As stated above, Commissioner Ramsey recently testified at budget hearings before City Council that the Department was having difficulty recruiting new officers. This was a special challenge in maintaining a diverse workforce. On taking office, Lynne will work with the Department to determine what incentives may be necessary in assuring a well-qualified and diverse corps of men and women eager to serve our City.

Gun Possession is a Public Health Issue.

Unpleasant fact: gun possession is out of control and people suffer.

Lynne has long believed we should start treating gun violence as a public health issue. For too many years guns have been the focus solely of intense law-enforcement programs. Lynne has initiated the following programs aimed at prevention: the "Cradle to Grave" Program for young offenders at Temple Medical School; the "Don't Fall Down in the Hood Youth" violence prevention program; the "Youth Violence Reduction Partnership" in the areas of the City highest in homicide and gun-related violence in collaboration with Public Private Ventures; and other programs. In addition, Lynne lobbied early and often for legislation in Harrisburg limiting gun purchases to no more than "One Handgun a Month;" eliminating extended magazines for highpowered firearms; banning the sale of all assault weapons and high powered ammunition; and similar legislation. Sadly, all without success. She was successful, however, in getting millions of dollars in state funding to set up the first ever "Straw Purchasers Program" in the District Attorney's Office, specifically targeting, arresting, and prosecuting hundreds of people who bought firearms, not for themselves, but as "agents" for those who could not lawfully buy or possess a gun in Pennsylvania. Lynne obtained thousands of "gun locks" from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to give away to the general public whenever she spoke about gun-related safety and violence prevention.

Possession of guns in the home is uniquely associated with suicides, homicides, accidental shootings and killings. Guns are often stolen by burglars, who then traffic in them or use the weapons to commit more crimes. Gun-related shootings on the street from largely unlicensed guns have killed many thousands of our young, mostly minority, citizens on our streets and in our homes.

The goal of the "Public Health" approach to gun violence doesn't seek to arrest or punish anyone. Instead, it seeks to prevent the problem of gun violence before it starts. By using epidemiology in finding the causes, risk factors and trends of gun violence we can enhance the safety of our homes and our streets. A program advanced by Lynne and her many partners is a template for reaching a realistic strategy of prevention from a public health perspective, working with the County Medical Examiner, DHS, Child Protective Services and others.

Office for Family Violence

Unpleasant fact: We don't do enough to protect the most vulnerable of our people.

Philadelphia's battered, beaten and abused women and children are among our most vulnerable people. They suffer the scars and pain of violence, oppression and rape. Often, they cannot leave their abusers because there are simply not enough shelters and services to provide a safe haven and a safety net. Lynne shall find more money for shelters and safe havens. For the first time in the City's history, Lynne shall establish an Office of Family Violence. She shall coordinate with her friends and colleagues in the women's and family violence services community and leaders of public agencies to assure that the City is doing all it can to protect women and children who are subjected to poverty, abuse and violent interpersonal relationships.

Merit Selection of Judges

Unpleasant fact: Our judges are selected in a political process that assures that the best and most qualified candidates are mixed in with the worst and least qualified, and that politicians control too many of the outcomes.

Philadelphia picks our judges in a random way that depends more on ballot position and party support than merit and experience. For the most part, voters don't really know who they are asked to vote for. This gives party endorsement far greater sway than evaluations by the Philadelphia Bar Association. Bar Chancellor Albert Dandridge recently wrote on this critical subject: "The city Democratic Party yet again betrayed the trust of voters by endorsing judicial candidates based in cronyism rather than merit." We have seen this film too often before. Unqualified judges supported by party hacks and vested interests serve until they are caught in some impropriety, ranging from the serious to the petty, and ultimately resign or leave the bench to serve time. The damage is done.

Confidence in the court system is the foundation of our society, and the essence of criminal justice. We rely on judges to assure a fair trial for the accused and that the people's interest in public safety is well served. Lynne will advocate in Harrisburg for legislation to establish a merit-based judicial selection process for Philadelphia to assure that our judges are highly

qualified men and women representative of all the people and communities of our diverse city, and join in the efforts of Pennsylvanians for Modern Courts.

Public safety in buildings and structures

Unpleasant fact: The Department of Licenses & Inspections is dysfunctional and a danger to public safety.

For too many years, the Mayor and City Council have underfunded the Department of Licenses & Inspections. Inspectors are poorly trained and poorly supervised, with ineffective, if not irresponsible, leadership. Each week seems to bring a new revelation of mismanagement and reckless disregard for the safety of our citizens, construction workers and firemen. The tragic Salvation Army disaster could have been avoided had a qualified supervisor simply shut down the job.

The Mayor has recently allocated funds to hire new inspectors, but until there is a complete restructuring of L&I, those monies may be wasted. In addition, politics plays too great a role in the daily operations of L&I. Lynne has advocated that a highly qualified licensed engineer be appointed Commissioner to run the Department, reporting to a strong Managing Director. Until Lynne is in office and a restructuring is accomplished, and effective training put in place, the best solution for the City is to place L&I in receivership, with close oversight by the Inspector General.

Leadership

Unpleasant fact: our City government is dysfunctional.

Over the past seven years the strong-mayor form of government under the Philadelphia Home Rule Charter has eroded. The Mayor and City Council President don't communicate on the most important issues of the City's business. A striking example is the recent PGW debacle where not one councilman had the courage to stand up and call for a hearing on the most significant City transaction in memory. Not one! Ten district councilmen act as kings and queens of their own domain, as if we were ten separate boroughs or ten different cities.

If we are to address criminal justice and public safety effectively, we need a strong, independent Mayor, a proven leader, with executive experience and a City-wide vision and the guts and grit to get things done....and not afraid to break a little china along the way.